

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction and Context**

When Patrick Stevedores launched a government-backed campaign to bust the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in 1998, they did not anticipate the extent of international support for the dockworkers. The MUA strategy in the dispute combined global collective action with local pickets and a national legal struggle (Lambert 1999). By reaching out to the International Transport Federation (ITF) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) for assistance, the MUA was able to coordinate solidarity actions with sister unions around the world. Unions in South Africa, Japan, the United States, and Britain prevented Australian ships loaded by non-union labour from docking. Mobilizing support at local, national and international scales enabled the MUA to successfully resist the de-unionisation drive (Castree 2000).

The dispute between the MUA and Patrick Stevedores is symbolic for many Australian unionists of what they feel is a crisis for their movement. The symptoms of the crisis are collapsing density rates, dwindling bargaining power, and eroding legal protections. Though the exact causes of the crisis still generate debate, most fingers point to a combination of environmental, social, and political factors. In the Patrick dispute, the companies found a willing ally in the Howard government for its plan to exclude unions from its operation. If the dispute encapsulates the crisis facing Australian unions, the MUA's survival represents the capacity for unions to meet the crisis. And if this is so, then it also represents the capacity of international union activity as a strategy for dealing with crisis. In recent years, scholars have begun to discuss the "revitalisation strategies" unions are using to rebuild lost density, power, and political leverage. This thesis addresses both of these issues: it studies how Australian unions use international activities in their revitalisation strategy.

The global solidarity action of the Patrick dispute is only one possible form of international activity. Recently, unions in the Pilbara managed to challenge the plans of mining giant Rio Tinto to exclude them from the workplace. In this traditionally unionised region, the company was in the process of establishing a non-union agreement with its employees. To maintain their presence, the unions' strategy was to

redevelop a sense of the local union tradition in mining. They also manipulated differences between the state-level industrial relations system of Western Australia and the federal system. But in addition to these local, state and national tactics, cooperation at the global scale was crucial to the outcome of this dispute (Ellem 2003).

During the campaign, organizers in the Pilbara used tactics and planning techniques developed in conjunction with their counterparts overseas. Campaign tactics such as house visiting, “blitzing” and planning techniques such as worksite-mapping became critical to building a base of resistance among workers to the non-union certified agreement. While the campaign did not include the direct involvement or support of any one union overseas, the campaign tactics used are part of an organizing model that has been developed and shared among struggling national union movements in the U.S., Britain, Canada and Australia. This type of strategy has proven to be one of the most significant forms of international cooperation in the Australian union movement.

Whereas anyone would immediately recognize the importance of the international actions taken in the waterfront dispute, the international aspect of the Pilbara campaign is somewhat hidden. However, the international sharing of skills, strategies and tactics depends strongly on cultivating international linkages, exchanging information and creating reciprocal patterns of engagement between unions in Australia and those abroad. Nevertheless, much of the research on international trade union collaboration focuses on those more visible aspects of international solidarity that involve sympathy actions or diplomatic relations in global peak bodies.

International activity in Australian unions is noteworthy for the diversity of forms it takes. At the top institutional levels, the president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is engaged with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and other international organizations in developing and implementing union policy. At the sectoral level, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the MUA are all actively involved in campaigning with their trade secretariats. At the union level the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU), Transport Workers Union (TWU) and others are involved in bilateral relationships with unions abroad to exchange

organizing tactics and information about corporations. In individual campaigns, most Australian unions have been involved in one-off cooperative activities, supporting or receiving support from overseas unions. Along with these various forms of cooperation, there are also apparently many different objectives for cooperation. In some instances, such as a 1993 solidarity strike at Peabody in support of American miners by the CFMEU, the objective is apparently economic – it is intended to create control over labour market conditions where demand comes from a global firm. In others, such as the 1989 blockade of Fiji by transport workers unions in Australia and New Zealand, the motive was clearly political – the defence of free trade unionism in the region.

Any theory of union activity, whether it be national or international activity, should account for such “structural, strategic, social and spatial diversity” (Ellem and Shields 2002, p. 1). Unions make purposive decisions about the deployment of scarce resources to achieve their goals. Investing in cooperative relationships with unions abroad is one use toward which resources may be put. The examples of the MUA and the Pilbara unions indicate the varieties of international cooperation that unions can invest in. They also demonstrate the variety of ways that international strategies intersect with activities carried out at national and local scales. Even though both campaigns involved the expenditure of resources in pursuing a relationship with other unions, there are great differences between the coordinated industrial action of the waterfront dispute and the use of overseas organizing strategies in the Pilbara. Equally, both campaigns involved connections between international, national, and local scales of activity. The connections between the scaled activities in the waterfront dispute were different from the Pilbara dispute. The analysis of international activity in Australian unions wants for a theory that is capable of describing different forms of international activity and different kinds of relationships between scaled strategies taxonomically and then explaining why they exist.

This thesis contributes to the development of such a theory in the process of trying to answer several questions about Australian international union activity. The central problem is to explain how unions use international activities in pursuing their broader revitalisation strategies. To address this question, it is necessary to explore three related questions.

- How can international activities be meaningfully distinguished and defined for analysis?

- What objectives are international strategies meant to achieve?
- What are the economies that determine whether a union deploys resources into particular forms of international activity?<sup>1</sup>

In trying to answer these questions, this thesis is also part of a broader project to forge interdisciplinary links between industrial relations and economic geography. Recently, some industrial relations scholars have started to draw methodological and theoretical inspiration from the work of labour geographers. The labour geographers are interested in how the collective activities of working people and their unions shape and are shaped by the spatial structure of economic activity. The study of international union activity is a key part of their research program. Because the geographers treat international union activity as being dependent on factors that vary across space, there is an important connection between their perspectives and the questions this thesis means to answer.

In making the connections between labour geography theory and the analysis of union international strategy, the thesis argues for using labour geography as a political economic foundation for industrial relations in the tradition of Hyman's Marxist theory of industrial relations. This provides a critical theoretical perspective and conceptual vocabulary with which to criticise and extend industrial relations research on international activity. The theoretical perspective that emerges is suggestive, but still incomplete. Historical and case study research on the international activities of the ACTU, TWU, LHMU and CFMEU demonstrate the viability of the theoretical perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> This last question requires some further explanation. This thesis begins from the premise that unions act strategically in the sense that they economize on scarce resources in the pursuit of some objective. It is exceedingly hard to study unions this way relative to, say, business firms because unions are political organisations, and are therefore subject to political and moral, as well as market economies. As well, the objectives of firms are modelled pretty well with a simplifying assumption: firms maximise profits. No such simplifying assumption about union objectives is available. Nevertheless, there is merit in treating unions as having an organisational rationality by which they make efficient-enough choices in the pursuit of specific goals.

## The context of the thesis

### *Definitions*

In discussing the international activities of trade unions, there are many terms that could be taken as synonyms. But it is important to decide whether transnational cooperation between trade unions is the same thing as international union activity. For that matter, is international union activity the same thing as union internationalism? Is union collaboration the same thing as union cooperation or coordination? These terms appear separately in the literature, and refer either implicitly or explicitly to a particular ideologies and conceptual traditions. As an introduction to the various literatures dealing with international union activity, and to avoid referring to them unintentionally, this section specifies the different meanings of apparent synonyms. In the remainder of the thesis, these terms will invoke the meanings and literatures assigned to them here.

*International union activity* refers to any activity that a trade union engages in involving another country, group of countries, or institution. The term is intended here to be vague and intuitive, and does not stem from a particular literature or perspective. It refers to the largest class of activities that might be the subject of this thesis. Sending delegates to a meeting of the ICFTU is an international activity. So is organising a letter writing campaign among members on behalf of human rights in another country. Negotiating an award is not an international activity. While such examples make it look clear enough, later analysis of the development and diffusion of innovations shows that it is not always clear what kind of activities should be classified as international. Similar definitional problems cloud any attempt to determine the scalar resolution of a particular activity.

*International Cooperation* between unions refers to a relationship of reciprocal support between two or more unions, at least one of which operates in a different country from the rest. Cooperation is a subset of the more general category of activities. Membership in the ICFTU is a form of cooperation, as is participating in a solidarity action on behalf of members of a union overseas. But more general human rights activities or participation in protests against global trade organizations

are not necessarily forms of international cooperation between unions. The purpose of making this definition is to isolate those forms of international activity that deal specifically with unions from those that involve the cooperation of unions with other international social movements.<sup>2</sup>

*International coordination* is a specific kind of cooperation. Coordination is the specific form of cooperation advocated by those who believe in a global system of collective bargaining. The term refers to the practice of unions representing the workers in a single multinational corporation attempting to coordinate collective bargaining dates and objectives.

*Internationalism* derives from Marxist-Leninist theory and the legacy of the first, second and third International Association of Working Men. The term refers to the idea that working class organisation should transcend national boundaries. Peter Waterman is at the head of a research and activist agenda concerned with the analysis, advocacy, and creation of what he calls a “new labour internationalism”. According to Waterman, internationalism is “a critique of the nation-state and capitalism” and emphasises the importance of cross-national, global or non-territorial solidarities (Waterman 1998, p.50). In this thesis, internationalism will only refer to one of these related traditions.

*International unionism* is a more general term that can refer to internationalism, but also to multinational collective bargaining, global social movement unionism, or transnational industrial relations. Each of these theoretical perspectives describes a possible future role for organized labour at the global scale. Yet none of the roles they imagine for organized labour yet exists. International unionisms are therefore inherently speculative, predictive, or normative.

The subject of the thesis takes on a different colour with this new definitional clarity. It is an analysis of the international activity of Australian unions and peak bodies.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon and Turner (2000, p.4) use the term ‘collaboration’ in a similar way, to denote activities that are distinct from, but may lead to union internationalism. However, in the economic literature on international trade, the term ‘collaboration’ is also associated with the coordination of wage-setting behaviour by unions in different countries.

International activity is a component of the explicitly scaled strategy of unions and peak bodies. This is not a theory of international unionism; there is no assumption of an ultimate normative or structural objective that international activity points toward. Nor is it an assessment of the prospects for such an ultimate objective. It is just an attempt to describe the different kinds of activity unions engage in and to contribute to an understanding of why they do so.

### **International activity and the crisis for Australian unions**

*What is clear is that the kind of movement we have had over the last 80 years is simply incapable of responding to the paradigm shift in the industrial relations environment. Radical change in every facet of union organisation is required (Crosby 2002, p. 9).*

*Because he saw the real world of industrial relations as characterised by stability and order Dunlop regarded the combination, intermingling, and breaking up, or integration and disintegration, of different industrial relations systems as being issues of marginal concern (Dabscheck 1995, p. 9).*

Within the Australian labour movement, the last decade has been a period of crisis and debate. The crisis is a combination of dwindling membership rolls and falling revenues in an environment of hostile relations with employers and the government. The debate centres on what unions can do to renew their purpose and power. Response to crisis, as Crosby suggests, has inspired a re-evaluation of what Australian unions do and how they should do it. In 1999 a new vision of unionism, based on intensive organising, grassroots activism, and networking with other social movements became ACTU policy with the publication of *unions@work* (ACTU 1999). Its advocacy of organizing guided decision-making at the 2000 ACTU Congress (Cooper 2000, p.582). At the 2003 Congress, delegates confirmed their commitment to ideological and strategic change with the adoption of the *Statement of Trade Union Values. Future Strategies 2003* (ACTU 2003a) shows the ongoing process of change in the identity of the Australian union movement.

In the post-war period, Australian unions each represented segments of the workforce in a unique system based on compulsory arbitration. Under Australia's traditional arbitration system, companies are required to recognise registered unions. A registered union can file a claim against an employer, who must then participate in the deliberations of an industrial tribunal. The findings, or awards, of the tribunals bind all parties. In practice, the awards of the industrial tribunal generally cover all

employees in a particular industry, setting a floor for their wages and working conditions.

Unions thrived under the arbitration system as long as they represented a stable full-time workforce in a relatively non-adversarial industrial relations environment. These conditions are vanishing as the rhetoric and reality of structural changes associated with globalisation work their way across the Australian landscape<sup>3</sup>. Unions must now contend with the most casualised workforce in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the demands of employers for a flexible workforce, the hostility of the Howard government to unions, the advent in Australia of union-busting and unitarist human resource management philosophy, and the restructuring of Australian industrial relations toward union exclusion and decentralized bargaining.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the strategic response of Australian unions to these challenges, including international activity, is important, but difficult. The choices being made now by the ACTU and its member unions may determine whether they still exist in fifty years (Crosby 2001, p. 23). But industrial relations research does not on its own explain how unions choose among the different options before them, nor how they mobilise and exercise power (Gardner 1989; Kelly 1999; Frege and Kelly 2003). In Australia, Cooper (2002a) has studied the adoption of the organising model in several white-collar unions, arguing that it is important to understand union agency in the process of decline and renewal. This thesis adopts the similar premise that it is important to understand the role of union agency in determining the practice of international activity.

### **Understanding international union activity**

The waterfront and Pilbara disputes resonate with a scalar logic implicit in most theories of international union activity: if corporations go global, then to

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<sup>3</sup> The term globalisation is used in a general sense here to refer to “the complex of forces, born of the crisis of the mid-1970s, that reversed the different complex of forces that had become consolidated in the decades following World War II (Cox 1997, p.23). A full analysis of these forces is outside the scope of the paper. Detailed interpretations of globalisation in the Australian case can be found in (Fagan and Webber 1994; Breitenfellner 1997; Harcourt 2000)

<sup>4</sup> This discussion of the arbitration system and the changes that have happened to it is superficial and only means to explain the general context within which Australian unions pursue international activities. See (Teicher, Holland et al. 2002) for an accessible yet probing survey of the traditional system and the ways in which it has changed over time.



maintain power so must unions. The mobility of capital has allowed it to dance away from the relatively graceless, lumbering manoeuvres of organized labour. By linking arms and forming a circle on the dance floor, unions can hem capital in. Such reasoning builds on the observation that unions have weakened in the last several decades during the period of globalisation. The correlation of union crisis with globalisation spawns a rather persuasive argument: The period of globalisation has weakened the labour movement. The weakening of the labour movement is a casualty of increasing capital mobility. Capital mobility harms organised labour because it allows employers to evade the regulatory grasp of national unions. Therefore, extending the regulatory grasp of organized labour will allow it to match the power afforded to capital by its mobility. This reasoning is appealing because it appears to explain the worldwide crisis for organised labour, and gives a prescription of what is to be done to correct it. There is also a rhetorical appeal in the idea that the corrective for capital's global reach is a countervailing global reach of labour.

In this argument, the scale of capital determines the appropriate countervailing scale of union activity, and so might simply be called the “scale-matching” thesis. Several variants of the scale-matching thesis undergird academic research on the international activities of trade unions. The emergence of multinational firms as a dominant feature of the economic landscape led many to theorize that unions would match scales within a framework of multinational collective bargaining. Since the mid-1990s, other scholars have seen unions as key players in an alternative “globalisation from below”. In one variant, called “global social movement unionism”, unions, reconfigured as democratic grassroots organisations of working people, join with other social movements to regulate capital. Waterman's notion of a new labour internationalism similarly begins by noting the new organising approaches of unions in the north and their increasing alliances with other kinds of movements. On his view, though, new labour internationalism is part of a larger project to transcend the political economy of capitalist nation-states in moving toward a global socialism.

As normative accounts, the theories of multinational collective bargaining, global social movement unionism and new labour internationalism are useful. Starting from an ideological premise about the desired end of international union activity, it becomes possible to analyse whether unions are doing enough, or the right kind of cooperating. To the extent that union members and leaders associate their

interests with a particular ideological premise, normative theories can be instrumental in policymaking and strategy. However, as descriptive and explanatory theories of the international activity of trade unions, arguments based on the scale-matching thesis are less convincing.

All three positions ascribe a teleological character to international union activity. Unions participate in international activities of all kinds. While there is merit in comparing these activities to some ideal purpose, there is also merit in examining them in their own right. Unions choose these activities, and indeed often choose not to act at the international scale for their own particular strategic and tactical reasons. Why they choose as they do is an important question for both scholars of union behaviour, and union decision-makers themselves. Though there are doubts about the procedural rationality of unions as strategic agents, it is worth considering that unions might follow their own logic and tend to act in their own interests. From this perspective, there is great value in taking an agnostic look at the ways in which Australian unions choose to engage internationally, the institutions they create to do so, and the objectives they appear to pursue.

Within industrial relations, there is very little existing theory or research on which to base the kind of analysis proposed for the thesis. The questions about international activity that the thesis intends to answer form a point of connection between industrial relations and the related discipline of labour geography. Labour geographers study the ways that the spatial arrangement of economic and social activity affect and are affected by the behaviour of working people and their unions. In particular, they are interested in understanding how globalisation might enhance or limit a union's ability and desire to act internationally. Since industrial relations does not offer a suitable theory for answering the questions posed in this thesis, and labour geographers have a theory that answers similar questions, the thesis pursues the connection between these two disciplines. The result is a theory of industrial relations that is based on the spatial political economy that informs labour geography. This spatial industrial relations theory provides a framework within which questions about how unions choose particular forms of international activity can be addressed.

Aside from labour geography, people studying the international activities of unions have brought several other interdisciplinary perspectives. Some base analysis on Charles Tilly's mobilisation theory, arguing for an understanding of international union activity as a problem of resource mobilisation (Kelly 1999; Anner 2003; Frege

and Kelly 2003). Others have recently argued that collaboration between industrial relations theory and international political economy will provide key insight into international union activity (Harrod 2002; Haworth and Hughes 2002b; Haworth and Hughes 2002a). In light of these alternatives, the choice of labour geography as the theoretical perspective of this thesis requires justification.

First, mobilisation theory deals with the study of grassroots social movements, and international relations with the study of interactions between nation states. While unions are in some ways analogous to grassroots social movements, and in other ways analogous to nation-states, they are not identical to either. Labour geography, on the other hand, is explicitly concerned with the behaviour and agency of industrial relations agents and phenomena. Borrowing labour geography for industrial relations just involves a change in discursive focus, from space, which is the geographer's concern, to union agency. Second, labour geography is actually an articulation of a more general political economy theory in which space is a central feature. Hence, developing labour geography for use in industrial relations is not merely a way to access new methodological tools, but actually links industrial relations to a more general theoretical perspective.

### **Method and chapter structure**

The thesis is divided between the development of theory and research on international activity in the Australian union movement. The opening two chapters propose a way to link industrial relations theory with labour geography, and examine how this theory can be used to examine variations in international union activity. The latter two substantive chapters apply this conceptual vocabulary and theory to the study of Australian unions. This unusual chapter structure coincides with the unusual research project that is to be undertaken.

Rather than a conventional deductive analysis of international union activity, this thesis performs a more inductive kind of analysis, in conjunction with historical and discursive analyses of key issues and concepts. The end result is a theory based in labour geography of how and why unions choose between different international activities. The empirical research on Australian unions gives suggestive power to the theoretical perspective and contributes to its development. It is not meant as a deductive test of a robust theory. Instead, the empirical research is an inductive

analysis of Australian international activity in which historical information and case study data are arranged and interpreted according to the theory developed in the first two chapters.

The empirical research is divided into two chapters. Chapter Four studies the international activities and policies of the ACTU, while Chapter Five examines case studies of the international activities of three Australian unions: the TWU, the LHMU, and the CFMEU. Studying the ACTU first provides a general context within which the three unions carry out their international activities. More instrumentally, the ACTU research provides a framework of different forms of international activity that the comparisons in the case study chapter are based on.

The case study chapter compares and tries to explain the differences between the three unions in their uses of international activity. The choice of case study unions was driven by several factors. First, all three unions have relatively robust international programs. Second, each union represents workers in a different industry, and the three unions capture the various segments of the Australian workforce. Third, the particular branches of each union come from different ideological positions. The New South Wales branch of the TWU is a traditionally right-wing union, while the CFMEU is solidly left wing. Lastly, the decision to study these unions was driven by issues of access to relevant informants and union documents.

In Chapter Two, the thesis introduces labour geography for an audience of industrial relations researchers that may be unfamiliar with it. The primary argument is that labour geography provides a range of concepts to use in a new political economy of industrial relations. Based on Hyman's Marxist political economy of industrial relations, the chapter uses labour geography to redefine industrial relations, the notion of power, the motives of different industrial relations actors, and the nature of industrial and social conflict. It then considers how these concepts have been applied by labour geographers to the study of international union activity. It concludes with several suggestions about how this perspective can enhance understanding of why unions choose the international activities they do.

Chapter Three shifts the focus away from labour geography to review the intellectual and material history of international union activity. Ideas and institutions of international activity emerged together through a history of struggle between socialist and pragmatic visions of unionism. The major theories of international activity today are the ideological product of this process. However, one scholar,

Harvie Ramsay, proposes several conditions for a contingency theory of international activity. His contingency theory perspective tries to match international activity to the unique structural features of different multinational corporations. The chapter appropriates Ramsay's conditions as a framework for developing a more general contingency theory of international activity, based on the labour geography insights developed in Chapter Two. It concludes by organising the observations about international activity culled from industrial relations literature according to the contingency theory framework.

Chapter Four is a study of the international activities of the ACTU. The chapter examines both the actual activities of the ACTU, and the ways in which the ACTU tries to define its international agency through policy documents. First, the chapter argues that the activities of the ACTU are expressions of its agency as a peak union, and examines how different kinds of agency have different scalar expressions. The chapter finds that the forms of international activity most prevalent in the Australian union movement are strategy-sharing connections, solidarity activities with unions in the South Pacific region, and efforts to construct global scales of industrial regulation. A historical and discursive analysis of ACTU policy documents reveals the origins of these activities, and illustrates how the ways in which unions try to scale their activities depends on what they are trying to achieve politically and socially. It turns out that strategy sharing is a form of international activity that is not only fairly unique to Australia, but is also at odds with the ACTU's own efforts to represent the international as a sphere of moral authority and social justice.

Many of these themes are central to the case study analysis in Chapter Five. In Chapter Five, the international activities of the TWU, LHMU, and CFMEU are studied according to the spatial contingency theory developed in Chapters Two and Three. Each of the three unions engages in the three forms of international activity revealed in Chapter Four, strategy sharing, regional solidarity, and global regulation, but in different ratios. The chapter suggests that the explanation for these different ratios depends in part on the spatial structure of the industries that the different unions organise.

Although the case study analysis is limited to a suggestive overview rather than an in-depth exploration, it leads to several tentative conclusions. The spatial contingency theory explains enough of the variation in international activity that further development of the theory and further tests of its validity are warranted. As

well, the case study analysis again establishes the significance of strategy sharing as a form of international activity in Australia. Perhaps most importantly, the case studies yield insights that will prove useful in any future development of the theory.

## **Conclusion**

It is probably reasonable to argue that international activities are a far less significant part of union strategy than the scale-matching thesis might suggest. Even so, most unions these days are engaged in some form of international activities, and as this thesis will show, many are engaged in multiple forms of activity. Industrial relations has begun to study how unions make strategic choices, particularly in response to economic and political changes that threaten them. This research has not yet extended far into an explanation of international activities, which most scholars either ignore, or study only descriptively.

Australian unions are not known for their international activity. Nevertheless, they too pursue many international activities. In particular, they engage with their counterparts overseas to develop and exchange revitalisation strategies, most notably the organising model. In spite of the invisibility of this form of international activity, its influence on the structure and direction of Australian unionism is undeniable. These international activities reveal the extent to which the way unions use international activities in revitalisation are under-researched. Hopefully, this thesis will bring further attention to this unique and important form of international activity.

Labour geography as a political economy of industrial relations gives a theoretical basis for examining union strategy in general, and union strategy at the international scale in particular. The theory developed in this thesis to explain international activities could actually be extended to a more comprehensive theory of union revitalisation strategy. The spatial concepts that are the basis of labour geography are challenging for those who have not studied them before. However, this thesis finds that the value of learning them outweighs the costs, measured in terms of the contribution they make to understanding international activity. Chapter Two begins this process by re-introducing labour geography to industrial relations.

## Chapter Two

### A New Political Economy of Industrial Relations

*I argue that it is important to conceptualize international labor solidarity in explicitly spatial terms if we are to understand why different groups of workers may pursue radically different types of political praxis in different places and at different times (Herod 2003).*

In studying international union activity, labour geographers, including Herod, try to understand how unions respond to changing spatial configurations of economic and political phenomena. Their research has explored whether unions are capable of acting internationally (they are), whether they have to act internationally (they do not), and whether international activity is motivated by a desire to defend a particular place (it might be). Labour geographers are concerned with geography; with geographic attributes, processes, definitions and methods. Therefore, when Herod insists that international labour solidarity be studied “in explicitly spatial terms”, he is giving a friendly suggestion to his colleagues in industrial relations. After all, we are the ones who study the strategic decisions and organisational behaviour of unions. It is as if Herod has walked up to the invisible boundary that separates geography from industrial relations and whispered some hints about how we might solve a puzzle. But from there, it is our problem.

This chapter takes a two step approach to solving this problem. It first develops a general theory of industrial relations based on labour geography, then discusses how that theory might help understand international activity. A handful of people from industrial relations use concepts of labour geography in their research, with promising results. Reviewing their work, this chapter finds there are two ways to use geography in industrial relations: as an empirical method, or as a tool to extend and criticise existing theory. Both draw in different ways on the central idea that social relations, including industrial relations, are inherently spatial relations.

To explain what this slogan means it is necessary to review the critical economic geography of which labour geography is one branch. It turns out that the central concepts of labour geography combine two intellectual traditions. One is a tradition of looking at how the social relations of capitalism, as described by Marx,

affect, and are affected by, the arrangement of economic and social phenomena in space. For example, how patterns, say, of industrial investment and disinvestment between different places are shaped by structural conflicts between workers and capitalists. Labour geography is essentially based on the argument that the agency of workers and their unions has been overlooked in such research. In making these arguments, labour geographers also draw on post-structuralist accounts that are critical of the class-based agency and economic determinism in Marxian political economy.

This chapter considers how the spatialised Marxism of labour geography can breathe new life into Hyman's political economy of industrial relations. Hyman's theory placed class-conflict and the Marxian theory at the centre of explanation in industrial relations. By redefining Hyman's theory in accordance with the key concepts of labour geography, this chapter provides a new political economy of industrial relations that links labour geography formally to the concerns of industrial relations scholars. Formalising this connection is useful for any further extensions of labour geography to industrial relations. In particular, it gives a framework for studying the different kinds of international activities used by Australian unions.

As it turns out, labour geography is especially useful for addressing two of the questions in the thesis. Because it ties union agency to the spatial structure of the global economy, labour geography gives some insight into the motives for international activity. It also helps to explain the kinds of margins that partially determine whether particular forms of international activity may be useful. Aside from these structural insights, labour geography also gives insight into the role that identity and ideology may play in the decision-making processes. Finally, by making a problem of the concept of 'scale', labour geography forces a consideration of what 'international' activity means, and how international activities are related to activities at other scales. This thesis argues that unions scale their activities as they do for particular reasons, some of which are structural and can be specified up front, and others that are historically contingent and can only be explored on a case-by-case basis.



## **A summary of key concepts and arguments**

A new political economy of industrial relations based on a tradition of Marxist geography defines industrial relations as the study of processes by which social actors seek control over the “social relations of work”: the intersection of market, workplace, and household relationships that together determine what different stakeholders want and get out of work (Ellem and Shields 1999). The central issues in this framework are how stakeholders are motivated to control the social relations of work, and what power resources they can deploy. Labour geography simultaneously provides a structural economic explanation, but in a way that permits for post-structural analyses that do not reduce the motives and power of humans to simple economic factors. Under capitalism, employers and workers both seek to protect their interests: profitability for employers; a decent and stable life for workers. These structural pressures are a source of conflict between what employers and workers want out of the social relations of work in a particular place in a particular time. But where the interest of employers in profitability is rather straightforward, the interest of working people in a decent and stable life is itself socially, historically and spatially contingent. Therefore, different workers, and different groups of workers may seek different spatial fixes. This insight, that there are what Tonkin calls “multiple labour geographies of power” allows labour geography (and through it industrial relations) to account for the many contingent factors that shape social agency among working people (Tonkin 2000).

By reviewing the theories and research that constitute labour geography around the concepts of the social relations of work, the spatial fix, and multiple labour geographies of power, the capacity of labour geography to envelope the concerns of industrial relations becomes clear. The main point is that social relationships are inherently caused by, and causative of, economic space. For that reason, any theory of industrial relations that is concerned with understanding the ontological status of social agents must place them spatially as well as socially. Yet space need not be the central focus of empirical research. As Hyman said of Marxist industrial relations more generally, “[it] is the framework of what is taken for granted and what is

regarded as problematic that most differentiates [labour geography] from conventional ‘industrial relations analysis’ (cited in Pocock 1997, p. 13).

Spatial considerations are very relevant to many industrial relations phenomena, though. Most observers regard the geographic notion of scale to be the tool of most use in exploring the explicit spatiality of industrial relations (Herod 1998; Castree 2000; Sadler 2000; Herod 2001a; Herod and Wright 2002; McGrath-Champ 2002a; Peck 2002; Fagan 2003). Activity can occur and can be studied at a variety of different scales, ranging from the very local and particular, to the global and encompassing. The ability to act, or to represent activity, at different scales is a source of social power. For example, the ability of capital owners to shift money around the globe gives them an apparent power over regions that depend on their investment. This enables local industries and governments to argue that to attract investment, the regulatory apparatuses governing work need to be controlled by enterprises, that is, at the scale of the firm. Such material and discursive construction of scale has significance to many of the issues of industrial relations. Of particular interest here are the attempts of unions to construct global scales of action.

### **What is labour geography?**

For the uninitiated, labour geography is a peculiar and abstract way to think about things. We are not used to thinking about “space” as an integral component to human relationships. At first, it is easiest to think of how economic geographers view space as being equivalent to historians view time. Human activity occurs in particular places as it does in particular times. More than that, the content of those activities must be understood by their presence and relationships within those specific places and times. As Marx recognized, though, while “men make history”, they do not always make it just as they desire (Marx 1968, p.97). The same is true of space. The places and times people live in are the subject of competing claims. Conflict among the claimants is the social force that shapes the contours of space and time. We respond now to the historical and spatial legacy left by these prior struggles, just as our struggles will leave a residue that constrains and motivates our descendents. Finally, the way we represent space and time to ourselves is also the product of social struggle. Winners write history, but they also draw maps (and plan cities, and regulate trade, and so on).

The term labour geography originally referred to a literature that sought to account for the role of workers in making spatial patterns in the economy: regional variation in industrial decline, for example. Geographers are primarily interested in understanding how social relationships shape spatial relationships. For them, by focusing on the agency of working people in controlling space, labour geography is a corrective to social theories that only acknowledge the agency of capital owners and nation-states in producing spatial patterns of economic activity (Herod 1998; Sadler 2000; Herod 2001a; Fagan 2003). In contrast, the hope that understanding spatial relationships will help them understand social relationships is the source of interest in labour geography for those coming from industrial relations.

Herod identifies three ways in which industrial relations actors are influenced by spatial relationships. He argues that industrial relations actors are shaped by their position within an unevenly developed global economy, by their embeddedness within a particular place with distinctive social and economic features, and by their use of space as a medium for political struggles (Herod 2002b, p. 6). Labour geographers study the difference space makes to unions, the difference unions make to space, and the nature of international trade union activity (Sadler 2000, p. 136). Fagan distinguishes four themes in this research: studies of labour responses to globalisation, studies on the geography of union membership and density, studies on the role of trade unions in constructing distinct local and regional cultures, and studies of how scale shapes the causes and outcomes of industrial disputes (Fagan 2003, p. 9). His taxonomy makes clear the intersection between the interests of labour geographers and the current themes of industrial relations.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to describe labour geography from an industrial relations perspective is to consider the ways industrial relations researchers have used it in their own analysis. Susan McGrath-Champ, Bradon Ellem and John Shields at the University of Sydney all use geographic theory to inform their industrial relations research. All adhere to the premise that social and spatial phenomena mutually determine one another through a dialectical process. McGrath-Champ uses geographical empirical methods in her analysis of industrial phenomena, arguing that the spatial patterns reflect underlying social processes. Conversely, Ellem and Shields use more conventional sociological and historical research methods, but apply labour geography to critically appraise and broaden existing ideas about regional industrial relations and peak body agency.

McGrath-Champ (2002b) makes great use of the premise that social relationships determine spatial relationships. Examining the variation in enterprise bargaining outcomes between regions of Australia, she attempts to “reach through’ spatially-situated phenomena to grasp the underlying social processes” (McGrath-Champ 2002a, p. 121). Geographical theories that relate the social to the spatial enable her to interpret the social meaning of empirically observed spatial patterns. On her view, the relationship between the spatial patterns in enterprise bargaining outcomes and social processes is informed by “three key areas of mutual conceptual connection between industrial relations and labour geography: globalisation, decentralization, and scale” (2002, p. 119). In this McGrath-Champ uses labour geography to develop a unique spatial methodology for industrial relations research. The methodology reveals patterns in social relationships that may be hidden in non-spatial analyses.

Where McGrath-Champ begins from the position that the social determines the spatial, Bradon Ellem and John Shields focus on the other half of the socio-spatial dialectic (Ellem and Shields 1999; 2001; Ellem 2002). For them, the conceptual centrality of space is a source of theoretical insight and innovation for industrial relations. So far, this has helped them develop theories about the meaning of the term “region” in regional industrial relations (Ellem and Shields 1999), to analyse strategies of union renewal (Ellem 2002), and to study the nature of peak union origins and agency (Ellem and Shields 2001). All of their recent research focuses on understanding the role played by organised labour in local employment regulation. Their first contribution in this vein uses economic geography as a platform to criticize regional industrial relations and to theorize what they call the ‘social relations of work’

Following the geographers, we suggest that the scope of local capital-labour analysis should be broadened from the ‘relations of (public, paid) production’ to incorporate the spatialised relations of reproduction and consumption. Taken together, these three spheres cover what we prefer to call the ‘social relations of work’ (1999, p. 547).

To them, geographers understand more clearly than industrial relations theorists the need to look beyond the site of production for the social relationships that are essential in motivating and directing the regulation of employment relations. The

social relations of work cover a holistic field of relationships that matter for understanding work.

Ellem and Shields also locate a theory of power for industrial relations within labour geography by drawing on literature that identifies the different orientations to space of the employing and employed classes. Employers are interested in locations within space as places to settle down to the activity of making a profit. Workers, on the other hand, want to live in places that facilitate their social and biological reproduction. These different orientations to space are exacerbated by the relative mobilities of capital and labour. Capital, generally more mobile, allows employers to search widely across space for profitable places, while labour is generally attached to a certain place. This attachment to place and dependence on capital investment gives employers power to enforce their interests in the social relations of work. But this power is not unchecked. Ellem and Shields argue that labour's attachment to place can also be a source of power. Because labour's attachment to place is manifested in the development of unique local cultures, working people have more capacity to control the relations of reproduction and consumption (Ellem and Shields 1999).

Like Herod, Ellem and Shields recognize how the need among working people for liveable places can manifest in a sense of 'place-consciousness' (Ellem and Shields 2001; Ellem 2002). Place consciousness might be defined as an explicit awareness of the significance a particular place as a site of reproduction. There is an important theoretical nuance here. People are always interested in maintaining certain conditions of their reproduction. Furthermore, according to Ellem and Shields, this maintenance depends on the control of social relations of work, though efforts to control them need not always be overtly spatial. When place-consciousness develops, working people act with the explicit aim of protecting their local sphere of reproduction. As such, place-consciousness is just one form of consciousness by which people may mobilize to exert control over the social relations of work. People might just as well organise around class, race, gender, or ethnicity in order to exert control over social relations (Tonkin 2000; Ettliger 2002; Herod and Wright 2002). Equally importantly, while place-consciousness is attached to a particular place, the political praxis it inspires does not have to be local (Herod 1998; Sadler 2000; Pendras 2002; Fagan 2003).

Ellem and Shields use the concept of the social relations of work to supplement an emerging theory of peak union origins and agency (Ellem and Shields

2001; forthcoming). The origins of a peak union, they explain, are at least partially informed by labour's desire to act at multiple geographic scales. Peak unions can be formed to exert influence at any specific scale that is desired by its affiliates. While the most obvious peak bodies operate at national scale, such as the ACTU, Ellem and Shields are interested especially in a local peak body, the Barrier Industrial Council that operated within the Broken Hill region of New South Wales. In addition to their observation about the contingent and socially constructed nature of the scale at which unions form peak bodies, they also identify peak union agency as being partially directed toward regulating the social relations of work. In the case of the Broken Hill region in the early twentieth century, every aspect of the social relations of work, commodity consumption, production and reproduction was constituted at a fundamentally local scale. The locally scaled BIC was active not only in organising and mobilizing workers to achieve a balance of bargaining power with local employers; it also acted to control local commodity markets and the production choices of local employers.

This brief review illustrates the ways that industrial relations scholars have been using labour geography as a platform for their own analysis. It should also give a sense, for the uninitiated, of the Marxian tradition of economic geography of which labour geography is part. Most likely, the review opens more questions than it answers. The notion of space as an essential and defining component of human experience, rather than a vessel within which that experience occurs is not very intuitive. Digging deeper into the history and meaning of these concepts will help explain better what is going on in the appropriation of labour geography by industrial relations scholars.

### **The background of labour geography**

When Richard Hyman sought to develop the Marxist variant of industrial relations theory, he did not do so to supplant existing theory, but to broaden it (Pocock 1997, p. 13). The dominant Dunlopian systems theory was concerned only with the analysis of a fixed regulatory apparatus, dependent on the assumption of equal power between capital and labour and the neutrality of the state. By considering how the class structure of capitalism might affect the power of industrial relations actors to exercise control over work relations, Hyman established a theory

that covered the traditional range of industrial relations topics and placed them within a dynamic framework. Hyman's theory was capable of incorporating systems theory as a special case, but could also account for the "fluidity of the *processes* of control: a continuous and shifting relationship, which can never be effectively frozen in a formal rule" (1975, p. 31, original emphasis). He achieved this by considering how the structural relationship between workers and their bosses under capitalism would motivate and constrain their control of work. He called this application of Marxian political economy to the problem of industrial conflict and its resolution a "political economy of industrial relations".

Labour geography has the potential to serve as a new and improved political economy of industrial relations for several reasons. As an outgrowth of Marxist economic geography, labour geography overcomes the deficiencies in non-spatial political economy first noted by Henri Lefebvre and developed by David Harvey (Harvey 1982). Like Hyman's political economy of industrial relations, labour geography maintains the categories of analysis in conventional industrial relations, but undergirds them with an apparatus that allows for more sophisticated theorizing about what motivates and constrains actors in shaping work relationships. This is particularly germane today, as key problems for industrial relations involve understanding the motives and strategies of workers, firms, and the state in altering work regulation and in responding to rapid structural change.

Furthermore, as Ellem and Shields indicate, labour geography allows industrial relations to move beyond a narrow focus on workplace relationships to a broader analysis of how intersecting commodity markets, production processes, and the economic and social practices of labour reproduction are implicated in the regulation of work. Labour geography also engages with the cultural turn that has afflicted the social sciences (Fagan 2003), forcing it away from analyses that reduce behaviour to structural analysis of class relationships and toward the recognition of the role the politics of identity play in social, economic and political life. Herod's version of labour geography takes this affliction and turns it into a multifaceted theory that is capable of dealing with structural features of the economy, but also of articulating feminist, ethnic, and other subsumed discourses about work.<sup>5</sup> It therefore

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<sup>5</sup> While Herod is often criticized for focusing on unions in his empirical research (Tonkin 2000), his theory of labour geography acknowledges the existence of the different possible forms of working-class agency.

moves beyond the rigid focus in industrial relations on national, sectoral, or enterprise-level systems of control over work relations.

The important themes of labour geography as a political economy of industrial relations come out of the foundational works of David Harvey (1982) and Doreen Massey (1984). All later labour geography refers to the traditions begun by these two scholars. Harvey's work provides the baseline political economic framework for labour geography and really articulates the connection between social relationships of capitalism and their manifestation in the economic landscape. Massey takes spatial analysis in a direction that explicitly considers the effects of spatial restructuring on workers and regulatory apparatuses, and hence provides the basis for analyses that treat industrial location and the regulation of work as spatial phenomena. As well, Massey was among the first to take seriously the radically contingent nature of social agency in spatial analysis. She explicitly rejects the reduction of behaviour to abstract social forces. For her, structural forces can inspire and constrain behaviour, but the outcomes we actually observe in space always depend on unique local conditions that cannot be foreseen by theory (Massey 1984; Scott 2000).

Harvey's landmark work considers how capital might use spatial restructuring as a means to maintain profit rates. According to classical Marxian economics, capital is plagued by periodic crises of profitability, which Marx believed would inevitably lead to the collapse of the capitalist system. But he and others also saw the possibility that capitalists would be able to stave off collapse by finding new sources of accumulation, and hence profit. Lenin, for example, thought that imperialism, through the exploitation of raw materials in the colonies provided a vehicle for cost-savings that could temporarily restore profits (Harvey 1982, p. 406). Harvey calls this a 'spatial fix' for capital's accumulation crisis. In fact, imperialism is just one form of spatial fix: an external fix for the internal crisis. Harvey proposes that capital also seeks an internal spatial fix.

Capital is generally more mobile than labour, but must set itself in a particular place in order to realize profit through production. As it is fixed within a particular place, each capital is dependent on maintaining the flow of value through its social relationships. As long as the firm maintains a rate of profit at or above the average, it can count on the continued flow of mobile capital, which it transforms through production into commodities. These it sells in the market for money, which returns to the system as new mobile capital. Where Marx argued that all capital is doomed to



experience a drop in the rate of profit, Harvey points out that the problem of realizing an above average profit may affect different capitals and different places at different times. Fixed in a place, a particular firm experiencing declining profitability is cut off from the flow of mobile capital. The process of devaluation is, thus, spatially uneven: particular industries and regions will be more or less prone to devaluation, with the result of uneven patterns of investment and employment across the landscape. This gives rise to the possibility of an internal spatial fix for capital. Harvey notes that through this process, the collapse of capitalism might be forestalled. Regions that have experienced devaluation in the past can later become sites generating greater than average profits, leading to an ongoing cycle of investment and disinvestment that flows throughout the capitalist world-economy. This review of Harvey's contribution sheds light on what is meant by the idea that social relationships are fundamentally spatial: the social relationships of capitalism are manifested within space as capital struggles to solve its accumulation crisis. From this notion come the later conceptual relationships between the spatial and the social.

Labour geography does not only draw from the structural Marxism on which Harvey's theory was based. Labour geography has been much affected by another strand of Marxist geography emanating from Doreen Massey and the British Localities school of the 1980s. Massey and her colleagues rejected structural Marxism and tried to focus on ways to understand the role of gender in addition to class in determining spatial outcomes (Scott 2000, p. 490). This project resulted in Massey's development of the notion of contingency as a premise for geographic theory. In Massey's theory, class and gender are dual axes of social causality, but the particular patterns of their effects cannot be read off from abstract theory. Instead, their effects are hopelessly mediated by historical and spatial specificities that are impossible to specify ahead of time. This methodological premise has been picked up especially by geographers researching the geography of regulatory restructuring, and is foremost in Jamie Peck's theoretical account of labour market segmentation and the transition from the Keynesian welfare state to a regime of localized workfare regimes (Peck 2002). It also factors heavily in Herod's development of the theory of labour geography when he acknowledges the multiple identities along which working people may mobilize (Herod 2001a, p. 48).

Where Harvey demonstrates that economic processes underlying social interaction will be manifested in the landscape, Massey shows that many social

processes operating according to their own logic would mediate structural forces in unpredictable ways. This tension between structural and post-structural discourses is key to Herod's account of labour geography:

A labour geography should ... recognize that working-class people...organise across many cross-cutting political, social, racial, gender and cultural lines. And yet the fact that they do so as working-class people rather than as capitalists distinctively shapes their spatial praxis, and hence, their production of geographical landscapes (Herod 2001a, pp. 47-8).

It is the idea that working-class people are active agents in the production of economic space that is new with labour geography. Though the survey here is of Herod's theoretical development, his work is a synthesis and expression of a literature growing out of Harvey and Massey's work that sought to recognize the agency not just of capital, but of working people in shaping patterns of development in economic space (Wills 1996; Fagan 1997; Herod 1998; Castree 2000; Sadler 2000; Tonkin 2000). Why and how workers might shape economic space and the scales of political and economic activity are the key conceptual challenges posed by research in labour geography.

### **Theories of labour geography**

In answering this challenge, Herod tries to critically situate the spatial agency of working people within the existing framework of Marxist economic geography. He does this by making two key points about their relationships to economic space. Most importantly, he proposes that working people seek their own kind of spatial fix, somewhat analogous to that sought by capital that gives them an interest in shaping economic space in particular ways. But while this appears to be a structural explanation for working-class motivation and behaviour, Herod goes to great lengths to point out that in the pursuit of its social fix, working people are sentient social beings whose social and geographic agency can be fragmented along many lines. These theoretical developments are new articulation of Marxian political geography that moves beyond its discursive boundaries.

The idea that labour can have a spatial fix analogous to capital is at first blush somewhat problematic. After all, capital requires a spatial fix for the crisis attached to the realization of profit. But in Marxian political economy, exploitation and

alienation in production are the motive forces behind labour's social agency. In this framework, the spatiality of labour is simply a mirror of the spatiality of capital. Labour's conflict with capital appears in the landscape wherever production takes place. Patterns of employment and unemployment in space are simply the residue of capital seeking its spatial fix.

Labour's spatial fix, according to Herod, is not attached to the contradiction in interests between capital and labour in production, but rather in reproduction. Social reproduction must occur in the particular places where working people live. Because of their spatial attachment they will seek to shape space in particular ways that facilitate social and biological reproduction. This is labour's spatial fix (Herod 2001a, pp. 33-4). This notion was anticipated by Kevin Cox (1998), who illustrated the analogy between labour's spatial fix and that of capital. Labour is like fixed forms of capital, in that both are relatively place-bound and both, therefore, need to

[ensure] that value in its more mobile forms continues to flow through their social relations...In other words, agents have local interests. These are interests in appropriating/realizing profits/rents/wages/taxes in particular places (Cox 1998, p. 5).

Herod is quick to point out that this conception of labour's spatiality recognizes that workers and their employers may frequently collaborate when their spatial fixes coincide (Herod 2001a, p. 36). For instance, when a manufacturer and the union representing their workers lobby the state government for tax relief, the firm is interested in tax relief presumably to enhance profitability, while the union, as the representative of a group of workers, is interested in maintaining the state as a site of lucrative manufacturing jobs. The ability to account for these kinds of episodes, so frequent in capitalism, is a strength of Herod's theory. He uses it to great effect in explaining a dispute between unionised waterfront workers in the Southern and Northern U.S. over setting national wage rates. For the Northern unions, national wage rates protected regional jobs by preventing employers and their customers from using cheaper southern ports. But the Southern workers found that the trade off for being paid at northern rates was unacceptably low employment (Herod 2001a, Chapter 5).

Tonkin (2000) builds on Herod's theory to identify multiple "labour geographies of power" (2000, p. 116). In demonstrating that spatial conflict can occur

between workers and capital, between groups of workers, between workers and the state, and so on, Herod acknowledges workers as independent and sentient beings, rather than as vessels of abstract structural forces. Since labour's spatial fix is a reflection of the problem of reproduction, and since reproduction is a social and cultural, as well as an economic process, it follows that different groups of workers will seek different spatial fixes that reflect cultural and social prerogatives. While Herod acknowledges that labour's spatial agency takes many other forms, his application of labour geography is primarily to the study of trade union motives and strategy (Herod 2001a, p. 44). However, Tonkin uses labour geography in analysing the restructuring of the steel industry in the Australian city of Wollongong. In her account, she describes how a group of female steelworkers organised to influence human resource management practices that discriminated against women. This, she argues, is an example of how a gendered labour geography of power can drive the quest for a spatial fix (2000, p. 128). Recognition of multiple labour geographies of power overcomes the emphasis in labour geography and industrial restructuring studies on unions as the privileged agents of working-class desire and power (2000, p. 119).

### **Labour geography as a new political economy of industrial relations**

The concept of labour's spatial fix and the recognition that there are multiple labour geographies of power that reflect multiple spatial visions are the two crucial concepts of labour geography for developing a new political economy of industrial relations. Like Hyman's Marxist-inspired political economy of industrial relations, this new one also identifies industrial relations as being a subject that analyses processes of control. Labour geography, like Marxist sociology, enables researchers to identify the sources of power that can be deployed in the struggle for control, and the motives of actors in their particular choices about how to deploy that power. But labour geography also goes beyond what Hyman intended in several crucial ways. First, by allowing a focus on the social relations of work, labour geography provides a theoretical base that enables industrial relations to move beyond Hyman's focus on the control of production. Second, by recognizing the multiple dimensions of worker agency, and the potential for conflict among working people, labour geography provides a theoretical base for industrial relations analysis that studies tensions within

unions, as well as the activities of non-unionised workers. Because of this, labour geography has the potential to tie together many strands of ongoing research.

It is worthwhile to recall the nature of Hyman's political economy of industrial relations. His theory was about control, agency and power. He defined industrial relations as "the study of *processes of control over work relations* (1975, p. 12, original emphasis). The fundamental fact of work relations is that they are work relations under capitalism. Whatever workers seek in attempting to control work relations will ultimately conflict with their bosses' desire to control work relations in the interest of making a profit (Hyman 1975, pp. 18, 19). Because they control the means of production, employers have a greater ability to control their physical and social environment, Hyman's definition of power (Hyman 1975, p. 26). It is to match the power of employers to control work relations that workers collect together in unions.

But one of the deficiencies of Hyman's theory for contemporary industrial relations research is his focus on the realm of production as the focal point for theory and research. At the time he wrote, industrial relations were regulated by relatively stable national systems in England, Australia, and the other Anglophone countries. It is natural that Hyman would try to develop a theory that still described that framework, but could account in a sociological way for the reasons that workers and their employers would get into disputes over the nature of work. Hyman's theory deepened, but did not necessarily broaden, the account of industrial relations.

The new political economy of industrial relations aims to study the processes of control over the social relations of work. Workers, employers and the state, to achieve a spatial fix, all need to control the social relations of work. Focusing just on the control of work relations ignores the way work is connected to domestic life through the process of social reproduction, and the way work is structured around production for exchange in markets (Ellem and Shields 1999). Where Ellem and Shields focused on local forms of control, the social relations of work encompass intersecting and cross-cutting spaces and scales, as do the politics of their control. But, as they point out, the focus in geography on the social relations of work enables a more comprehensive account of the embeddedness of working life within capitalist social relations. Because Hyman was focused on control in production, and identified unions as the only vessel of collective power for workers, his theory was limited in its ability to deal with these issues. However, labour geography makes up for these

deficiencies. As Peck (1996) has shown, geography is a powerful tool for the analysis of local labour market regulation, which has both social and legal aspects.

By identifying multiple geographies of power, labour geography enables industrial relations to simultaneously embrace several critical perspectives at once. Feminism, ethnic and racial identity politics, and postmodernism are perspectives that students of industrial relations cannot ignore. In Hyman's theory, the analysis of "what workers want" is limited to understanding what workers want as workers under capitalism. His political economy of industrial relations is limited in scope to considering only what workers want in work relations, that is, in production. Because labour's spatial fix is attached to worker's desires in reproduction, and because the lens on the social relations of work helps to link the sphere of production with the sphere of reproduction, "what workers want" in labour geography is contingent on their historically, spatially, culturally and socially contingent desires. These desires may be articulated and mobilized through unions, but equally well through women's organisations, or ethnic organisations, or, indeed, through informal modes of resistance such as shirking or absenteeism.

Labour geography is an umbrella under which many of the topics that interest industrial relations scholars can hang. For example, a recent concern of industrial relations scholars in Australia is the process of deregulation of the labour market. A key theoretical contribution is the recognition that deregulation is really the substitution of regulation internal to the workplace for regulation external to the workplace (Buchanan and Callus 1993, p. 516). Managerial control replaces state control. In the framework of labour geography, this distinction is identified as a shift of regulatory power between different spatial scales. In Australia, wages and working conditions for most employees used to be determined through national or state level awards. The shift to enterprise bargaining can be seen as a shift of these regulatory functions from the national or state scale, to the "enterprise scale" (Fagan 2003). This rescaling of regulatory function was driven partially by the Business Council of Australia on behalf of their member's desire for a spatial fix. On their account, withering profitability in Australian industry threatened a devaluation of the capital fixed within the nation. Rescaling regulation provided them with more direct control over work relations, ostensibly to restore profits. While their claim was that regulatory rescaling would restore profits through enhanced productivity of the existing workforce, much of the effect of rescaling has been to exclude unions from

the workplace, workforce casualization, and work intensification. Unions, too, were complicit in the process of regulatory rescaling. During the 1980s control over work relations had been centralized at the national scale under the Accord, negotiated between the ALP and the ACTU. Political opportunity made rescaling work regulation at the national scale attractive to the ACTU. The Accord fell apart as powerful unions broke ranks to capture gains where pockets of profitability sprung up in certain industries in certain places. To maintain its legitimacy with affiliates, the ACTU was compelled to endorse a program of industry level, and eventually enterprise bargaining. Together, employers and organised labour constructed the enterprise scale as a locus for controlling wage and working conditions in the beginning of the 1990s.

### **Spatial analysis in industrial relations: the politics of scale**

As a political economy of industrial relations, labour geography can admit many disparate topics of interest into a coherent theoretical framework, as illustrated by the preceding example. This example not only highlights how a spatial theory can provide conceptual coherence to industrial relations, it also illustrates the most significant tool geography provides for understanding the political praxis of all social agents, including workers, firms, unions, and the state: the concept of scale. Space and scale are closely related concepts in labour geography, but have different ontological roles. Scale is also an explicit feature of almost every study relevant to industrial relations research. But while the spatial theory of labour geography seems well developed, the concept of spatial scale in labour geography is still rather contentious. Most promising are relational concepts of scale that insist on the socially constructed nature of scale.

Scale is about representing socio-spatial activity. Therefore, the same social processes that affect the way space is constructed also affect the scales at which the struggle over construction takes place. Swyngedouw refers to idea that the scalar representation of activity is itself socially constructed as the 'politics of scale' (Swyngedouw 1997). When unions seek global labour rights agreements with a particular firm or a national government, they are trying to construct the international as a scale of regulatory determination. This is in contrast with neoliberal arguments that employment practices and labour rights should be determined at local levels, or

even be completely unregulated. Each side seeks to see particular activities scaled in particular ways to protect their particular interests.

Fagan notes that scale is highly important in labour geography because of the need to understand the meaning of the term “local” in local labour market studies, the ongoing rescaling of industrial regulation, and the need to understand how different mobilities affect the power relationship between capital and labour (Fagan 2003, p. 14). Sadler (2000, p. 138) agrees that scale is the key issue tying together all strands of labour geography research. For Herod, a central issue is understanding how workers shape geographic scales and use different scales in securing their spatial fixes (Herod 1998, p. 38; Herod 2001a, p. 46; Herod 2002b; Herod and Wright 2002). Industrial relations scholars who have engaged with labour geography also highlight the significance of scale. McGrath-Champ notes that understanding the strategies of industrial relations actors requires understanding the scales at which strategies take effect, or can be observed (McGrath-Champ 1999, p. 240). In her regional comparison of enterprise bargaining agreements, she deploys several different concepts of scale (McGrath-Champ 2002a, p. 133). Ellem and Shield’s contributions centre around the theorization of local modes of regulation, whether they be through locally scaled union organising (Ellem 2002) or through the analysis of the control functions of local peak union bodies (Ellem and Shields forthcoming).

The concept of scale, like the other elements of labour geography, originated in a political economic framework, but has since been challenged by poststructuralist innovations. Neil Smith was the first to conceive of scale as a social product. He claimed that capital, in seeking a spatial fix, needs distinctions between many different scales, and that capital engages in a process of homogenisation, and a process of differentiation at each scale (Smith 1984). His theory was original, but was flawed by its failure to account for the conflict between capital and labour in constructing scales of activity, and its inability to account for the impact of other social forces in shaping the contours of various scales (Herod 2001a, p. 40). However, one of Smith’s insights remains central to the theory of scale today. For Smith, like Harvey, the need for capital to fix itself in the landscape was the source of its spatial politics. This fixity is not an absolute feature, but rather something that exists along a continuum. Some capitals are more fixed than others, and all are generally less attached to any particular place than is labour. The relative mobilities of different actors form their source of spatial power. Intuitively, it is capital’s global



reach that appears to give it power over labour. In an era when controls over capital flows no longer exist between nations, capital owners can use this mobility as a tool to discipline workforces. As Jefferson Cowie shows, prior to the end of capital controls, RCA used national mobility to shed its unionised workforce in New Jersey by moving production to Bloomington, Indiana. But the Bloomington workforce organised as well. After capital controls between Mexico and the United States disappeared in the 1990s along with the opening of free trade through NAFTA, RCA used its enhanced mobility to once again dump its unionised workforce, this time by shifting production facilities to Mexico (Cowie 1999).

An ongoing debate in labour geography concerns whether the concept of scale should be attached to relative mobilities. Linking scaling to mobilities generally means associating labour with the local scale, and capital with the global scale. In terms of regulatory change, the association of capital with mobility and the global results in what is called the globalisation thesis. The hypermobility of capital renders national institutional differences between regions and countries obsolete. Swyngedouw called this the process of “glocalization”, wherein the construction of a global scale for capital renders national scales of regulation obsolete. What is left is a world in which capital plays off local regions, which must differentiate themselves enough to attract investment, but which cannot control the profitability of fixed capital (Swyngedouw 1997).

Jane Wills (2001) argues that these differences in mobility, in heightening the power of capital, have rendered traditional forms of contention between workers and employers obsolete. Unions, she argues, must come up with new ways to organise at national and global scales that can effectively thwart capital’s mobile power (Wills 2001). However, Fagan points out that while there is merit in such a view, it relies on an oversimplified notion of scalar politics, and accepts the globalisation thesis as fact (Fagan 2003). It assumes that capital sets the scalar agenda, to which workers must respond in order to secure their scalar fix. On the contrary, not only can workers create effective responses at national and local levels, the scale at which political struggle over which spatial fix is set in the landscape is itself an aspect of, and vehicle for, this struggle.

Others have also disputed the scalar determinism that is implied by the globalisation thesis (Fagan 2003). Herod demonstrates that local activism can successfully confront global capital in his case study of a General Motors strike.

Having shifted to just-in-time production in its North American operations, workers in a key plant used strike action to delay production throughout the continent (Herod 2001a). This has implications for the ability of organised labour to control the ways in which corporations can restructure their work practices. The cost-savings associated with just-in-time production are offset by the enhanced risk of crippling strike activity. Rutherford and Gertler argue that unions, therefore, have a significant impact on the restructuring activities that produce an international division of labour. Furthermore, they illustrate how differences in national union movements, and in national regulatory structures continue to affect the capacity for firms to make workplace changes (Rutherford and Gertler 2002). Likewise, Noel Castree admonishes labour geographers not to fetishise the global and local as the key scales of political struggle. His account of the Liverpool docks dispute shows that support at the national level is crucial in determining industrial outcomes (Castree 2000).

Fagan is one of a number of labour geographers working to develop a “relational” concept of scale. Rather than scales being attachments to the relative mobilities of spatial actors, or positivist spheres of analysis, Fagan argues for conceiving of scale as the

processes through which global, national and local mutually determine one another. This unsettles the simple global-local binary and means that scale-jumping does not mean going ‘up’ or ‘down’ – to a new point on the continuum – but a move to a qualitatively different space through continuous struggles over scale and rescaling (Fagan 2003, p. 14).

This leads Fagan to five insights, which are worth repeating here, as they quite succinctly summarize the relational and discursive concept of scale. First, scales are constructed simultaneously. This means that social actors each attempt to scale social processes in different ways at the same time. Their success affects their ability to achieve a spatial fix in the landscape. Second, actors construct different scales discursively in ways that can reflect their power. So, in Ellem’s research on union organising in the Pilbara, Rio Tinto justified their efforts to keep the union out by their need to remain competitive with another regional employer. But the union, too, constructed a powerful discourse of the local region as a union region. This construed Rio Tinto’s attempts to oust the union as an affront to local traditions and cultures (Ellem 2002, p. 85).

Third, the discursive and material construction of scale means that it is impossible to specify an objective set of scales that act as lenses for the analysis of social or spatial life. Instead, researchers must be aware of the multiple actual and discursive scales that are relevant to any particular social process, and the power interests that different actors have in constructing them. Fourth, it is important to recognize that though scales are “constructed contingently and discursively by stakeholders, they take concrete form institutionally, legislatively...and ideologically”. This perhaps, can relieve an apparent paradox associated with the idea of scale as a social construct. If scales are constructed through the praxis of social actors, then in a certain sense, it becomes very difficult to talk about those actors moving between scales, or using the resources of one scale or another (Herod and Wright 2002, p. 11). However, scales become set in the landscape, just as spatial fixes are. Therefore, it means something to speak, for example, of unions shifting their strategy for dealing with occupational health and safety from the state to the national scale. These scales have concrete meanings at a particular historical and spatial juncture. Even if the union changes their meaning through its activity, it is still reasonable to discuss unions as shifting different activities across scales. Fifth, and finally, Fagan warns that all scales are always relevant. They must be, after all, as scales are social constructs. They could not exist if they did not matter. Furthermore, his suggestion is a warning to not be sucked in by the discursive practices of competing actors in attempting to promote the significance of particular scales (Fagan 2003, pp. 15-16).

### **The study of international union activity**

The study of international cooperation between unions is one of the key areas of labour geography research (Fagan 2003, p. 9). However, there is yet little connection between research based in industrial relations and that based in labour geography. Labour geography research on international cooperation tends to focus on prescriptive accounts of a “new labour internationalism” (Waterman and Wills 2001b; Wills 2001; Ettliger 2002). Alternatively, case studies of international cooperation can be used to demonstrate that unions, and workers more generally, are capable of acting at the global scale (Herod 2001b; 2003). These are important contributions,

but do not develop the full potential of labour geography to assist in theorizing international activity.

While international activity has yet to attain the importance predicted by some scholars (Levinson 1972; Windmuller and Pursey 1993; Breitenfellner 1997), unions have certainly increased and altered the ways in which they interact across borders (Gordon and Turner 2000; Herod 2001a). Changes in the use of international activity as a strategic device have been uneven, both across and within unions, and across space. Any theory of transnational cooperation needs to account for this “structural, strategic, social and spatial diversity” (Ellem and Shields 2002, p. 1). Chapter 3 will show that what unions decide to do internationally depends on their strategic objectives, assessments of the efficiency of various scaled activities in meeting those objectives, and the relationships between international activities, and other activities in a union’s strategic repertoire. The new political economy of industrial relations helps by attaching union agency to a core of theoretical premises that make it easier to speculate on the structural and non-structural forces that produce the diversity in international praxis.

The new political economy of industrial relations gives a specific meaning to the subject of this thesis: the role of international activity as a revitalisation strategy of Australian unions. Union revitalisation strategies focus on helping unions rebuild a base of power that has either been lost, or that union leaders believe is under attack. The notion of power, which is often without meaning, has a very specific definition in Hyman’s industrial relations. To him, power was the ability to control the “physical and social environment; and as part of this process, the ability to influence which decisions are and are not taken by others” (Hyman 1975, p. 26). In the new political economy of industrial relations, this definition remains valid, but it is essential to reflect on the spatiality of the physical and social environments over which control is exercised. Therefore, a union seeking to rebuild power is seeking to rebuild an ability to control some spatially specific physical and social environment.

How unions implicitly or explicitly define this space is itself a subject for contemplation. The common assumption these days is that unions want control over social relationships within the nation state. An analysis of the ACTU in chapter four shows how the union movement has begun to pursue control over industrial relations in the South Pacific and Oceanic region. But in any case, whatever the space unions seek control over requires an ability to control the social relations of work within that

space. Controlling the social relations of work is the underlying objective of any revitalisation strategy, including international activity.

The social relations of work that confront a particular group of workers have spatial arrangements that may extend beyond the organisational boundaries of any union. Because commodity markets, labour markets, and production processes are more global than ever, it would seem that the processes by which workers endeavour to control the social relations of work must themselves include activity at the global scale. But this increase in the significance of the global scale is not homogenous across space, industries, or even individual workers. What may be a perfectly good way of engaging at the global scale for one group of workers may make little sense for another. Therefore, analysis of international cooperation should begin by trying to find the lines of difference in the social relations of work.

Focusing on how different workers must engage in different processes to control different social relations of work, the new political economy of industrial relations gives some theoretical account of the structural incentives and impediments for international activity. International activity is most likely to be linked with those aspects of the social relations of work that are most global. For miners in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, labour markets and production processes are exceptionally local, but the market for their finished product is global, as are the managerial prerogatives of the multinational that employs them. For call centre employees of a major Australian bank, labour markets and production processes are global, but the market for their service is national, as are the managerial prerogatives of the bank that employs them. Structural differences between the scaling of the social relations of work for the two groups of workers ought to be reflected in a different scaling of the processes by which they seek to control those social relations.

So, this structural side of labour geography might lead one to hypothesize that the global scale of contention for miners will be oriented toward manipulating output markets and developing international strategies for dealing with the management strategy of the single multinational employer. Conversely, the global scale for call centre workers might involve attempts to control the global labour market, either through coordinated bargaining, or through efforts to develop international labour standards.

However, such hypothesizing ignores two important aspects of labour geography. First, the relational concept of scale as well as a growing body of research

tells us that globally scaled phenomena can be controlled through activity at other scales (Castree 2000; Sadler 2000; Herod 2001a; Peck 2002). Second, the spatial fix workers seek is not foreordained and neither are the routes by which they seek them. There are many contingent factors that go into determining why workers mobilize to exert influence at different scales, and how they do so. These include the historical identity of union movements and the coincidence of local cultures of activism, the existence of institutions that can create a political opportunity for different kinds of cooperation, such as trade secretariats or ILO conventions, differences in government regulation of unions, and social or linguistic barriers between groups of workers. In a recent paper, Mark Anner illustrates how two Brazilian autoworkers unions covering workers in the same firm pursue different international strategies because of different ideological commitments (Anner 2003).

Labour geography, therefore does not produce an end theory, but points in the right direction. While it does not generate predictions about the exact form of international cooperation, it does tell researcher a couple of important things. First, workers are engaged in constructing engagement at all scales. Therefore, international cooperation always exists, and the real question for research is about the form it takes. Second, there are structural forces that may produce fault lines in the form of cooperation, especially between workers in different industries, and in different locations. But the form of international cooperation that ultimately appears is the product of a host of contingent factors. Therefore, research into the determinants of international cooperation as a strategic response of unions needs to account for both these structural differences in the social relations of work, but also document the contingent factors that alter the capacities for cooperation and the impediments to it for any group of workers.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter begins to answer Herod's call for a spatially sensitive theory of international union activity. The purpose of combining labour geography with Hyman's political economy of industrial relations is to put the spatial concepts of the geographers into a coherent and accessible framework. Labour geography can, and indeed must, form the basis for a methodological pluralism in industrial relations that allows it to be both theoretically rigorous and politically relevant. As a political

economy of industrial relations, labour geography tells us what questions to ask but not always how to answer them. In studying international cooperation, for example, labour geography can explain why there would be variation in the motives and practice of international cooperation in general, but does not explain the instances of this variation. It only suggests what kinds of things might be the contingent factors that determine the ultimate patterns of international cooperation. In this, it creates a space for scholars to apply more familiar forms of analysis. Labour geography can envelope non-spatial analysis within its broader theoretical framework. It is, therefore, inherently interdisciplinary.

It is industrial relations as an interdisciplinary and pragmatic field that has the potential to make this multiperspectival agenda work. In this study, theories from industrial relations - of union movement identity, peak union formation and agency, union strategic choice, and collective decision-making - must all be embedded within the framework of labour geography. The literature on international union activity that is the topic of the Chapter Three delves into some of these themes, and goes about articulating the conditions for what Ramsay called a “contingency theory” of international activity. This chapter has already foreshadowed the ways that labour geography impacts the understanding of that theory by changing the way we think about union objectives, incentives and constraints. Chapter Five pulls these insights together in a comparative analysis of the international activities of three Australian unions. The other feature of labour geography, the politics of scale, and the relational theory of scale, come into play in Chapter Four, which reviews the ACTU’s material and social construction of the international scale.

## Chapter Three

### Why Act Internationally? Global Unionism, Internationalism and Contingencies

International cooperation between trade unions is difficult. Treading beyond the idealistic veneer of union solidarity, unions within the same country have a hard time cooperating with each other. What hope can this give to attempts to cooperate across borders? With disputes between unions, between union branches, between political factions, and between peak bodies, the cohesion of any national union movement is an object for marvel and analysis in its own right. International relationships face the same obstacles as do national ones, and enjoy fewer of the incentives that come to exist in a nation. A national identity tends to harmonize the beliefs and desires of its citizens, produce institutional homogeneity, while the national state is able, if not always willing, to regulate business in the interest of organised labour. No surprise, then, that the international relationships between the unions and union movements of different countries appear awkward and halting.

Understanding the international activities of trade unions is difficult as well. Most academic attention focuses on whether social changes like heightened capital mobility and global trade compel unions to act internationally. Even these questions have not been totally resolved. As Chapter Two suggests, whether these elements of globalisation induce or require global action from organised labour are still questions that are open to debate. What unions do internationally is characterized by a diversity that seems to have little to do with global political and economic changes. Instead, union decisions about international activity are idiosyncratic, apparently more tied to particular strategic considerations than any kind of global pressure.

Studying the diversity of international union activities in Australia requires a theoretical framework that can articulate the role international activity plays in revitalisation strategy. As a beginning, Harvie Ramsay provides a set of conditions that should characterize what he calls a contingency theory. A contingency theory relates particular forms of international activity to the particular circumstances internal and external to the union that affect its strategic choices. On Ramsay's view, such a theory will explain different levels of international activity and the motives, incentives, and impediments for that activity. This chapter argues these conditions



form the basis for a more complete theory of international union activity than currently exists. It also reviews how scholars have defined the different categories implied by those conditions in their own empirical research.

Before that, a general historical review of the ideas and institutions of international union activity helps establish the context in which contingency theory appears. Historically, international union activity has been characterized by a conflict between socialist internationalism and a more moderate institutional international unionism. The material and intellectual legacy of these two positions lingers on today, affecting the possibilities for international practice and shaping the ways that scholars try to understand that practice. The first section of the chapter explores how the dialectical tension between these two ideas shapes the modern landscape of international unionism.

### **A short history of ideas about international union activity**

Academic interest in the international activity of unions arises sporadically. Flurries of research and theoretical development come from three periods. The first period extends from the founding of the First International Association of Workingmen in 1864 to roughly the beginning of World War I. During this period the functional separation of international trade union activity from the activity of the socialist internationals inspired commentators at both ends of the ideological spectrum. The second period of interest arose during the global economic contraction of the mid- to late-1970s. The massive firms that thrived under consensus capitalism during the post-war boom started to use their mobility to discipline national labour movements. For a time, industrial relations scholars and union leaders focused on whether the activities of the multinational firm would inspire a regime of multinational collective bargaining. Such a regime had not appeared by the early 1980s, and interest in international union activity dwindled again (Ramsay 1999, p. 194). Recently, a third period of interest accompanies the sectoral decline in union densities throughout the developed world, a trend that many feel to be the product of social and economic changes associated with globalisation.

These three periods can be labelled the “period of classical union internationalism” the “period of the multinational threat” and the “period of globalisation crisis”. It is apparent that interest in international union activity

corresponds to the perception of challenge for organised labour, and with attempts to shift the strategic and ideological orientation of unions. International activity offers a possible “way out” of the apparent crisis. In the period of union internationalism, organised labour in Europe was pressed by rapid trade liberalization and the international mobility of labour. Many nation-states were still in their formative period, with working class people not even always granted citizenship. The capacity or willingness of the state to intervene on behalf of working people was far from clear. One way to match the power of industrial capitalists and hostile states was through international cooperation, based on class-solidarity. In the period of the multinational threat nation states were fully formed and had developed mature systems for regulating industrial relations. Unions and industrial relations scholars saw the rise of multinational corporations as a threat to these systems. To meet the threat, some felt unions could organise internationally and build pressure for corporations to bargain in a global system of collective bargaining. In the current period of the globalisation crisis, the challenge to unions from multinational corporations is only one element of a larger structural shift in the political, economic and social framework. The challenge of globalisation for unions seems especially clear, with union power and influence in decline around the world. The general sense is that as long as unions are stuck in thinking about and acting at the national scale, then they cannot control the increasingly global aspects of the political economic system, which include labour markets, the division of labour, and trade regulation.

Perhaps the prospect of an international union movement so easily stirs the imagination because the union movement was associated with international activity and internationalist ideology from its inception. This excitement notwithstanding, the theoretical treatment of international union activity has always been weak, even when interest has been most strong. In the period of classical internationalism, theory was limited to some isolated writings by Marx and Engels, which Lenin later developed into a more comprehensive internationalist ideology. Later scholarship was in large part limited to debates over the proper interpretation of these texts. The period of the multinational threat produced some good, but incomplete scholarship. Authors offered suggestions for ways to think about transnational industrial relations and about what might affect international cooperation, but did not follow up enough to produce a robust and rigorous theory. Since interest dwindled in the early 1980s,

“little effort has been made to establish a theoretical basis for the analysis of cross-border unionism” (Ramsay 1999, p. 194).

The history of international activity is closely linked to its own history of thought. Each period spawned particular real world institutions and practices as well as conceptual frameworks to analyse and legitimate them. Challenges to the old institutions are accompanied by challenges to the old theories. But the process never results in the complete destruction of either. Institutions and ideas persist, shaping and constraining the events and ideas that follow. The development of theory proposed in this thesis therefore requires an exposition of this dialectical process, in order to fully grasp the intellectual context within which it is to fit. Although the intellectual dialectic cannot be fully understood without the material dialectic, this section will focus mainly on the intellectual. Because the thesis is ultimately focused on Australia, there is actually some disconnect between intellectual and material development. This is because theory regarding international union activity has tended to revolve around developments in Europe. However, while it is connected socially, historically and economically to Europe, the material history of Australian internationalism has developed quite differently and independently.<sup>6</sup>

### **The period of union internationalism**

Debates about organising labour internationally are at least as old as unions themselves (Windmuller 1980). Apart from international organisations of socialists, the international activity of unions in their own right did not really take off until the turn of the twentieth century. Economic growth at the turn of the century propelled the growth of trade unions, allowing them to function autonomously from the socialist political parties that in many cases gave birth to them (Windmuller 1980, p. 21). As union dependence on the parties collapsed, so were commitments to the economic emancipation of the working class replaced by pragmatic goals of securing better

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<sup>6</sup> The position here is that ideas about international union activity developed on the continent were then diffused to Australia. Because the thesis focuses on intellectual development, this chapter is concerned with material development in Europe primarily as it helps understand where ideas came from. The material history of international activity in Australia forms the context for a later chapter. It would perhaps be more responsible intellectually to analyse how the adoption in Australia of ideas about international activity depended on its own material circumstances. Such a task is, sadly, outside the scope of this thesis. Chapter Four attempts something similar later in discussing the development and spread across borders of new tactics and strategies for unions.

wages and working conditions. The tension between socialist and economic practices of trade unionism was reflected in the development of theories of trade unionism. Differences between the socialists and pragmatic unionists over the issue of international activity were reflected in the establishment of both socialist and non-socialist organs of international unionism. However, theoretical interest in international activity lay primarily with the socialists, whose theory of internationalism reinforced the legitimacy of their weakening grip over the direction of the union movement.<sup>7</sup>

Institutionally, union and socialist interests were initially aligned in the formation of the First and Second International Association of Working Men. The Second International, founded in 1889, was by far the more powerful and active organisation. While it was able to subordinate national parties through its ideological influence, its control over increasingly independent unions was less assured. The autonomy of the unions was reflected in the formation of separate international bodies for socialists and for unions. Beginning in the 1890s, unions formed international alliances along industry lines, known as the International Trade Secretariats (ITS). Many of the secretariats were formed during meetings of the second International, and adopted socialist goals. But the very idea of trade union organisation based on industry structure was not consonant with the socialist emphasis on the organisation of class interests.

As the secretariats grew in power, the socialist theory of internationalism presented an ideological tool that could be used to discipline them. In Marx's theory, national identification could only fracture solidarity around true proletarian interest in economic emancipation from wage slavery under capitalism. Communism would be an international movement that would eradicate the "existing state of affairs" and supplant the system of capitalist exploitation with a harmonious global system. Socialist internationalism is therefore a counter-nationalism, with the objective of organising working people along lines of class in defiance of national boundaries (Waterman 1998, pp. 50-2). According to theory, national boundaries enabled capital to establish a "labour aristocracy" within each advanced country. These relatively

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<sup>7</sup> It is possible to blow these tensions out of proportion. After all, many unions retained the vocabulary of socialism and worked closely with socialist parties. The early history of trade unionism and socialism are one. But it is important to cast in relief the early stages of fissure in the unity of these ultimately different organizations.

privileged workers would identify their interests with the success of their bosses and their nations, since these helped them maintain their position of relative privilege.

In this light, the economic unionism of the national trade union centres could be condemned as “class collaboration” spurred by a “false consciousness”. The trade secretariats and international peak bodies were “national internationals” that assisted national unions in their dealings with employers were also complicit in this collaboration (Waterman 1998, p. 17). As the national union bodies and the ‘national internationals’ grew in influence, the socialists grew more vigorous in insisting on adherence to internationalist principles. In spite of this, they were often unable to discipline the secretariats. The ideological schism became a major rift as pragmatic and socialist unions separated into different bodies during the interwar years.

### *Interwar transition*

After the First World War these distinctions became more and more meaningful and divisive. The socialists were shocked at the speed with which workers who had rallied under the banner of internationalism suddenly lined up to kill each other in the trenches. Blame was partially placed on the second International, the revolutionary goals of which were thought to be diluted by the dominance of business-oriented unions. A third International established by Lenin employed a more authoritarian approach, with national movements subordinate to an international centre: the U.S.S.R. This Communist International (Comintern) also established a labour union branch, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). The Red International was heavily active throughout the interwar period, claiming membership in thirty-eight countries. As minority movements within national labour movements, workers and organisations affiliated with the Red International were highly critical of “class collaboration” and “false consciousness” by their fellow workers and unions (Munck 2002, p. 138-40).

In the years after World War II, advanced national systems of industrial relations were firmly in place. In the capitalist West, unions and businesses bargained in a consensual framework mediated by the state. Many unions were concerned with the economic success of domestic capital and the political success of their nations. Such unions supported the liberalization of trade and were instrumental in supporting anti-communist foreign policies (Herod 2001a, p. 140; Robinson 2002, p.116).

Communist and non-Communist unions briefly came together in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1945, but cold war tensions proved too great. Anti-communist unions organised the ICFTU with the explicit aim of alienating and ousting communist influence. The WFTU became a pro-Communist and pro-Soviet instrument almost by default (Munck 2002).

### **The period of multinational collective bargaining**

Soon after World War II, there was a shift in the international activity of unions as multinational corporations became an influential fact of economic life. Being able to shift production across borders, cross-subsidize strike costs, and threaten capital flight could enable multinational corporations to force concessions from unions and from national governments, or such was the fear of unions in the 1970s. National systems of industrial relations were predicated on the ability of the state to discipline both unions and firms. Multinational firms began to shift the balance of power within those national relationships (further) in their own favour.

Unions struggled to use their influence with still-formidable state power to restrain the multinationals. But the multinationals posed a threat not just to unions, but also to national industrial relations systems. This led some to consider ways that unions could seek solutions outside of these systems, that is, through international activity. After all, the threat was international, and unions had a history of international activity as well as an existing institutional framework to draw upon. Unions began to set up worldwide councils within the International Trade Secretariats to link unions in different countries that were dealing with the same multinational. The initial objective of the councils was to open dialogue between unions to share information about their dealings with companies. However, many believed in the possibility that these councils could be one part in a system of multinational collective bargaining, forcing multinational firms to negotiate with employees in several countries at once. At the same time, the ICFTU became active in lobbying national governments and the ILO to help establish core labour standards throughout the world.

Scholars followed these developments by trying to establish a theory of the relationship between the multinational threat and international union responses. To some, the responses of the labour movement heralded an evolution of industrial

relations regulation from the national to the international scale. Such “evolutionary optimism” is most clearly captured in Charles Levinson’s 1971 *International Trade Unionism* (Ramsay 1999, p. 195). Levinson’s work was a polemic, arguing that unions must take the multinational threat seriously by working to forge a multinational framework for collective bargaining. His belief that this was both desirable and possible was based on two premises. First, Levinson believed in a pluralist model of industrial relations. Second, he believed in Galbraith’s concept of countervailing power. These beliefs led him to conclude that the power imbalance created in national industrial relations systems by multinational firms would naturally call forth a countervailing force; the global trade union. This scalar shift in capital-labour relations could then produce a new version of U.S. style industrial relations but carried out at the global scale.

Levinson’s vision was seen as grandiose by some (Ramsay 1999), but is representative of the focus at the time on the viability of a system of multinational collective bargaining. Less polemical and more scholarly work appeared at the time to develop the same themes. While there were intentions to develop a descriptive and explanatory theory for union international activity (Günter 1972, pp. 444-5), the majority of contributions in this short-lived scholarly fad centred on the viability of multinational collective bargaining. Several important insights for later research came out of this work, though, as they dealt in a detailed way with the obstacles, incentives and alternatives to multinational union relationships. A lot of the research was predicated on labour market economics and a Dunlopian systems theory of industrial relations. Other contributions took a more radical perspective, looking at the prospects for multinational collective bargaining in the context of Marxist political economy. Interestingly, both camps were ultimately sceptical, but for somewhat different reasons. The systems theorists simply believed that the obstacles to international bargaining would outweigh the incentives for it, with national industrial relations systems providing sufficient relief. The radical industrial relations scholars took a position in keeping with the old internationalist tradition. On their view, economic interest could not form a basis for solidarity. Instead solidarity could only be forged through a political focus on systemic change.

### **The current period of globalisation crisis**

Academic scepticism about the prospects for multinational collective bargaining has been largely confirmed by practice, with multinational collective bargaining failing to materialize up to the present day. As a result, scholarly interest in what appeared to be a non-issue dropped after the 1970s. By the 1990s, the problems the unions expected to result from the rise of multinational firms had appeared. Union membership and density levels spiralled downward in response structural economic change and growing employer hostility. Simultaneously, the willingness of national governments to act as neutral arbiters of industrial disputes appeared to flag. By the 1990s, neoliberal political movements in most of the Anglophone countries had implemented labour market reforms intended partially to exclude unions.

Together, these political, social and economic changes can be referred to by the conveniently vague term “globalisation”. Declines in various measures of union influence and power are associated with various aspects of the globalisation process. The question of the precise causal relationships between globalisation and changes in industrial relations is too large to take up here. While the debate continues, there is convincing evidence that the changes associated with globalisation are at least partly responsible for waning union influence (Breitenfellner 1997; Peetz 1998). The activities of multinational firms and union responses are but one part of the globalisation process. Therefore, while it may seem that what are here identified as the period of multinational collective bargaining and the period of globalisation crisis are too close temporally to be distinguished, qualitative changes in both the institutions and theory of international union activity make give the two periods distinct historical properties.

### *Institutions*

The recent decision by the ITSs and the ICFTU to group together as ‘Global Union Federations’ (GUFs) indicates a changing sense of purpose and identity within international institutions. Being “global” rather than “international” indicates a subtle shift in focus, away from mediating relationships between national union bodies and toward construction of encompassing, global priorities. Being a federation of “unions” rather than of “trades” indicates a shift away toward thinking as a global organisation of workers, rather than in terms of increasingly outmoded sectoral



structures. However, the retention of the term Federation is intriguing. Historically, the International Trade Federations were the International Trade Secretariats, and the International Federation of Trade Unions was the International Secretariat of Trade Unions. The term Secretariat was abandoned in favour of the term federation, partially to appease U.S. unions, because a secretariat implied a more centralized and authoritarian structure. From a historical perspective, continuing to identify as a federation implies a peak body with little control over its affiliates, a feature that has important implications for the kinds of international activity it can foster.

The ICFTU has also adjusted its priorities during the period of globalisation. The end of Cold War politics has seen its Cold War rival, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), slowly losing its affiliates to the ICFTU (Herod, p. 241). Ideological tensions between unions appear to have given way to a growing shared concern with the impacts of globalisation. Primarily, the ICFTU is concerned with persuading world leaders of the value of workers rights and strong unions. It also represents affiliates in world bodies, most recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Finally, the ICFTU has been fairly active in developing broad international campaigns around human, women's, children's and trade union rights.

Other institutions have emerged during the period of globalisation crisis, reflecting different perspectives on how industrial relations can and will change. In an effort to extend the notion of social partnership between unions and management, the European Union requires large multinational firms to establish Works Councils. The European Works Councils are supposed to create a forum within which employees from different parts of the firms operation, even in different countries, can consult with each other and voice concerns to management. The role of unions in the Councils is neither assured, and is a subject of ongoing debate (Wills 2001). Nevertheless, the Councils indicate on ongoing effort to replicate national tripartite industrial relations systems at the European scale.

The period of globalisation crisis has also seen the emergence of new forms of international union activity. Many unions have tried to work with international institutions in developing tools to regulate the terms of trade liberalization as well as the international activities of multinational firms. Much of the effort to regulate trade has focused on tying trade liberalization to labour rights through what is sometimes called a "social clause". The labour side agreement to the NAFTA is a frequently cited example of the use of a social clause. Unions, through the GUFs, have also

pursued “framework agreements” with various multinational firms. These are non-binding agreements about how the firm conducts its international operations. The frameworks are essentially intended to create a consultancy dialogue between the firm and the GUF.

The Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR) reflects a contrasting vision of the union response to globalisation (Lambert and Webster 2001). Established in 1999, SIGTUR was formed to represent democratic unions in the global south<sup>8</sup> with the explicit aim of resisting “neoliberal globalisation” (Lambert and Webster 2001, p. 346). To achieve this, SIGTUR is committed to “global social movement unionism ... a program of global action ... and the fullest exploitation of cyberspace communications systems”. Global social movement unionism is conceived as an alternative to exiting forms of international activity, that are rejected as “global business unionism” (2001, p. 352).

Unions also pursue many different types of international campaigns. International campaigns are intended to mobilize and exert the collective economic and political power of cooperating unions. This contrasts with the use of legalistic tools like the social clause and framework agreements that rely on the disciplinary power of national and international regulatory bodies. Solidarity campaigns, corporate campaigns, organising drives, training exercises, and political campaigns are just some of the tools that unions have implemented at the international scales over the last decade. These campaigns each have unique characteristics and qualities that set them apart from each other, but they all draw on a different idea about international union activity than the more legalistic tools pursued through the global peak bodies.

### **Theorising international activity during the period of globalisation crisis**

The tension between social partnership and social movement visions of international union activity is reflected in a tension between two dominant theories. For Andreas Breitenfellner, the appearance of an emergent legalistic framework at the international level, combined with growing linkages among unions foretells the emergence of transnational industrial relations; what he calls “Global Unionism”. By

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<sup>8</sup> “The ‘Southern’ in the organisations title is defined *politically*, not *geographically*: that is, SIGTUR is one initiative to bring together some of the most exploited working classes all over the world, where union rights are negated or constrained, and political situations restricted” (Lambert and Webster 2001, p. 342).

contrast, focusing on grassroots mobilization, horizontal relationships between unions, and cooperation between unions and other social movements at the end of the 1990s, Peter Waterman and others feel the time is ripe for a new labour internationalism. Both theories prescribe a particular vision of international unionism and interpret ongoing activity with reference to that vision. Each is also an articulation and critical extension of the earlier theoretical traditions. Global unionism is quite close to the pragmatic systems theory that was concerned with multinational collective bargaining, while New Labour Internationalism is a critical continuation of the old socialist internationalism.

Another kind of theory has emerged alongside these two positions. The period of globalisation crisis has generally caused concern among both unionists and sympathetic researchers about the causes of, and possible solutions to, the crisis for organised labour. One result has been to look at how union strategies may or may not be successful in achieving their short- and medium-term goals. In turn, this has led to a closer focus on the determinants of the success or failure of particular strategies in particular situations. Harvie Ramsay coined the term “contingency theory” to refer to research on international activity that matches particular kinds of action to particular situations (Ramsay 1997). The idea is that the choice of strategy is contingent on the circumstances of the union, including its ideology and goals. Contingency theories come from research that is more directly concerned with how day to day practices of internationalism can help unions restore their lost power. Unlike the period of multinational threat, when the challenge to unions was mostly conceptual, the challenge to unions today is all too clear. Researchers are concerned with how international activity can address the very specific problems unions now face: dwindling membership, density and coverage, as well as hostile employers and governments.

It is worthwhile to delve briefly into the two normative positions. Global unionism and new labour internationalism frame the field of theory, within which contingency theories fall. They also address a different kind of problem than that dealt with by contingency theory. Certainly, there are not clear distinctions between the three bodies of theory that are delineated here. Often, some notion of new labour internationalism or global unionism underlies what is ostensibly a contingency analysis..

## *Global unionism*

Like many others, Breitenfellner pins his optimism about the prospects for global unionism on the historical experience of classical union internationalism. However, he argues not for a renewal of socialist internationalism, but for the establishment of a global tripartite system of industrial relations. The establishment of works councils in Europe, of social clauses in regional trade agreements, of ILO conventions on trade union rights, and of codes of conduct for multinational corporations suggests a nascent foundation for industrial regulation. He argues that the ILO, as a tripartite organisation “could take its place beside the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the concert of world economic organisations” (Breitenfellner 1997, p. 552). Alongside this, Breitenfellner interprets the international campaign activities of unions and the GUFs as evidence that unions could act globally in “restoring the socio-economic balance of power” (Breitenfellner 1997, p. 552).

Though this sounds similar to the theories of transnational industrial relations that emerged in the 1970s, Breitenfellner’s global unionism is different. He argues that global unions, alongside state and employer bodies would have the capacity to control global financial markets. From this perspective, global unionism is more of a contingency theory, albeit still a normative one. The global is the appropriate scale at which unions should deal with wanton financial markets. Breitenfellner reiterates this point when he suggests that national activities would not lose significance under global unionism. The implication is that different scales of activity, and different institutional structures at those scales, are appropriate to dealing with particular problems for organised labour.

Unfortunately, while he puts this perspective forward early in the paper, he does not follow it up theoretically. Breitenfellner believes that the purpose of the union is to defend its members’ conditions and to act as a conduit voicing workers’ concerns to management. Because they must stake out well-defined areas of protection, he argues that unions are tied to national boundaries. That is, unions must delineate whose interests they protect, a process that must include geographic boundaries. Globalisation weakens the bargaining power of unions by extending the boundaries of labour markets beyond the boundaries of any individual nation-state. This allows firms to operate outside unions’ area of protection. At the same time, the

ability of the state to act as a neutral arbiter is weakened by its reliance on retaining potentially mobile capital. To keep wages and conditions out of competition, unions must figure out ways to cover the extent of product and labour markets. By matching the scale of their activity to the scale at which capital can employ labour, unions can maintain their protection of wages and conditions without resorting to national protectionism.

Breitenfellner's argument is primarily an anticipation of a transnational system of industrial relations. Because he only considers how economic changes might change the kinds of priorities for which unions use international activity, the theory of global unionism does not sufficiently explain how unions choose particular kinds of international activity at particular times. Breitenfellner describes globalisation as a sort of homogenous force that compels a homogenous response from unions. However, not only do unions practice different kinds of cooperation all the time, it is also far from clear that the objective of those international activities is to control runaway financial markets. On the positive side, Breitenfellner's theory does give some insight about how certain features of globalisation compel unions toward a particular kind of international activity, all else the same. But overall, his theory is too restricted in interpreting all international activity as part of a global unionism.

### *New labour internationalism*

The new labour internationalism is both a continuation and a criticism of the old internationalism. Like the old internationalism, the new labour internationalism is concerned with the creation of a movement to "transform the present order of things" (Waterman and Wills 2001b, p. 307). Furthermore, the new labour internationalism is as concerned with articulating between "nationalist internationalism" and "true internationalism", taking up the old internationalist attacks on the major organs of international unionism (Waterman 1998; Wills 1998; 2001). Unlike the old internationalism, new labour internationalism is supposed to overcome the privileging of labour, particularly organised labour, as the principal emancipatory subject. Grassroots mobilizations, alliances between unions and social justice and environmental movements all herald a new more general internationalism being forged along many different lines of identity, including class, but also gender, nationality and race.

Waterman (1998) makes three explicit assumptions that he says are the basis of new labour internationalism. He assumes that we are in a period of world economic crisis that has weakened the labour movement. More controversially, he also assumes that the ways in which national governments and international organisations respond to the economic crisis are doomed to fail. Lastly, Waterman assumes that traditional unions, labour, and socialist organisations are inadequate to the task of bringing about global social change. In other words, in the new labour internationalism, most models of union behaviour are, by assumption, useless to cope with an assumed crisis. Rejecting all traditional forms of union activity, Waterman is left to derive his propositions about new labour internationalism from what he feels to be the successful international activity of alternative social movements. The only hope for organised labour lies in its ability to learn from and develop the methods of the environmental movement, anti-globalisation activists, third world liberation struggles, and indigenous rights movements.

The justification of new labour internationalism also rests on the premise that economic and social life have radically changed, and that people have some agency in determining how these changes are played out. According to Waterman, where capitalism was once industrial and national, it is now social and global. This transformation has several ramifications. The shift from industrial to social capitalism means that the manipulation of social structures is as important as the manipulation of economic structures. In industrial capitalism, economic structures shaped social life and social identity. Therefore, capital and labour were the most important and influential social agents. Now, Waterman argues, “other determinations are equally important” (1998, p. 76), including national, racial and gender identities.

In Peter Waterman’s theoretical articulation of new labour internationalism, the reasons for rejecting certain kinds of international union activity become clearer. Six traits define the new labour internationalism: 1) activity between workers at the grass-roots level; 2) expressing daily concerns; 3) based on workers’ resources and efforts; 4) in opposition to capitalism, statism, patriarchy, racism, imperialism, militarism; 5) creating a global community of interest and activity; 6) complementary to those of other mass popular and democratic interests (Waterman 1998, p. 80). It is clear that much international activity does not match the vision implied by these traits. The vision itself suggests much about the theory and the literature; in particular, it belies a substantial normative and ideological perspective.

As an ideological theory, new labour internationalism articulates which forms of union activity will lead to fundamental social transformation and which will not. Munck, for example, criticizes Breitenfellner for advocating a “tried and failed” tripartite vision of global unionism (Munck 2002, p. 158). In their analysis of SIGTUR, Rob Lambert and Eddie Webster posit the new labour internationalism, identified as “global social movement unionism”, as a conceptual alternative to multinational collective bargaining (Lambert and Webster 2001, p. 357). Peter Waterman contends that the ICFTU and GUFs are, through their ties to the ILO and the WTO, too fixated on partnership arrangements internationalism as the diplomatic relationships between national unions, national governments, and multinational firms (Waterman 1998; Waterman and Wills 2001a). Jane Wills offers a more subtle analysis of the European Works Councils from the perspective of new labour internationalism. Her view is that the EWCs could possibly be, but are not currently, vehicles for labour internationalism (Wills 2001). Clearly, new labour internationalism is a more normative than positive way of looking at international union activity.

An ideological dissonance permeates some of the new labour internationalism. While lamenting the failure of traditional Marxist and socialist visions to mobilize and inspire, the new labour internationalism pursues the same clear line between progressive and regressive labour politics. The only real difference is that now movements based on identity politics have been allowed some agency in the theory and practice of radical politics. Via the assault of post-structuralism on Marxist theory, multiple agencies of power achieve recognition in the theory of new labour internationalism. Rejection of the Marxist narrative means constructing a theory and politics with other agencies than labour, and other problems than capitalism. Rejection of the neoliberal narrative means constructing a theory in which the politics of globalisation can be contested and altered by these various emancipatory agents. However, the rejection of these discursive frameworks would seemingly involve the displacement of certainties about the desired direction of social transformation, or the appropriate means to achieve those changes. Somehow, the new labour internationalism reproduces the distinctions between socialist and economic visions of union purpose, while trying to avoid the theories that produced them. It is an interesting project, but as yet, an unconvincing one.

While the logic justifying the new labour internationalism is flawed, Waterman does offer some potentially useful analytical devices for thinking about international activity. First, he distinguishes different forms of international activity according to their scale, social field, and target. Social fields include the social, economic and political field, which are targeted respectively to affect citizens, capital, and the state. His observation that these forms of activity can be carried out at any number of geographic scales anticipates the analysis provided in the upcoming chapter. Waterman also distinguishes between different organisational types at the international scale. His taxonomy is quite value-laden, identifying multinational firms as “transnational” types, while pluralist and democratic organisations are “internationalist”. In between are interstate and inter-non-governmental organisations. Lastly, he notes that international activity can be distinguished by its axis and flow. The axis can be from global North to global South, for example, while the flow can be unidirectional from North to South, from South to North, or can be bi-directional. Even though the intent of these analytical tools is to identify which forms, organisational types, axis, and flow are proper to new labour internationalism, they are intriguing in their own right, because they provide a rudimentary framework within which to categorize international activity.

### *Discussion*

The theory of global unions and the theory of new labour internationalism show the ways in which intellectual traditions have been both maintained and transformed in the period of globalisation crisis. They have managed to move beyond some of the problems inherent in the theoretical traditions. But they remain wedded to a deterministic and prescriptive way of thinking about international union activity, and to the scale-matching thesis. International activity, in both theories, is necessitated by the globalisation of capital. The globalisation of capital forces unions to either go global or die. Furthermore, they must go global in specific ways. Both accounts largely ignore the question of why unions choose the particular forms of international activity that they can actually be observed to participate in.

Aside from their differences, the theories of global unionism and new labour internationalism have an important similarity. Both imagine that unions face a challenge from a monolithic force. Breitenfellner calls this force globalisation, and



details its component parts and their effects. Waterman calls it capitalist globalisation, and argues that other forms of globalisation are possible. In neither case are the effects of this force treated as being differentiated according to union, to firm, to economic sector, or by geographic space (except, perhaps, between North and South). Rather, both theories rely on globalisation being a monolithic force producing an alliance of interests between people in different countries. In this sense, these theories are also similar to the older theories dealing with multinational collective bargaining and the classical theory of labour internationalism. In all cases, a monolithic problem – globalisation, capitalist globalisation, multinational corporations, capitalism – appears to require a homogenous global response. As should be clear from the discussions at the beginning of this chapter, the strategies of organised labour, international or otherwise, are far from homogenous. Equally clearly, the sources of challenge are not monolithic. What presents challenges for one group of workers presents opportunities for others. These observations not only serve as a critical reflection on the theories considered thus far, but foretell the possibility of another kind of theory that links diverse problems for unions with the heterogenous strategies they can be observed to employ.

### **Developing a contingency theory**

A contingency theory articulates how unions choose particular forms of international activity in response to particular situations. This kind of theory requires an articulation of how factors internal and external to the union shape its strategic decisions. Global unionism and new labour internationalism regard globalisation as an external pressure that compels unions toward international activity. Another way to look at this is to say that in these theories, the forces associated with globalisation alter the capacity for unions to achieve their goals through international activities. Both Breitenfellner and Waterman take globalisation to have changed the efficacy of certain (national) union actions relative to other (international) actions in achieving union goals.

Ramsay first used the term ‘contingency theory’ to describe analyses that linked different types of multinational firms to different tactics a union might use to deal with them (1999, p. 208). The key insight of these theories was the realization that choice of strategy should depend on the nature of the multinational firm. In this

limited context, contingency theory focused on different ways to characterize multinational firms, and on different ways to exploit their structural features. For example, workers dealing with a firm producing a single output through a production process extending across multiple borders would likely use a different international strategy than workers dealing with a firm producing the same output in several different countries.

In the present context, the term contingency theory is defined more broadly as analysis in which international union activity is viewed as being contingent on the nature of the problems facing the union and of the problem-solving environment. Ramsay's original meaning of contingency is just one particular application of contingency theory. Following from this broader definition, any contingency theory must be very concerned with describing the nature of union strategy, with describing the problems that the union faces, and with describing its problem-solving environment.

Like this thesis, Ramsay sought a more general theory of international union activity (1999, p. 212). To this end, he identified several conditions that should characterize a contingency theory. First, a contingency theory should distinguish between the different levels at which international activity might occur. These include the level of the enterprise, the sector, or the "world". His point was that what occurs at the level of the ICFTU might differ qualitatively from what occurs at the level of the GUFs. To this focus on the international peak bodies, it is meaningful to note that what goes on in peak bodies might be different from what occurs in bilateral relationships between independent unions, and between groups of individual workers. Each of these 'levels' of activity needs to be understood distinctly in theory, because activity occurs at these levels for particular, differentiable reasons.

Second, Ramsay argued that the contingency theory should account for variation in the objectives of international activity (1999, p. 213). This differs from the assumption that the end-goal of international activity is multinational collective bargaining, transnational industrial relations, or new labour internationalism (and the overthrow of capitalism). Ramsay argued that the objectives of international activity would vary, even between the different levels of international activity. Clearly, this condition presents a particular challenge for theory, since the objectives of unions are very difficult to discern either theoretically or empirically.

Finally, theory needs to be able to account for differences in the incentives for, and impediments to international activity (Ramsay 1999, pp. 213-5). These, too, may differ in different circumstances. For contingency theory, this means that structural factors and economic considerations may play an important role. Ideology may compel activity in one direction or another, but theory needs also to account for the fact of resource limitations. Unions, like all other organisations (and organisms) must decide how to allocate scarce resources to best achieve their objectives. Or in a more familiar academic language: the incentives for cooperation are its perceived benefits, while the impediments are its perceived costs.

In addition to the three conditions Ramsay came up with, theory should also account for the existence of strategic alternatives to international cooperation. Ulman (1975) concludes that the possibility of bargaining over job losses at the national level would be more appealing to unions than multinational collective bargaining. This, in spite of the fact that in some cases multinational collective bargaining might be worthwhile in a strict cost-benefit calculation (Ulman 1975). Even though the premises on which Ulman based his analysis have changed over the last three decades, the point still holds. Practices of international cooperation cannot be considered strictly on their own merits, as if in a strategic vacuum. As unions decide how to deploy scarce resources to achieve their goals, they will have many options. The relative benefits of international activity in securing those goals needs to be examined alongside the relative benefits of activity at other scales.

| <b>Harvie Ramsay Conditions<sup>*</sup></b> |                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I.                                          | Distinguish different levels at which international activity happens                     |
| II.                                         | Account for variation in the objectives of international activity                        |
| III.                                        | Explain incentives for and impediments to international activity                         |
| IV.                                         | Account for relationships between international and other union activities <sup>**</sup> |

<sup>\*</sup>The enumeration of the conditions differs slightly in Ramsay's original discussion.

<sup>\*\*</sup>This condition was not included in Ramsay's original list. See the discussion below.

In this thesis, these are assumed to be necessary conditions for a contingency theory of union activity. Therefore, they constitute a sort of litmus test for the evaluation of theory. A theory is adequate only if it meets all four of these conditions. As an example, Breitenfellner's theory is inadequate but makes useful contributions to

thinking about alternatives to international activity. As discussed above, globalisation is a monolithic, geographically undifferentiated force in his analysis, leading to a homogenous response for unions. His theory is inadequate because it does not discuss the different levels at which international activity can occur. Nor does it account for variation in the objectives of cooperation. He names at least four different objectives: controlling financial markets, establishing reliable institutions, raising wages and conditions, and providing workers a collective voice (Breitenfellner 1997, pp. 532, 542). This range of objectives does not imply that different unions may have different motives, only that there are numerous objectives to be pursued through cooperation.

Incentives for cooperation flow from the connection between globalisation and the decline of union influence. Admirably, Breitenfellner goes to great pains to illustrate the connections between various aspects of globalisation, labour markets, and union power (measured as union density). Rather than assume these connections, he reviews them critically. The incentives to cooperation, then, are thought to flow from the connection between union decline and globalisation, particularly the internationalisation of financial markets. In addition, the presence of international institutions and access to the Internet facilitate the capacity for unions to cooperate internationally. However, these incentives are compromised by a set of obstacles, including differences between countries in the legal basis for industrial action, language barriers, and, most of all, the short-term gains from locational competition.

Breitenfellner also recognizes four strategic options available to unions to cope with globalisation. Unions can raise wages and labour standards, restrict capital mobility, facilitate labour market adjustment to competition in high-wage industries, or they can focus on policy coordination between nations and develop institutions to promote stability (1997, p. 543). He does not discuss the possibility that unions might choose differently among these strategic alternatives, but there are two aspects of his discussion that are quite intriguing. First, Breitenfellner offers these as strategic options that could be complementary to one another. Where Ulman focused on the idea of strategies as substitutes, Breitenfellner reminds the reader that they may be complements. He does not pursue the distinction, but it clearly suggests that the fourth Harvie Ramsay condition needs to be broadened. Not only should theory acknowledge strategic alternatives to international activity, it should also deal with the relationships between strategies more broadly. Case studies on the international

activities of unions clearly link success to the ability to weave multiple tactics together (Armbruster 1998; Castree 2000; Armbruster-Sandoval 2003).

### **Using the literature to develop a contingency theory approach**

To think about union strategy in this contingent way is to think about how unions deploy resources to maximal effect. Because unions have limited resources, they must at least try to get the most out of them. Whatever the union goals are, it will choose the mix of strategies that gets is closest to achieving those goals. This resource-economizing decision will involve international activities if the benefits of international activity in terms of the union's goals exceed whatever costs are associated, and if there is no strategy that does a better job.

The Ramsay conditions provide not just necessary conditions for a theory, but the fundamental building blocks for one. They require that one distinguish the different kinds of international activity, that is, the form of the variable that is to be explained. The choice of a particular form of international activity depends on how it stacks up relative to others in helping the union achieve its goals. Such an analysis would require, as the Ramsay conditions stipulate, the specification of the objectives of the international activity. Only then is it possible to consider whether a particular kind of activity does a good job of bringing the union closer to its goal relative to other available strategies.

While these insights are intriguing, they only illustrate the potential value of the contingency conditions. In order for the theory to be valuable, it must provide some explanatory power in research. This requires that the Ramsay conditions can be tied to an overarching political economic theory within which they all fit together. Second, it requires that the variables implied by the conditions can be given concrete meaning in research. Most research on the international activities of unions provides insight into at least one of the Harvie Ramsay conditions. Generally, these insights reinforce each other, or are complementary. Sometimes they contradict each other. By assembling these various insights together within the framework of the Harvie Ramsay conditions, a picture emerges of the phenomena and contradictions theory should account for. More importantly, this review catalogues the different ways that researchers have defined these conditions in research.

*One: Any theory of international union activity should distinguish different levels at which international activity happens.*

Ramsay argued that theory should be able to separate levels of activity because “generalizations about the activities of federal bodies...do not necessarily apply to sector or enterprise forms of internationalism” (Ramsay 1999, p. 212). It is necessary, in other words, to be able to distinguish one form of international activity from another. His overall point was that most accounts tend to uncritically treat international union activities as an undifferentiated set. But the differences between different forms of activity are clear to the casual observer. As early as 1967, Windmuller managed to distinguish four different types of international union organisations - global, regional, industrial, and specialised internationals - each of which carries out a unique set of functions: (Windmuller 1967). Dimitris Stevis offers another perspective on the different levels of international union activity. He claims that there are three levels of international union politics: 1) efforts to shape the rules of regional integration; 2) efforts to engage capital; 3) efforts to engage other unions (Stevis 2002). These suggest an entirely different categorization of the levels of international union activity than that suggested by Windmuller or Ramsay. Indeed, there are many vectors along which international activities might be parsed for analysis. Windmuller, and to a lesser extent Ramsay are focused on distinguishing different kinds of institutions. Stevis focuses on various kinds of political engagement.

It is not that one of these authors is right and the others wrong. What their different accounts suggest is that what is really needed is a broad framework for categorizing international activity that has multiple axes of distinction. Hans Günter articulated the need for such a taxonomic framework to help theorize transnational industrial relations in 1972. A theory of international union activity is supposed to explain whether or why it occurs. An important component of such a theory is an ability to map explanations onto particular kinds of activity. This cannot occur unless there is some way to differentiate between types and amounts of international activity. For example, in a recent contribution, Mark Anner proposes a clever theory to explain to explain the “forms and frequency” of international cooperation. Unfortunately, he only distinguishes the forms and frequencies by way of suggestive cases (Anner 2003).

Günter's prescient call has not yet been answered, though some recent scholars have begun to take steps in that direction. As noted above, Waterman has proposed distinguishing between the scale, social field, and target of international activities, as well as between different kinds of international organisations. While his framework does not quite map onto the categories suggested by Ramsay, Windmuller and Stevis, it suggests that such a framework is possible in principle.

Smith and Wright have produced another, similar, framework for their analysis of the Australian Council of Trade Union's international policy. They include union structures, geographic scales, and alliances of interest as axes along which international activity can be differentiated. Their union structures are explicitly drawn from Ramsay's enterprise, sectoral and federal levels. They also, uniquely, differentiate international activity according to whether it is binational, multinational, global, or macroregional. Too often, scholars from both industrial relations and labour geography have failed to appreciate these gradations in the meaning of "international activity". Finally, Smith and Wright recognize the different kinds of alliance of interest that support international activity. For example, the ICFTU, WFTU and WCTU were all federal structures operating at a global scale, but each mobilized different kinds of interests: economic, political and Christian respectively. Smith and Wright identify geography, history and ideology as other potential lines along which alliances can form (Smith and Wright 2000, p. 127-129).

*Two: Any theory of international union activity should account for variation in the objectives of international activity*

The difficulty of specifying union objectives has been well documented (Booth 1995; Gahan 2002). Ramsay's view is that scholars have put too much emphasis on multinational collective bargaining as the focus of international activity. Fetishising the economic over political forms of cooperation, or over pragmatic information exchanges might bias theory toward particular kinds of analysis. Again, the observed world of international union activity does not look like one moving in the direction of multinational collective bargaining. How and why unions pursue activity surely depends on their particular objectives, which may or may not include long-term goals of establishing multinational collective bargaining or a new labour internationalism.

Many scholars do view multinational collective bargaining as the goal of international activity (Kujawa 1975; Ulman 1975; Ramsay 2000; Randal 2001). Gordon and Turner take the more moderate but similar perspective that international activity is geared toward creating a countervailing power to multinational corporations and the forces of globalisation (Gordon and Turner 2000, p. 4). These theoretical perspectives draw on, and are reinforced by case study evidence. In reviews of cross-border organising campaigns in North America, Ralph Armbruster (Armbruster 1995; Armbruster 1999) claims that their objective is to reduce the downward harmonization across borders of wages and conditions. Looking at transnational corporate campaigns, Greven and Russo contend that the goal is simply to win representation and favourable contracts (Greven and Russo 2003). In contrast to these economic perspectives on international activity, Rob Lambert notes that SIGTUR is motivated with the political objective of contesting neoliberal globalisation (Lambert and Webster 2001). Finally, Robinson views internationalism as one possible strategic orientation of a union, describing one of many ways a union may decide to structure its strategic activities.

All of these perspectives identify particular kinds of international activity with particular economic or political goals. But they do not themselves transcend the unproductive duality of purposes implied by the framework. This can only further explain what is going on in a particular episode of cooperation, but not why it is happening. For this, we require an analysis of the formation of strategies and tactics within unions. Anner's recent suggestion that the form of international union activity depends on the location of control over global production chains is intriguing in this regard (Anner 2003). The implication of his analysis is that unions are motivated to influence these sites of control. In this view, international cooperation has a kind of tactical objective, the focus of which varies depending on the socio-economic structures that determine the locus of control over various productive relationships. The simplest distinction is between economic and political objectives. International activity with economic objectives is intended to secure wages and conditions, while activity with political objectives would include anything that falls outside of the collective agreement (Ramsay 1999; Hyman 2002). This dualistic framework does not sufficiently capture the motives that lie behind international activity. It is simply a reproduction of a simple model in which there are two kinds of union: economic- and class-based unions (Hyman 2001). But it is not clear that these are the only lines



along which objectives may differ. Objectives may refer not only to the broadest goals of an organisation, but also to intermediate strategic or tactical goals.

*Three: Any theory of international union activity should explain incentives for and impediments to international activity*

This is the area where theory begins to really look like theory. That is to say, this is the core of any theory that actually means to explain, rather than describe, international activity. In the simplest way, an accounting of incentives, capacities, and impediments for international activity may suggest whether such activity is likely to occur. This Harvie Ramsay condition indicates that theory should be able to account for the various costs and benefits of pursuing that objective through international activity. Of course, the hidden implication is that the objective of international activity is already known. Otherwise, assessing the incentives for it is meaningless. This is the area where most authors have made a real theoretical contribution. Even those who have not tried to create a framework for assessing costs and benefits have at least tried to help enumerate the possible kinds of incentives and impediments unions face.

Ulman (1975) provides a very basic and compelling theory to assess incentives and impediments based on the assumption that the objective of international activity is to match the power of transnational corporations. To him, the incentives for cooperation stem from particular problems for unions resulting from the activities of multinational firms, particularly job loss in high-wage countries and the ability to “whipsaw”, or play different groups of workers against each other. Along with these problems, there are also environmental inducements that can amplify the incentives for international activity. In regards to job loss in high wage countries, the tendency to cooperate internationally is amplified by the fact that job losses in the low wage country from cooperating with high-wage workers would be minimal. Nevertheless, these incentives have to overcome certain impediments to cooperation including the relationships between national and international wage structures, differences in public policies such as welfare, and differences in labour market institutions in the different countries.

Drawing on case studies and introspection, scholars have identified many other possible incentives and impediments to cooperation. Identified incentives

include the end of Cold War tensions, various forces of globalisation, the presence of international institutions, the structural flexibility of unions, and new communications technology. Identified impediments include language barriers, fear of loss of autonomy, ideological differences, legal constraints, preoccupation with national and local affairs, and lack of member interest (Gordon and Turner 2000; Anner 2003). Besides these immediate issues, there have been several attempts to identify or broaden the lines along which success or failure might be determined.

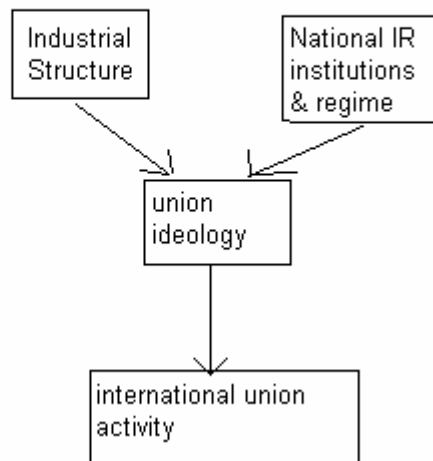
The classical theory of union internationalism provides a different way to think about the incentives for cooperation. Based on orthodox Marxism, internationalism imagined that capitalist development would ultimately lead to the proletarianisation and immiseration of the world's population. Their common misery and common enemy would induce these workers to join together in an international insurrection. As Hanagan points out, this theory has little power to explain international union activities (Hanagan 2003). Structurally speaking, union internationalism has not been correlated with a worsening of conditions for unionists and workers. In fact, some argue that international activities are more likely when the economy and job market are strong, but have begun to decline (Ramsay 1997). In spite of this ambiguity about the relationship between economic crisis and international activity, internationalism functioned in the past as a powerful mobilizing ideology (Lambert and Webster 2001).

Thus, even if international activity was not inspired by immiseration, it was in many ways inspired by an ideology that said it was. The separation of ideology from fact is difficult and dangerous, but the example serves to illustrate the impact that ideology has on union behaviour. Kelly and Frege (2003) argue, following Hyman (2001), that union ideology acts as a perceptual filter in assessing external events and determining responses. Developing a very similar theory, Anner (2003) demonstrates how ideological differences between two Brazilian unions in the same industry leads them to pursue very different kinds of international activity. In his analysis, left-wing unions are more likely to pursue internationalism in general, and especially more confrontational forms of internationalism. This simple assessment may be peculiar to the Brazilian case, but indicates the ways in which ideology might be defined for analysis.

Anner's theory is unique in that it looks at incentives and impediments to cooperation, but also looks at how unions process information internally, and at the

connections between economic, institutional, and ideological factors. In his theory, certain factors of industrial structure give incentives for particular kinds of international activity. However, these pressures are mediated by both national labour market institutions and union ideology. The actual practice of international activity therefore depends on factors that cannot be specified in advance, but must be determined empirically (2003, p. 604).

Figure 1: Anner's theory of international union activity  
(from Anner (2003))



*Four: Any theory of international union activity should account for strategic alternatives to international activity*

In addition to his useful contributions for thinking about the incentives and impediments to international union activity, Ulman also brought attention to the idea that there are strategic alternatives that might achieve the same results. In his analysis, the strongest net incentive for international cooperation between unions occurs when high-wage workers fear job loss to workers in low-wage countries. However, at the time he observed that many unions had begun to bargain directly with nation states and firms over job losses (Ulman 1975, p. 26). Corporatist job bargaining, at least in Europe in the 1970s was a viable alternative to international cooperation. Unions began to suffer the effects of multinational firms and globalisation well before their effects on the governance of nation states became

noticeable (Elder 2002). Thus, national strategies tended to be substituted for the next best approach, which might have been international linkage.

Along with Ulman's focus on the substitution of national activities for international ones, some have emphasized the complementarity of national and international activity. Hyman argues that unions tended to choose international activities that could bolster their success in national ones (Hyman 2002). For example, pursuing regulation of multinational firms through the ILO could provide a point of leverage in the job-bargaining process. Today unions use framework agreements bargained with different firms in their own local industrial struggles (Wills 2002). So, while national strategies may make certain international strategies obsolete, such as multinational collective bargaining, they do not erase the international scale as a realm of union activity.

Recognition of the fact that international and national strategies can be both substitute and complement makes things complicated. Quite often, international activity is treated as one among a range of strategies that unions can take. But international activity comprises a broad range of activities. Thus it is too simple to posit a substitution of the national for international activity, as Ulman suggests. Instead, an articulation of the relationships between different strategies and tactics is important for theory. So is an articulation of the relationships between the scales at which activities are carried out.

### **Toward a synthesis**

Theories of international union activity remain in a preliminary stage. Interest in international activity has been intermittent historically, and remains weak today. Presumptions of its importance by some scholars contrast with its apparently marginal significance in union strategy. With a shortage of empirical fact, theory has been reduced to the level of untested speculation. But with a renewed interest in international activity today, both of these problems can be relieved. Not only is internationalism increasing in importance, but labour geographers have indicated that the international scale may be significant for unions in ways that might not have been imagined before. At the same time, independent scholars have been building the different areas demarked by the Harvie Ramsay conditions. While a contingency

theory that can really explain the variations in the forms and frequencies of international activity has not appeared, its component parts have become more visible.

## Chapter Four

### The International Activities of the ACTU

Chapter Four begins with a descriptive account of how the Australian union movement uses the international scale in revitalization strategy, as characterized by the activity and behaviour of the ACTU. The ACTU tends to characterize international activity as a primarily outward activity aimed at encouraging union and human rights in the South Pacific region. In recent years, the ACTU has begun to pair this with an increased focus on working with global bodies in establishing an international regulatory framework. The international policies of the ACTU obscure two other kinds of international activity going on in the union movement: international campaigns and strategy sharing. The ACTU certainly gives some attention in policy and press to international industrial campaigns. However, the chapter argues that the ACTU maintains a discursive focus on the international as a scale of social justice and to a lesser extent social partnership. Fully hidden from view in the ACTU's discursive construction of the international scale are the international activities that have led to major reform within the ACTU and within Australian unions: the interchange of ideas with other union movements.

The chapter shows that considering how space affects industrial relations actors helps explain what an aspatial theory cannot. Social and economic changes not only affect the choice of revitalisation strategies, but also the identity of the union movement. The scale politics of ACTU revitalisation strategies link different aspects of peak union identity and agency to different scales of activity. How this happens is not determined by the changing scalar structure of political and economic forces associated with globalisation, but emerges from the conflictual processes in which different actors construct scales as part of their attempts to control space.

The relational theory of scale discussed in Chapter Two suggests that unions construct scales both materially and discursively. This is certainly true of the ACTU. The ACTU engages in many forms of international activity in its many capacities as a national peak body, yet in its official policies and public statements, the ACTU focuses on the international as a scale of social agency. This chapter attempts to disentangle these aspects of the ACTU's construction of the international scale,

examining both material and discursive aspects. Later, in Chapter Five, the thesis turns to look at how three unions draw on these different constructions of the international in their own activity.

### **The ACTU as an international actor**

It is reasonable to regard the activities of the ACTU as being representative of revitalisation and international activity in the Australian union movement more generally. The ACTU is the only national peak union body in Australia. Its twenty largest affiliates represent 90 percent of the unionised workforce covering all major Australian industries. As an exclusive peak body with a very inclusive membership, the ACTU speaks on behalf of the Australian union movement and on behalf of Australian workers generally (ACTU 2001b; Griffin 2002).

While there are many structural similarities between unions and their peak bodies, as agents of industrial relations the two organisations are fundamentally different. The description of the international activities of the ACTU should acknowledge that they are the activities of a union peak body. Ellem and Shield's theory of union peak bodies, drawing on Brigg's earlier work (Briggs 1999), identifies three types of peak union agency: mobilisation, external exchange and representation, and regulation (Ellem and Shields 2001). Each type of agency can be pursued through industrial, political and social modes (see Table 1). As in this thesis, Ellem and Shields develop their model by using labour geography to extend an existing industrial relations theory. Their model is a suitable framework to present the international activities of the ACTU.

Some readers may wonder why this chapter does not instead use the framework developed by Smith and Wright (Smith and Wright 2000). Smith and Wright analyse ACTU international policy according to a framework that expands on the first Harvie Ramsay condition.<sup>9</sup> In their framework, international activity should be distinguished along three dimensions: structure, level, and alliance of interest. While the connection to Ramsay and the emphasis on scalar distinctions appear similar to the analysis in this thesis, the appearance is superficial. Ramsay's theory is a theory of unions. Smith and Wright's framework applies Ramsay's conditions to a

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<sup>9</sup> This condition asserts that a theory of international union activity should account for different levels of activity. See the discussion in Chapter Three.

model of peak body activity, without considering the how the nature of international activity carried out by a peak body might differ from that carried out by a union. Smith and Wright's use of scalar concepts in studying the international activities of the ACTU is compelling in that it provides a precedent for a spatialised analysis. But their analysis merely tacks scalar distinctions onto a pre-existing industrial relations framework. According to the political economy of industrial relations articulated in Chapter Two, spatial considerations cannot simply be added onto existing theory, but must form the basis of theory.

Most of the ACTU's international activities relate to its ability to represent the Australian union movement and negotiate exchange relationships with industrial relations actors. After all, almost by definition, the ACTU's mobilisational capacity is restricted to the national scale, though there are instances where this is not strictly true. But its ability to mobilize nationally and to speak for the Australian union movement permits the ACTU to participate in international peak bodies, and to enter into exchange relationships with social actors in many different countries. As an agent of regulation, the ACTU's power is mostly tied to its structural influence at national and sub-national scales. However, the ACTU is also involved in some efforts to regulate labour markets and social relations within the Oceanic region. Clearly, the ACTU's regulatory capacity depends on its exchange relationships, which in turn depend on its mobilisational capacities. The relationships between these different forms of agency are reflected in the ACTU's activities at different scales, and therefore in the scalar construction of its strategies.

### *Mobilization*

As an agent of mobilization, the ACTU articulates the priorities of the union movement and coordinates affiliates in activities to advance those priorities. In part, the ACTU articulates the international priorities of the Australian union movement through congress policies, executive resolutions, and other strategy documents that are considered in detail later. The ACTU uses its mobilizing agency in two material ways that involve the international scale. Most significantly, the ACTU channels resources into Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA. Through APHEDA, the ACTU organises development projects and supports human and trade union right throughout



the developing world. Second, the ACTU mobilizes affiliates in support of various international or transnational campaigns.

**Table 1: Dimensions of Peak Union Agency**

|                                                    | <b>Industrial Mode</b>                                                                                                      | <b>Political Mode</b>                                                                                                                | <b>Social Mode</b>                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agent of Mobilisation</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affiliate coordination / dispute resolution</li> <li>• Union organising</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propagandising</li> <li>• Consciousness-raising</li> <li>• Political campaigning</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour-community alliances</li> <li>• Social &amp; environmental issues</li> <li>• Human rights</li> </ul> |
| <b>Agent of External Exchange / Representation</b> | With: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers</li> <li>• Tribunals</li> <li>• Other union bodies</li> </ul>      | With: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state</li> <li>• Political parties</li> </ul>                                     | With: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social movements</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| <b>Agent of Regulation</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awards</li> <li>• Collective agreements</li> <li>• Union rules</li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative regulation</li> </ul>                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour market regulation</li> <li>• Social relations</li> </ul>                                            |

(Ellem and Shields forthcoming)

While APHEDA is formally separate from the ACTU, the two organisations have deep structural connections. The ACTU chartered APHEDA as the Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad in 1984 as its international aid agency (Davis 2004, p. 121). In 2003, Australian trade unions contributed roughly 40 percent of APHEDA's \$4,000,000 budget, with most of the remainder coming from government project grants (APHEDA 2003). The ACTU also appoints five of the nine members of APHEDA's managing committee, with the remainder elected by the membership. In 2003, seven of the nine committee members were Australian trade union officials, four of whom worked directly for the ACTU (APHEDA 2003; Davis 2004).

While it is an organ of the Australian unions, APHEDA does not merely support union-based projects. Through APHEDA, the Australian unions support a wide range of projects to aid development, social justice, and human rights in numerous countries. In recent years, union training and development have taken greater priority, as evidenced through APHEDA's decision to rename itself Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA. Of 49 projects in 15 countries during 2002-2003, just three were about developing stronger trade unions. 12 projects involved a partnership between APHEDA and a union in the recipient country. Significantly, the three projects that provided union training took place in East Timor, the Philippines, and Indonesia – all

countries in close geographical proximity to Australia, and consequently with close political, military, economic and social ties. Of the remaining 10 projects that involved a trade union partner, five were vocational training programs: four in East Timor, one in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. Four of the projects were for HIV/AIDS education or support in Cambodia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Papua New Guinea. Of current APHEDA projects that do not involve a trade union, 11 are vocational programs, 7 deal with issues of health or nutrition, 3 relate to HIV/AIDS education and prevention, and 5 are community or economic development programs (APHEDA 2003).

### *External exchange and representation*

Almost all unions in the world, and certainly all major unions in Australia are national organisations. For these organisations to engage in international activities means that some kind of relationship must exist between the national union and other national organisations, either through mutual membership in an international organisation, or through direct connections forged by the ACTU. For this reason, the ACTU's capacities as an agent of representation and exchange are the lynchpin of its international activities.

### ***Representation***

The ACTU represents the interests of the Australian union movement through its participation in several international organisations, enumerated in Table 2. The sheer number of such organisations serves to illustrate the very complicated meaning of the term international, which masks many different kinds of relationships that the Australian union movement can be party to. The ICFTU, ICFTU-APRO, SPOCTU, ILO, APLN and ICTUR all cover specific geographic spaces by definition and also have particular missions. By contrast, membership in SIGTUR, TUAC and the CTUC is predicated on other political-economic priorities as defined by those peak bodies. Smith and Wright rightly point out that the ACTU's international affiliations involve many different transnational spaces, as well as many different alliances of interest (2000).

**Table 2: Official International Affiliations of the ACTU**

| <b>International Institution</b>                                     | <b>Alliance of Interest / Geographic Range</b>                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)             | Global peak union body                                                                   |
| ICFTU-Asia Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU-APRO)                | Asia Pacific region peak union body                                                      |
| South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trade Unions (SPOCTU)           | South Pacific and Oceania peak union body                                                |
| Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC)                              | Peak body of unions in Commonwealth countries                                            |
| International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR)                  | Global organisation representing union rights                                            |
| Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR) | Peak body of democratic trade unions in the 'global south' (see Chapter 3)               |
| Asia Pacific Labour Network (APLN)                                   | Peak body of unions in member nations of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) region |
| International Labour Organisation (ILO) Governing Body               | Tripartite United Nations agency promoting labour rights                                 |
| Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD                    | Official Interface for unions in the OECD                                                |

Source: (ACTU 2001b)

Through its membership in these global peak bodies, the ACTU has some responsibility for championing their decisions with the Australian unions and Australian government. Naturally, this implies a feedback between the ACTU's exchange agency and mobilizing agency. For instance, in 2001, the ICFTU adopted an international plan of action on Burma. Since 1988, Burma has been under the control of a military junta that has violently repressed human and trade union rights (ACTU 2004a). In March 2001, the ACTU Executive passed a resolution formally endorsing the ICFTU plan (ACTU 2001a). Since, it has undertaken activity within Australia in accordance with the ten points of the plan. For example, the ACTU has coordinated its affiliates to send support to Burmese unionists. It has also pressured corporations operating in Australia to halt any activities in Burma, with some success. Finally, the ACTU consistently sends letters of protest to the Australian government to alter its diplomatic relations with Burma. In addition to these national forms of mobilization and representation, the ACTU has also acted internationally through APHEDA to support Burmese refugees along the Thai-Burmese border. Each of these activities is in accordance with the ten points of the ICFTU international plan.

The campaigns to include ILO conventions in Australian labour law and in trade agreements provide a different example of the ACTU taking local action in

support of its responsibilities to the global peak bodies. Since 1999, the ILO and the ICFTU have been highly critical of the Howard government's labour market reforms, arguing that they are in breach of conventions of Australia's obligations as a signatory to ILO treaties (Nyland and Castle 1999; ACTU 2002). The ACTU continues to try to press the government to bring labour market policy in line with treaty obligations.

The ACTU has also been active in pressuring the government to include ILO labour standards – a kind of social clause - in free trade agreements. In industrialized countries, unions typically call for a social clause typically to prevent less-developed countries from using exploitative labour practices as a competitive advantage. It is interesting, then, that the ACTU was equally adamant that the ILO's core labour standards be included in the recent free trade agreement between Australia and the United States. The ACTU protested that the labour standards in the agreement fall short of those in other trade agreements that the U.S. has negotiated with developing countries like Jordan (ACTU 2004b). In this case, it seems that the ACTU's insistence on a social clause is to provide leverage in its attempts to force the Australian government to bring labour law in line with ILO responsibilities.

### *Exchange*

It is through the ACTU's ability to forge exchange relationships with unions overseas that it is able to share strategies across borders. Illustrating the significance of strategy sharing as a form of international activity is one of the major tasks of this thesis. While the impacts of such exchanges have been immense, their international nature is hidden in the ACTU's discursive construction of scale, which is more fully discussed below. For now, the focus is on the material aspects of strategy exchange relationship. The most significant of these relationships are between the ACTU and certain U.S unions, though the ACTU is also engaged in strategy exchanges with unions in the U.K. and in New Zealand.

The ACTU has a history of looking abroad for ideas about strategy, and especially revitalisation strategy. In 1987, the ACTU famously articulated a shift toward a Scandinavian model of unionism and industrial relations. The policy shift included union amalgamations along industry lines and a notion of 'strategic unionism': corporatist social partnership practised by unions using modern management techniques. These policy proposals emanated directly from the report of

an ACTU mission to Europe, *Australia Reconstructed* (ACTU/TDC 1987), that attempted to draw lessons from European union movements to apply in Australia.

The policy of amalgamations did not shore up the waning influence of the union movement. Membership and density continued to decline. In 1993, the ACTU deployed another study team to the United States to develop links to different union movements, and to see how they were coping with their own problems. The team's report focused on a major innovation from the United States: the development of an organising model of trade unionism. Several U.S. unions have been highly successful in halting and sometimes reversing the process of membership loss by focusing on organising new members and redefining the concept of unionism. The 1993 study mission returned with a report that urged the Australian union movement to shift from its focus on strategic unionism and adopt the organising practices being developed in the U.S. (ACTU 1993b).

Adoption of the organising model requires unions to make significant ideological and structural changes. In the U.S. as well as in Australia, unions that adopt the model identify as 'organising unions', emphasising the idea of the union as a collective agency of its members' interests and action, rather than a third party that services its members. The focus of organising unions is therefore not just on the recruitment of new members, but also on the construction of activist networks within the membership. Structurally, this means organising unions dedicate a large portion of resources to new organising, but through that organising try to create powerful structures within the workplace. The hope is that by creating strong and active workplace structures, the membership can handle internal organising and grievance procedures, freeing up the unions resources for new organising and broader industrial and political campaigns that affect all members.<sup>10</sup>

In 1999, the ACTU sent a third delegation to visit unions in the UK, Belgium, Canada and the United States. Again, the objective of the delegation was to learn about their revitalisation strategies. The report of this delegation, *unions@work* more strongly encourages the ACTU and its affiliates to embrace the organising model and lays out the priority steps the union movement should take. Since 2000, the ACTU leadership has been dominated by proponents of the organising model. One of the first acts of this new leadership was to establish an Organising Centre dedicated to the

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<sup>10</sup> For a thorough description of the organising model, see Bronfenbrenner, Friedman et al (1998), For a discussion of the organising model in an Australian context, see Cooper (2002a).

implementation of the proposals within *unions@work* (Griffin 2002, p. 169). The primary functions of the Organising Centre are: training of new organisers; educating members and officials about the organising model; and maintaining a mobile campaigning unit (Crosby 2003).

In carrying out its mandate, the Organising Centre negotiates exchange relationships with union movements in other countries on behalf of the ACTU. The timeline in the appendix to this chapter sketches the different international exchanges carried out through the Organising Centre. While this is not a formal part of the Organising Centre's mandate, it sees these international relationships as essential to each of its core functions. In particular, the ACTU maintains strong relationships with those U.S. unions that have most fully developed the organising model: the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE).

At this stage, the Organising Centre sees these unions as being 'thought leaders' for the Australian union movement (Tarrant 2004). In translating the organising model to Australian unions, the Organising Centre tries to work in close consultation with U.S. counterparts. The organising model requires not only the development of radically new recruitment methods, but also quite radical cultural and structural shifts within the union organisation. Many of the Centre's training programs are borrowed in close consultation with U.S. unions. For instance, the Organising Works program, the precursor of the Organising Centre, is an adaptation of the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute. In 2003, the Organising Centre began its own version of the AFL's Union Summer program to recruit university students as organisers. In the U.S., these programs are run by veteran organisers who have been using the new methods for years. Reproducing these programs in Australia, where the organising model has only recently taken hold involves significant contact between the Organising Centre and its U.S. counterparts (Crosby 2003).

Because the adoption of the organising model involves cultural change, the Organising Centre also uses international links as a way to educate trade union leaders. A 1997 FIET meeting in Sydney brought several key officials from the SEIU. In meeting with the leaders of different Australian unions, they acted as missionaries for the organising model. Their visits were instrumental in leading both the LHMU and the HSUA to adopt the organising model. This experience has not

been lost on the Organising Centre, which has continued to build links between union leaders in Australia and union leaders in the U.S. union movement. In May 2004, the Organising Centre arranged a “Next Steps” program for senior union leaders to travel to the U.S. While there, each leader was placed with an organising branch for one week, to see how the unions function. Afterwards, they attended a week-long training program at the George Meany institute in Washington, D.C. including sessions with top U.S. unionists and industrial relations scholars on organising tactics, campaign tactics, and structural change (Crosby 2003; ACTU 2004c; Crosby 2004).

As is clear from the timeline, the international activities carried out through the Organising Centre are still developing, but continue to grow both in frequency and formality. What began as informal staff exchanges between the U.S. and Australia since 2001 have become semi-official programs. In 2004, the SEIU agreed to take six Australian organisers through its intensive Wave training program, and has begun a regular program of sending high level officials to work with Australian unions on campaign strategies. As the organising model takes hold in Australia, the strategy exchange between Australian and U.S. unions is deepening under the auspices of the Organising Centre (Crosby 2003). The uptake of the organising model has not been uniform across Australian unions. Those seeking to redefine themselves as ‘organising unions’ are pursuing their own relationships with the U.S. unions. The TWU and the LHMU are both developing international strategy sharing relationships beyond what the ACTU provides through the organising Centre (Sheldon 2004; Tarrant 2004).

It is clear that the Organising Centre has put a priority on its relationships with the U.S. organising unions. It also has connections to unions in several other countries, most notably in the U.K. and New Zealand where the organising model has also taken hold. All three countries moved toward the organising model as a revitalisation strategy in the 1990s, and have what one LHMU official described as a ‘sibling relationship’ in its adoption (Tarrant 2004). Industrial relations scholars note that the adoption of the organising model in the UK is underdeveloped as unions there experiment with a social partnership approach (Frege and Kelly 2003). Because of this, the strategy sharing links between Australian and the U.K. unions are limited to the occasional staff exchange and meetings to share lessons from attempts to apply the organising model.

The Organising Centre also has very significant relationships in New Zealand. The union movement in New Zealand was devastated in 1991 when the passage of an *Employment Contracts Act* eliminated closed shops. Overnight, union membership dropped 29 percent and has fallen ever since (Griffin 2002). In response, many of the New Zealand unions shifted toward the organising model long before their Australian counterparts. However, the dwindling resource base of the New Zealand union movement has made it difficult to manage their own organising program. The Organising Centre has tried to integrate the New Zealand movement into its programs as much as possible. New Zealand unionists share their experiences with the organising model and union revitalisation through courses provided by the Organising Centre. Recently, the Organising Centre hired the former General Secretary of Finsec and Secretary of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions as a Senior Advisor. In addition, the Centre runs training courses in New Zealand, subsidizing them by allowing New Zealanders to pay the Australian dollar cost of the courses in New Zealand dollars. While the relationships between the Organising Centre and the New Zealand union are rather informal, they are frequent and ongoing. Indeed, it is as if some New Zealand unions are as fully entrenched in the work of the Organising Centre as Australian unions (Crosby 2003; 2004).

### *Regulation*

As was the case with its mobilizing agency, the ACTU's capacity to directly enforce regulations is tied to its powers as a national peak body. According to Ellem and Shields, the regulatory agency of the ACTU as a peak body depends on its ability to "[formulate] and [enforce] ...requirements, rules, restrictions, prescriptions, and penalties for non-compliance" (forthcoming, p. 14). The ACTU does not have the capacity to enforce decisions over foreign unions, companies or states except to the extent that they operate in Australia. In fact, Ellem and Shields note that the regulatory agency of a peak body is closely connected to the scale of its influence. National peak bodies can effectively participate in industrial or political regulation through their exchange relationships with the state, and because of its ability to discipline its affiliates. However, they argue that local peak bodies will have a greater capacity for the social regulation of labour and commodity markets. These insights indicate that the ACTU has little capacity to directly regulate international activity.



The ACTU does use its regulatory power at the national scale as part of its international activity. Its attempts to get ILO clauses articulated in Australian labour law and free trade agreements were discussed earlier. The ACTU is also involved in attempts to shape the rules by which the Australian government engages with global economic institutions like the WTO and the IMF. Because it has little direct control over the government, these regulatory aspects of ACTU activity in turn depend on its exchange relationships with the state. Under the current government, the ACTU has little influence over policy. Its regulatory influence is limited to the filing of submissions with the various state agencies charged with managing Australia's international affairs.

In addition, the ACTU is engaged in a public relations campaign to promote 'fair trade' within Australia. Beyond attempting to use legalistic tools like social clauses in trade agreements, the 'fair trade' agenda involves redefining the social priorities that international economic policy is intended to meet. At its 2000 Congress, the ACTU defined the fair trade agenda:

The success or otherwise of trade liberalisation should be seen in the context of social progress and not simply in narrow economic outcomes. The ACTU recognises the importance of international trade to improving living standards in trading countries and supports a system of fair trade that promotes reform of the current free trade environment. Fair trade does not involve protectionism but means trade carried out in a manner which benefits civil society and delivers progress for all countries in terms of:

- i. employment growth
- ii. improved social relations
- iii. implementation of core labour standards
- iv. sustainable environmental standards
- v. elimination of forced/child labour
- vi. adherence to human rights and democratic values (ACTU 2000).

In part, the fair trade agenda is an aspect of the ACTU's commitments to the global peak bodies. The ICFTU and ILO in particular are actively attempting to redefine the priorities of the World Trade Organisation and to establish regulatory control at the global scale over trade, labour, and financial markets. The ACTU's fair trade policy and its submissions to the Federal Government on the WTO and the U.S. Free Trade Agreement are attempts to change political regulations governing trade arrangements.

At the same time, the ACTU engages in what Ellem and Shields call the social mode of regulatory agency. In promoting the fair trade agenda, the ACTU articulates

concepts of social justice that should govern economic policy. Trading relationships are to be subordinate to goals such as human rights, labour rights, ecological consideration and democratic process. At the same time, the ACTU asserts that trade liberalisation has to be connected to domestic policies that maintain full employment, vocational training, a social wage, and a clean environment. To enforce these priorities, the ACTU makes its submissions to the Government, but has also mobilised its affiliates to conduct 'social audits' to review the regional impacts of trade liberalisation and globalisation. These activities involve ACTU mobilisation, but must be seen more as a kind of social regulation. Because the ACTU has legitimacy as a voice of working people's interests, it is capable of shaping the terms of national debate over trade. It also attempts to shape public opinion and people's expectations about how Australia should interact internationally. Such social regulation can have real impacts on policy making and therefore on the function of international labour and commodity markets.

### **The ACTU's discursive construction of the international scale**

The preceding discussion reveals the connections between the international activities of the ACTU and the ways in which it represents the international scale rhetorically. In the fair trade debate, the international becomes the scale of market activities, through globalisation, that threaten the fabric of Australian society. At the same time, it is also the scale of alliances against that threat, and the scale at which regulatory structures ought to be reformed. This section reviews the ways in which the ACTU talks about the international scale in its policy-making and in its public discourse. In general, the ACTU talks about the international scale as an arena of development assistance and as an arena of regulation. Conspicuously absent is any discussion of the international as a scale of strategy sharing. But as the previous section indicated, strategy exchanges constitute a significant part of the ACTU's international activity. Given the emphasis within the ACTU on the development of the organising model, these international connections would seem that much more important. It is interesting, then, that they should be absent in the discursive construction of the international scale. That they are indicates a schism between the material and discursive construction of scale: a puzzle that highlights the value of a relational conception of scale.

### *The international scale in ACTU history*

A review of the historical development of ACTU policy helps to illustrate the uniqueness of strategy sharing as a form of ACTU international strategy and policy. It is also a valuable contribution to the understanding of international activity in Australia more generally. Communist internationalism was a basis for ACTU international activity from its founding until the beginning of World War II. After the war, international policies occupied less importance, and have walked a sometimes thin line between the arbitrationist unions on labour's right, and the militant unions on labour's left. The impact of these internal dynamics on the orientation and agency of the ACTU is widely recognised. Less well recognised is the impact of internationalism on the direction of these internal factions. While the thesis cannot address these connections in detail, it can suggest the importance of the international scale in the development and identity of the ACTU historically, and the influence of these historical patterns on the relationship between scale and ACTU agency today.

International affairs shaped the ACTU from its origins. During its inaugural congress on 3 May 1927, the ACTU affiliated with the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS) at the suggestion of representatives from the Sydney Labour Council. The PPTUS had been established a year earlier by communist organisations, including the Sydney Council of the Red International of Labour Unions, the union wing of the Third Communist International (Comintern). However, one historian of the Communist party in Australia has noted that

The decision to affiliate [with the PPTUS] was not a result of communist control of the ACTU. Ideas of working class co-operation were widespread amongst people on the left of the labour movement, and although the [PPTUS] had been created on Comintern initiative, this did not then have the same significance it was later to assume (Gollan 1975, p. 15).

The connection to Comintern became significant quickly enough. The fledgling ACTU needed to maintain its legitimacy with both militant and moderate unionists as well as with the ALP. In 1930, the ACTU disaffiliated from the PPTUS under pressure from unionists favouring a more moderate approach to social transformation (PPRC 1930; Hagan 1977).

Though the affiliation with the PPTUS lasted only a year, it had a more lasting impact on international policy in the ACTU. When the ACTU joined the PPTUS during its first Congress, it also formed a Pan-Pacific Relations Committee (PPRC) dedicated to managing the affiliation and to keeping track of affairs in the region. The ACTU also charged the committee with publishing a journal, *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, which it published until 1931. In the first issue, the committee outlined its policy:

- 1) popularise the resolutions of the PPTUC
- 2) Combat the danger of a new world war
- 3) Support liberation movements of the oppressed in China, India, Indonesia and the Philippines through contact with trade unions in those countries.
- 4) Publish detailed investigations of workers in the Pacific
- 5) Deal with problems of trade union unity (PPRC 1928).

The committee articulated its policy in terms of class and class conflict. In opposition to war, for example, they argued that ‘militant action of the working class’ was required to combat the ‘predatory ambitions of imperialist capitalists’ (PPRC 1928). Such sentiments were common at the time, and were in keeping with the internationalist doctrine of the Comintern. While the emphasis on class-war that initially grounded these policies eventually gave way, the underlying focus on peace, national liberation struggles, and unionism in the Pacific region remained influential in the development of international policy through the rest of the century.

From 1931, the ACTU was committed to a policy of isolationism based on a harmonization of interests between leftist opposition to imperialist war and right-wing opposition to notions of collective security. But in 1937, the ACTU reversed its isolationism, ironically in response to pressure from pro-communist delegates. The Comintern in 1935 had identified fascism as the main opponent of communism, and endorsed alliances with social democratic governments to fight fascism. In Australia, the reversal of the ACTU’s isolationist stance in regard to the war reflected the influence of the Communist party within the movement (Gollan 1975, p. 35).

It was the last time the Communists were to have such a substantial direct influence on ACTU international policy. After the war, they came under attack from the government and the moderate sections of the labour movement. In 1947, the ACTU was affiliated with the World Federation of Trade Unions, which at that point was still a non-ideological organisation intended to build solidarity among unions in

all countries. But just two years later, the ACTU joined union movements in North America and Western Europe in leaving the WFTU to form the explicitly anti-communist ICFTU (Hagan 1986).

The post war years from 1951 through the mid-1970s saw the ACTU Congress begin to formally implement policies dealing with international issues (Table 3). The issues that the Congress was willing to deal with were limited, and are intriguing in both what they included and what they omitted. The most common issue that the peak body dealt with was Peace, followed by affiliation to the ICFTU. During this period, the ACTU also established a priority on reciprocal visits; a sort of diplomacy to be carried out with unions of special significance to the Australian labour movement. Generally speaking, these were to be unions in the Asia-Pacific region.

Merely naming these strategies does nothing to indicate the ideology behind them or the tactics through which they were to be pursued. Nor does it indicate the level of genuine commitment to them. In 1938, the Waterside Workers Federation famously used its industrial strength to push forward its wartime agenda by refusing to load ships bound for Japan. When the government fought back, the ACTU was able to broker a deal between the parties. During and after World War II, the relationship between the ACTU and governments of different parties became less acrimonious. As a result, the ACTU was at times reluctant to endorse the use of industrial action to influence foreign policy. In the 1967 policy, the ACTU Executive condemned the use of industrial action as protest against the Vietnam War. This was in immediate response to an incident in which maritime unions proposed to ban the 'Boonaroo', which was to carry military materials to Vietnam (ACTU 1980). At the 1971 ACTU Congress, the Federal Clerks Union put forward a proposal to end the use of political strikes, with particular reference to bans on South Africa and work stoppages designed as protests against the war (Hagan 1986). These observations, while incomplete, suggest the general strategic and ideological orientation of international policy in the interwar period.

**Table 3: ACTU International Strategy, 1951-1967**

| <i>Policy</i>           | <i>Years (Content)</i>                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ICFTU Affiliation       | 1951, 1955, 1959, 1963                                                                                                  |
| International Policy    | 1955                                                                                                                    |
| Peace                   | 1951 (abolition of War)<br>1953 (U.N. in East Germany)<br>1959 (Basic Policy)<br>1963 (Nuclear Tests)<br>1967 (Vietnam) |
| Reciprocal Visits       | 1959 (established)<br>1961 (Confirmed)<br>1963 (observers ok)                                                           |
| South Africa: Apartheid | 1963, 1965                                                                                                              |

Source: ACTU (1968) *Index to Decisions of ACTU Congresses*

In 1980, the ACTU began to consolidate its previously disparate policies dealing with international activities. A year later, Congress passed an international policy that developed a comprehensive framework for international affairs that remained more or less unchanged until 1997. The 1981 framework divided policy into ‘General Principles’ and ‘Specific Policies’. The General Principles in 1981 included statements on Peace, Support for the United Nations, Disarmament, Human Rights, Suppression of Unionists, International Affiliations, International Trade Union Relations, and Refugees. Specific policies essentially described the position of the ACTU on matters in particular foreign countries (ACTU 1982).

Three features of the 1981 International Affairs policy are noteworthy. First, it focuses on the international sphere primarily as a political and social, rather than industrial arena. The international concerns of the ACTU were not concerns about global trade or multinational firms, but concerns about peace, international relationships, and human rights. Second, the policy constructs international activity primarily as something that flows outwards from the ACTU as a social and political agent. Countries and world regions discussed in the policy are typically developing countries, quite often those in Australia’s immediate vicinity, with which the ACTU claimed special concern. Third, and finally, it is worth noting in passing the similarity of the 1981 policy areas to the policies of the Pan Pacific Committee detailed in 1928. Both policies focused on the issue of peace, the plight of the exploited, and gave special focus to union movements in the immediate region. But where the PPC expressed its objectives in terms of class struggle, the 1981 policy derived them from a sense of social justice and rights. The only hint of the class ideology that dominated early ACTU international policy comes in the conclusion of the policy, which states:

Congress declares that in respect of international relationships the only real bridge which extends across all international borders and different systems is the industrial bridge of the world trade union movement and that the ACTU should use this bridge to argue the case for international cooperation through the world trade union movement on every occasion possible (ACTU 1982).

However, it is not clear whether this is intended to hearken back to socialist internationalism, or if it is in fact a subtle message to discount the World Federation of Trade Unions

### *ACTU international policy since 1981*

Comparing the international affairs policy as it took shape in 1981 with current ACTU activity analysed at the beginning of the chapter reveals two changes that took place over the last twenty years. Two forms of activity that feature heavily today, strategy sharing and the fair trade agenda, were not included in ACTU policy prior to the 1980s. This is not at all surprising, given that the issues of globalisation and union crisis that prompted the ACTU to get involved in those areas had not yet emerged. However, the process by which the ACTU introduced and incorporated issues of fair trade and strategy sharing into policy was not straightforward. Aspects of a union position on trade began to enter the international policy in 1991, albeit rather cautiously. At the time of the 1997 policy, though, the trade union response to trade liberalisation began to take centre stage. The 2000 Congress did not pass an international affairs policy, but passed a new policy on Globalisation and Labour Rights, indicating a shift in the union movement's perspective on its relationship to the international environment.

Reviewing the transformations in the international policies of the ACTU over the last twenty years yields insights into how the ACTU constructs the international scale. The international affairs policy of 2003 is partially a continuation of historical patterns, but significant changes to the policy come from the ACTU's struggles with employers and the Australian government to control space at multiple scales. A dramatic shift in international policy at the 1997 Congress a year after the election of John Howard's Liberal/National Coalition government and the passage of the *Workplace Relations Act*. As in the past, the ACTU continues to focus on social

justice, human and trade union rights in the international affairs policy, but the moral economy inherent in the policy has become more pointed, and the range of tactics that the ACTU endorses have become more varied.

Table 4 indicates the topics that were covered by the international affairs policy at Congresses in 1981, 1984, 1989, 1991 and 1995. Clearly, the bulk of the topics covered in the international policy did not change much over this period, other than the addition of several new topics in 1989. But even as new topics were added to the international affairs policies, they were generally in keeping with the focuses on peace, development, and the role of the Australian movement as a provider of assistance to struggling union movements and movements of national liberation. If anything, ACTU policy became more focused on the promotion of regional development and regional trade unionism during this period.

Not evident from the table are the means through which the ACTU intended to pursue these various tactics. In general, the Congress has left such tactical decisions to the Executive. But overwhelmingly, the International policy either makes provisions for the ACTU to directly support trade unions in less developed countries, or to put pressure on the government for such support. Conspicuously absent from the policies is the discussion of the international as a realm for industrial action, and indeed of any discussion of the international as having a substantial impact on the ACTU. It was only as recently as 1995 that the International policy explicitly dealt with the issue of trade. Equally absent is any discussion of the strategy sharing relationships that influenced ACTU policy after 1987.

However, there are several reasons that the ACTU International policy developed as it did over this period. First and foremost, the ACTU was engaged in the Accord process until the ALP government lost power in 1996. This gave the ACTU power to manage economic affairs through national regulation. At the same time, the ACTU had to devote its decision-making energy to the organisational restructuring and economic policy-making required of a corporatist social partner. Not only did international activity seem unimportant, there was little time for it.



**Table 4: Topics in the ACTU's international affairs policy, 1981-1995\***

| <i>Year Introduced</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <u>Topic</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1981                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Peace <sup>†</sup> (1981, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Support for the United Nations (1981, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Disarmament <sup>†</sup> (1981, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Human Rights <sup>‡</sup> (1981, 1984)<br>Suppression of Unionists (1981, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995)<br>International Affiliation (1981, 1984)<br>International Trade Union Relations (1981, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Refugees (1981, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995) |
| 1984                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Olympic Games (1984)<br>International Trade Union Aid (1984)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1989                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Education for Peace and Disarmament (1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Human and Trade Union Rights <sup>‡</sup> (1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Foreign Aid (1989, 1991, 1995)<br>Political Asylum (1989)<br>Union Action <sup>+</sup> (1989, 1991, 1995)                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 1991                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | APHEDA (1991, 1995)<br>Development Education (1991, 1995)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1995                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Code of Conduct and Social Clause (1995)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Source: (ACTU 1982; 1984; 1987; 1989; 1991; 1995a)<br>*Table shows major topic headings in ACTU International policy according to the year in which they first appeared. The years in which the policies reappeared are in parentheses.<br>† Peace and Disarmament appeared separately only in 1981. Since 1984, Peace and Disarmament are a single topic.<br>‡ The 1989 Human and Trade Union Rights is an extended version of the Human Rights policies from 1981 and 1984.<br>+ The Union Action Policy of 1989 and 1991 was renamed the 'Union Development' Policy in 1991 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

Prior to 1997, ACTU policy on international trade was isolated from its International Affairs policy. Since then, the two tend to overlap. While still working within the Accord framework, the ACTU adopted a basically conciliatory approach to foreign trade. In 1993, the Employment and Jobs Growth Policy announced a three pronged strategy to promote international trade based on encouraging capital investment in tradable goods, the process of technological innovation, and the involvement of trade unions in encouraging investment and innovation (ACTU 1993a). These were the policies of a union movement that felt it still had control over industrial development and social policy to manage trade liberalisation. This was made more clear in the 1995 Trade and Industry Development Policy, where:

Congress realises that the stage has been reached where the world market is now predominant ... Australia must therefore adjust as quickly as possible to achieve a higher level of ability to compete in the new global economy...Congress welcomes the potential for increased economic and social development in the region presented by the possibility of the expansion

of trade under international trade agreements like GATT [the precursor of the WTO] and APEC (ACTU 1995b).

Only two years later, with the hostile Howard government in power, the sentiments regarding trade liberalisation expressed at Congress were notably changed:

ACTU Congress recognizes that the acceleration of the ‘free trade world agenda’ by international capital is of paramount concern. Congress rejects the three basic tenants [sic] of free world trade – market liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation as being exploitative, undemocratic and inhumane where it is undertaken without the acceptance and application of ILO core labour standards (ACTU 1997a).

The transformation between the two periods is striking. As the ACTU lost its connection to state power, it also lost its ability to control the impacts of trade within Australia through political means.<sup>11</sup> What was touted in 1995 as a vehicle for ‘economic and social development’ in the region became ‘exploitative, undemocratic and inhumane’ in 1997. The appeal to a rhetoric of social justice combined with just a hint of the language of class struggle represents the beginning of a significant discursive shift in the ACTU’s construction of the trade agenda, and by association, of globalisation and Australia’s place within it.

The most recent international policies from the 2000 and 2003 Congresses have broken with the framework used between 1981 and 1995. Changes in the policy and its structure reflect the sense of crisis that has characterised ACTU strategy since the turn of the millennium. With the Howard government in power, its membership base in tatters, and a hostile regulatory framework, the ACTU has sought new sources for the power and legitimacy of the trade union movement. The international union movement has provided both. Through the GUFs, unions have access to international campaign resources and tactics. In the 2000 and 2003 policies, the ACTU encourages its affiliates to develop and participate in international campaigns, both through the GUFs and independently (ACTU 2000; 2003d). Through these campaigns, the ACTU partially constructs the international as a scale of industrial action, and therefore a basis for industrial power. At the same time, the ACTU maintains the social justice rhetoric that has characterized international policy since 1981. But now it is developing the moral economy behind the ideas of trade union rights, human

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<sup>11</sup> See Briggs (1999) for a full discussion.

rights and regional development as a legitimization of its opposition to government policy, and as a mobilizing rhetoric.

The fair trade agenda, which became ACTU policy in 2003, is an area where international policy has courted controversy. In her review of the 2000 Congress, Cooper notes ACTU President Sharan Burrow's repeated efforts to establish a sense of the union movement as a vehicle for social fairness. She also notes that the debate at the 2000 Congress over the inclusion of a fair trade amendment to an economic policy courted debate between representatives from the left and right wings of the labour movement. Michael Costa, then the Secretary of the New South Wales Labor Council opposed a fair trade amendment on the grounds that it would distance the ACTU from the ALP, which continued to endorse free trade, and that the union movement should support free trade regardless. The fair trade amendment passed, and has since become the guiding principle of the ACTU's trade strategy (Cooper 2000).

### **Discussion: Whither strategy sharing?**

Of the forms of international practice discussed at the beginning of the chapter, only international affiliations were explicitly incorporated in ACTU policy in 1981. But union practice and union policy have more or less developed in tandem. In 1989, the international policy mentioned APHEDA by name for the first time. The aid agency has been a central aspect of all subsequent international policies. Similarly as the preceding discussion shows, the fair trade agenda is a very recent innovation, but one that has come to heavily shape both ACTU international policy and practice.

The other major form of international activity, strategy sharing, has not yet found a place in the formal international policy of the ACTU. In a policy on "Reaching Out to New Members", the 2003 Congress endorsed the development of a lead organiser exchange program with overseas unions (ACTU 2003c). Congress has otherwise been silent on the issue, as has the ACTU Executive.<sup>12</sup> While these omissions may not be entirely deliberate – this is not meant to be an expose on the limitations of international policy – they do reinforce the idea that the ACTU portrays

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<sup>12</sup> A review of decisions by the ACTU Executive since 1990 found no resolution on strategy sharing relationships with overseas unions (see [http://www.actu.asn.au/public/papers/category\\_index.html#ExecutiveDecisions](http://www.actu.asn.au/public/papers/category_index.html#ExecutiveDecisions)).

the international scale discursively in particular ways. The ACTU portrays the international as a sphere of social justice and moral authority more than as a source of industrial power or innovation. Related to this is the ACTU's portrayal of the international as a world of developing countries, especially those in close proximity to Australia. With regard to these countries, the primary direction of international activity is outward: Australian union support to developing countries.

Some might object that strategy sharing is not a major form of international activity. The timeline for strategy sharing in the appendix to this chapter suggests that there have been plenty of activities around this particular form of international exchange in the last ten years. Moreover, a central feature of ACTU policy and strategy since 1999, to which it has devoted substantial resources, has been the development of organising unionism (Cooper 2001; 2002b; Cooper, Westcott et al. 2003). The Organising Centre, which is charged with developing the organising model in Australia, has done so in close consultation with unions overseas, principally in the United States. The co-director of the Organising Centre identifies these as the most important international relationships for the Australian union movement at the present time (Crosby 2003).

The strategy sharing form of international activity is also unique to Australia. An analysis of the revitalization strategies of union movements in the U.S., U.K., Spain, Germany, and Italy, suggests that union movements ought to be, but are not, learning from one another's experiences (Baccaro, Hamann et al. 2003, p. 130). In particular, they note that movements using a social partnership approach to revitalisation based on consultative institutions could learn from those using a social movement approach based on organising and grassroots mobilisation. The Australian labour movement is not only currently engaged in learning from colleagues overseas, but has a history of doing so. Its practice of using the international as a source of strategic innovations is not only significant internally, but also comparatively.

Nevertheless, the ACTU has some pragmatic reasons to discount the influence of the international aspect of the strategic innovations related to the organising model. Many Australian unionists may have felt burned after the experience with *Australian Reconstructed*. The adoption of organisational reforms on the Swedish model, such as amalgamations, failed to reverse the decline in membership and density, perhaps leaving unionists soured on the promise of foreign union strategies. Furthermore, some argue that it is foolish to adopt a strategy developed by the U.S. union

movement, citing its poor membership and density levels. Another related argument claims that the organising model is tied to the U.S. system of union elections, which has no close parallel in Australian industrial relations.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the ACTU has sought to distance its adoption of an organising framework from its origins with U.S. unions. In *unions@work*, the delegation is quite careful to note that they do not intend to impose a foreign model on the Australian union movement, but rather are interested in finding tools and ideas that can be adapted to the Australian industrial relations environment. While there is certainly truth to the idea that models of unionism cannot be imported from overseas, the adaptation of the organising model to the Australian scene has probably required more rather than less interaction with unions overseas (Crosby 2004).

The union movements in the U.S. and of other developed countries have been more or less invisible in ACTU international policy. Table 5 gives a visual impression of the ACTU's construction of the international scale. It shows the different countries and regions that have been named in each international policy, revealing how the ACTU's view of the international has changed over time. A few key features stand out. First, ACTU policy deals primarily with third world and developing countries. Union movements in the developed world exist only implicitly, through relationships with global peak unions. Table 5 also indicates that the world according to the ACTU has been getting smaller since 1991.

At first glance, it seems odd that the ACTU's world should be shrinking during the period when the effects of globalisation have been most influential. Ironically, it may be that this shrinkage is actually a result of the increasing influence of global pressures on union strategy. The shrinking of the ACTU globe is associated with an increased emphasis in the international policy on the development of trade unionism in the South Pacific and Oceanic region. Since 1997, ACTU international policies "give priority to the development of independent, democratic and effective trade unions in our region" (ACTU 1997b; 2000; 2003b).

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<sup>13</sup> The nature of the union crisis and the possible solutions to it has been debated extensively. For different perspectives see Costa (1997) and Peetz (1998).

**Table 5: International Geography According to ACTU Policy, 1951-2003**

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Place</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1953        | East Germany                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1963        | South Africa                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1973        | Papua New Guinea, South East Asia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 1978        | East Timor, Chile, Middle East, South Africa, Rhodesia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1981        | Middle East, Poland, Afghanistan, Indo-China, South Africa, Namibia, Southern Africa, South America, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Oceania, Indian Ocean, South-East Asia, Northern Ireland                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1984        | Middle East, Poland, Afghanistan, Indo-China, South Africa, Namibia, Southern Africa, South America, East Timor, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Oceania, Indian Ocean, South-East Asia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1989        | <i>Oceania:</i> New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, East Timor, Fiji, New Caledonia, Indian Ocean<br><i>Indo-China:</i> Vietnam, Cambodia<br><i>Latin America:</i> El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile<br><i>Middle East:</i> Lebanon<br>Namibia, Northern Ireland, Philippines, Poland, South Africa<br><u>Southern Africa</u><br><i>South-East Asian Area:</i> Cambodia<br>Peoples Republic of China                                                                                     |
| 1991        | New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, New Caledonia, Indian Ocean<br><i>Latin and Central America:</i> Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile<br><i>Middle East:</i> Israel, Lebanon<br>Northern Ireland<br><i>Indo-China:</i> Vietnam, Cambodia<br>Philippines<br><u>South-East Asian Area</u><br>People's Republic of China<br>Tibet<br><i>Frontline States:</i> Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe<br>South Africa<br><u>Central and Eastern Europe</u> |
| 1995        | East Timor, New Caledonia, Indian Ocean, Ireland                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 1997        | South Pacific, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Kanaky (New Caledonia), Pakistan, New Zealand, Fiji, Burma, Korea, Cambodia, Cuba                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2000        | Papua New Guinea, East Timor, South Pacific Area, Burma, Zimbabwe, Western Sahara, Cambodia, Indonesia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2003        | Asia Pacific Region, South Pacific, Oceania, Iraq, Indonesia, Aceh, Middle East, Colombia, Burma, East Timor                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

Source: (ACTU 1980; 1982; 1984; 1989; 1991; 1995a; 1997b; 2000; 2003d)

So, for the international policy to discuss ACTU strategy-sharing relationships with the U.S., U.K., or Canadian union movements would be both a break with tradition and with a current focus on regional union development. North American unions have always been invisible in international policy, and seem likely to remain so. However, this is not the only reason the ACTU does not discuss strategy sharing

in its international policies. After all, the New Zealand union movement is another partner in strategy sharing, yet these aspects of Australia's relationship with New Zealand are not included in international policy. This reflects the ACTU's construction of the international as a realm of social agency: legitimation based on a moral economy of social justice, relationships with global social movements, and activity based on social regulation.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the ACTU's efforts to draw on the international scale as a source of legitimacy coincide with the beginning of a period of employer and government hostility to unions, and to what Fagan has described as a rescaling of industrial relations within Australia (Fagan 2003). Such an observation is best explained by a relational theory of the politics of scale that makes a problem of the differences between the discursive and material production of scale, and understands that social agents make multiple scales in an effort to secure a spatial fix. The analysis of the ACTU's international activity suggests the way forms of union agency, identity, become woven together to construct interpenetrating scales of activity. The relational theory of scale enables us to see and describe these relationships, and therefore provides some hope of understanding them.

In studying the Australian union movement, three forms of international activity were most significant: strategy sharing, regional solidarity, and global regulation. At this level of analysis, the emphasis is on understanding how these different forms of activity represent different forms of peak body agency, and how they have been socially constructed over time. In Chapter Five, the emphasis changes to a comparison of the ways in which three different unions, the TWU, LHMU, and CFMEU use international activities in their revitalisation strategy. It seems that each union pursues these three common forms of activity, but each to a different extent. The thesis now turns to a description and explanation these differences.

## Appendix 1

### Timeline for the ACTU's strategy sharing relationship with the U.S. union movement

|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1994 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACTU Delegation to the U.S.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1995 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1996 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential visits to Australia by Theresa Conrow (Independent educator) and David Weil (Harvard University Trade Union Program)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1997 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1998 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FIET Congress held in Sydney. Large contingent of SEIU and Canadian union leaders spent time meeting with individual unions to promote organising model.</li> <li>• Delegation of Organisers sent to Canada to work on campaigns coordinated by the Canadian Labour Congress</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 1999 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEIU officials Andy Stern, Tom Woodruff, Alice Dale do a round of influential meetings, including with the LHMU. Spoke to the ACTU Council in Parramatta.</li> <li>• Organising Centre co-director Michael Crosby visits the UK</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bruce Raynor, President of UNITE does some seminars and meetings while on “holidays” in Australia</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trianna Stilton of UNITE and Kevin Pass, the organising director of the ISTC (UK steelworkers union) attend the Organising Centre's first organising conference.</li> <li>• Organising Centre campaign team members Troy Burton and Kaylee Campradt work in the U.S. with SEIU for six months.</li> <li>• Kelly Shay, former organiser with the CPSU of Western Australia goes to UNITE, works there for 2 years</li> <li>• Theresa Conrow and Andy Banks (George Meany Institute) conduct campaigning trainings around Rio Tinto for international delegates in Canberra, and with the CFMEU in Sydney.</li> </ul> |
| 2002 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organising Centre joint director Michael Crosby visits Denmark, Sweden, the UK to speak about organising and to discuss the Australian experience</li> <li>• Michael Crosby Visits U.S. for Organising Centre program development</li> <li>• Organising Centre campaigner Shannon O'Keefe does Cornell / AFL course on corporate campaigning. Works with UNITE for 1 month, SEIU Local 1 for 1 month.</li> <li>• SEIU lead organiser Norman Yemm in Australia</li> <li>• Teresa Conrow and Andy Banks return to do strategic campaign trainings in Victoria</li> </ul>                                              |
| 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEIU Organising director Tom Woodruff attends and speaks at ACTU Congress</li> <li>• Michael Crosby visits U.S.</li> <li>• UNITE contacts Organising Centre for support in an industrial dispute with Brylane. Results in support action coordinated through the NSW Labour Council.</li> <li>• Organising Conference             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amy Gladstein, Organising Director for 1199NY, talking about Political Leverage</li> <li>• Ernest Bennett, Organising Director for UNITE, talking about need for House visits</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                     |
| 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carl Leinonen, Executive Secretary of SEIU Local 1989 in Maine goes to work in TWU NSW Branch for ten weeks.</li> <li>• Tanya Boone, organising director for an SEIU Local works for six weeks with CPSU in the ACT</li> <li>• Organising Centre arranges for six Australian lead organisers to work with unions in the U.S.</li> <li>• Organising Centre sponsors “Next Steps” two-week program for Australian union leaders in the U.S. 35 Australian Trade Union leaders attend a seminar at the George Meany institute in Washington, D.C. and are seconded to various U.S. union locals.</li> </ul>            |

Source: (Crosby 2003; 2004)



## Chapter Five

### International Activity in Three Australian Unions

Globalisation may compel unions to act globally, all else the same. But all else is not the same. Unions organise different groups of workers in various industries, in different places, using distinct ideologies, all of which affect the particular strategies that the union uses. This is all the more true as unions seek not just to exercise power in the defence of their members' interests, but also to rebuild a base of power lost over the last two decades. For these reasons, the international practices of Australian unions cannot be described or explained with reference to a simple universal theory. The international activities that unions actually engage in are not universally oriented toward some vision of global unionism, nor toward a new labour internationalism. Rather, they are contingent on various historical, industrial, spatial and social features affecting the union and its environment.

The first two chapters of the thesis developed the conditions for a theory of international union activity that could take account of these multiple contingencies. Drawing on this interdisciplinary contingency theory, the present chapter examines the particular objectives and environmental features that drive Australian unions in their strategic decisions about international activity. In doing so, labour geography, as a spatial political economy of industrial relations, ties the analysis together. Insights from labour geography do not complete contingency theory, but they do generate new ways to understand international union agency.

This chapter examines the international activities of three Australian unions: the Transport Workers Union (TWU), the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU), and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union (CFMEU). The discussion is structured around the four Harvie Ramsay conditions outlined in Chapter 3 that describe what contingency theory should account for: different *levels* of international activity, different *objectives* of international activity, *incentives for and impediments to* international activity, and the relationships among different *strategies* and the *scales* at which they are carried out. In reviewing the cases according to this structure, the chapter maintains a focus on the spatial agency of unions. In particular, the chapter focuses on how unions seek to

maintain control over space and the social relations of work, referring back to the ideas of labour's spatial fix and place-consciousness. The different structures of the social relations of work are expected to have an impact on the costs and benefits of different kinds of international activity, as well as the way they interact with other scaled strategies. Different spatial fixes of different workers and concepts of place-consciousness should affect the objectives of international activity.

An important caveat must preface this chapter. The empirical analysis in this chapter is not meant as a test of a spatialised contingency theory. It is, rather, meant as a contribution to the further development of that theory through inductive, rather than deductive research. Deductive analysis requires the presentation of a falsifiable research hypothesis. What is presented here is a theoretically informed framework to organise information about unions and their international activities. It is an effort to bring the abstract development of labour geography in the first section of the thesis several steps closer to being an operational theory of international activity. The objective is not to conclusively demonstrate the correspondence of theory to reality, but to demonstrate, by means of case study, the value of the spatial perspective and to suggest further lines of theoretical development. As will become clear in the course of the chapter, to undertake the kind of analysis that the labour geography perspective implies for international union activity would require a vast research project, beyond the means and purpose of the present thesis.

A general objective of the empirical work is to provide as complete a picture as possible of the range of international activities that the different unions participate in. The primary information sources are union documents, journals, newsletters and press releases, media reports and interviews. At each union, informal interviews with key informants turned up crucial information on ongoing or emerging international activities and gave leads for further research. The TWU and LHMU both provided internal union documents including archives, campaign plans, and meeting notes. Due to the shortage of existing research on the international activities of Australian unions, secondary sources were not generally available.

The union is the unit of analysis in this chapter. Each of the three unions is the product of the intense amalgamations that characterized the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the amalgamation process was generally quite smooth, political and ideological frictions still exist between different divisions. These three unions also organise different industries, each with distinct spatial patterns in the social relations

of work. For these reasons, the chapter focuses on particular branches or divisions of the amalgamated super unions. The TWU study focuses on its New South Wales Branch; the CFMEU study focuses on its Energy and Mining Division; the LHMU study focuses on the Cleaning and Security division. However, the position of these organisations within larger union structures is not forgotten.

The chapter uses a spatial contingency theory framework to articulate the differences in the use of international activity by each union. First, the chapter categorises the levels of international activity based on the review of ACTU activities in Chapter Four. The evidence shows that the three unions prioritise different forms of activity. That the spatial contingency theory could explain these differences is the principal argument of the chapter. The objectives of international activity for each union are based on the social relations of work each union confronts. An exploration of the spatial arrangement of these social relations indicates that variations in international strategy are related to spatial features. As well, the chapter considers the objectives of international activity as expressed by the unions. The expressed objectives sometimes correspond with the social relations, but sometimes indicate that international activity may turn on ideological motives.

The chapter proceeds to review the incentives for and impediments to international activity for each union. Based on the spatial contingency theory, variations in the scalar configurations of the social relations of work provide the crucial source of incentives and constraints on international activity in each union. However, a preliminary analysis of these features is based on a list of factors developed in Chapter Three. From there, the chapter considers how the social relations of work might differ for each union, and suggests that these differences actually correspond to the observed differences in international activity. Finally, the chapter provides some observations about the relationships between differently scaled strategies for the three unions. The relational theory of scale from Chapter Two helps articulate and assess the various ways each union weaves different strategies based on different forms of unionism across various scales.

In the end, the analysis of international activity here is speculative rather than definitive. Still, the analysis of the chapter leads to the conclusion that a spatially informed contingency theory leads to insights and explanations that were not previously possible. In conclusion, the chapter draws together these insights to

suggest where the theory is strongest, as well as where further research should progress.

### **Levels of international activity in the TWU, LHMU and CFMEU**

Harvie Ramsay proposed that a theory of international union activity should account for different ‘levels of activity’, by which he meant different structural levels. In other words, international activities carried out through the ICFTU will be different from those carried out through GUFs, and both will be different from activities carried out through bilateral relationships between unions. Such distinctions focus only on the institutional aspect of international activity. Institutional variation is only one dimension of distinction between international activities. In the Australian union movement, certain functional distinctions are also important. In Chapter Four, a review of the activity and policy of the ACTU revealed three functionally distinct levels of international activity: strategy exchange, regional solidarities, and global campaigns. Since the ACTU reflects the Australian union movement at large, it is reasonable to assume that the functional levels of international activity observed in the ACTU provide a useful way to distinguish the different possible forms of international activity its affiliates might engage in.

Of the three unions examined, each engages to some extent in each of these three activities, but focus on one or two in particular. The TWU is heavily involved in strategic campaigns and regional solidarity, but not as much in global campaigns. Overall, the LHMU has a more robust international presence than the other two unions, but is primarily focused on strategic exchanges and global campaigns with less emphasis on regional solidarity. The CFMEU is heavily involved in global campaigns, with little focus on regional solidarities and strategic exchanges.

There is a correlation between the different kinds of international activity the unions engage and what Waterman called the ‘axis and flow’ of that activity. The axis refers to whether international activity occurs between unions in developed and less-developed countries. Flow refers to the direction of immediate support from the activity in question. Do benefits seem to be flowing from a union in one country to a union in another country, or are all unions involved benefiting simultaneously? Axis and flow help describe qualitative differences in the spatiality of the unions’ international practices. For example, being primarily engaged in strategy exchanges

and regional solidarity, the TWU's activities follow two axes and flows. Strategy exchanges flow from North America in to Australia. Regional solidarities flow out from Australia to countries in the South Pacific region.

*The international activities of the TWU<sup>14</sup>*

In the TWU, international activities centred on strategy sharing links and regional solidarity are more prevalent than those centred on global regulation. The national TWU has not adopted the organising model in as fundamental a way as certain service sector unions, such as the LHMU and HSUA. Nevertheless, the NSW branch has actively sought to learn from the U.S. organising unions directly as well as through the Organising Centre. In terms of international activity, the TWU is most well known for its close ties of solidarity with the Fijian labour movement. The TWU has a long history of supporting Fijian unionists with bans and blockades, and more recently with training and technical support. As for international activities related to global regulation, the TWU is active with the ITF, and has pursued some efforts to regulate occupational health and safety in the trucking industry with U.S. unions.

To date, the TWU's North American relationships centre on the exchange of strategies and information. Having adopted an organising approach to renewal, the branch is heavily involved in the projects of the ACTU Organising Centre. In 2003-2004, the TWU hosted a lead organiser from an SEIU local in Missouri as well as the President of an SEIU local in Maine. It also sent one of its lead organisers for three months to train and work with UNITE. In addition, the branch secretary travelled to the U.S. to participate in the Next Steps program at the George Meany Center. All of these are activities coordinated by the Organising Centre. As well, the TWU has begun to build its own links with unions in the U.S., principally SEIU, UNITE and the Teamsters. In the past, the Teamsters helped the TWU resolve a dispute with a multinational waste disposal company. Today, links with the Teamsters are limited to information exchange (Crosby 2004; Sheldon 2004).

The TWU's relationships in the region are somewhat deeper and involve both skill exchanges and industrial solidarity. In particular, the union has a strikingly deep

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<sup>14</sup> For the rest of this chapter, the acronym TWU refers to the New South Wales branch. References to other branches will be indicated. The term 'national TWU' will be used to refer to the union as a whole.

relationship with the Fijian and New Zealand union movements. The TWU has used bans, strikes, and political leverage in support of Fijian workers. In New Zealand, the TWU is beginning a program of three-month exchanges with the NZ Dairy Workers Union with the objective of sharing organising skills and resources. The national TWU also has plans underway to fund organisers and training with the NZ National Distribution Union for an organising project with waterfront workers (Sheldon 2004).

The TWU's Fijian connections are quite dramatic. In 1978, Fijian unionists went out on strike at Nadi Airport in sympathy with TWU members. The Fijian government broke the strike, arresting five unionists and ordering a return to work. When the TWU discussed the dispute with Australian Prime Minister Fraser, they insisted that the government intervene on behalf of their Fijian comrades. The branch secretary credits this episode as the beginning of a long history of mutual support (Sheldon 2003; 2004). In 1987 Fijian unionists were targets of a military coup, prompting the TWU and MUA, along with New Zealand transport unions to blockade the country (Harcourt 2000).

During a more recent coup, in 2000, the TWU undertook a ban, refusing to transport goods to or from Fiji. This solidarity action prompted the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to sue the TWU under the secondary boycott provisions of the *Trade Practices Act* (LaborNet 2000). After a demonstration of rank and file support for Fijian workers and a promise to publicly humiliate the ACCC for its support of the undemocratic regime in Fiji, the suit was dropped. Two years later, the Fiji Public Service Association, representing workers at the Nadi Airport requested support during a dispute with the government. In support, the national TWU grounded a plane in Australia with the Fijian Industrial Relations Minister on board. The TWU's promise of financial support and industrial action helped bring the dispute to an end (Sheldon 2004).

Currently, the TWU has set up a training program in Fiji on union organising tactics. As well, they have joint projects underway with the HSUA. In the aftermath of the 2000 coup, the TWU continues to monitor political developments. The history of TWU bans means that politicians in that country take the TWU seriously. In a 2003 *Fiji Times* interview, branch Secretary Tony Sheldon said the TWU would not "rule out" the possibility of taking sanctions if the Fijian government did not recognize a Supreme Court decision guaranteeing cabinet representation for the Fiji Labour Party (Cakau 2003a). This mere comment prompted a debate on the floor of

the Fijian parliament, during which the Prime Minister complained of trade union interference in the country's domestic affairs (Cakau 2003b).

In the NSW branch of the TWU, interactions through the trade secretariats do not seem to constitute a major form of international activity, though the TWU is an active participant in GUF-sponsored campaigns. The TWU is affiliated with the ITF, and participates in some of its campaigns, both as a benefactor, and as a recipient. The ITF helped resolve a dispute between the TWU and the courier company, TNT. Generally, the TWU uses the ITF as a source of information about the companies it negotiates with, and for some studies of the bus industry, particularly with regard to Occupational Health and Safety. The TWU also participated in an IUF-coordinated campaign against Coca-Cola to support Columbian and Guatemalan workers (Sheldon 2004).

#### *The international activities of the LHMU*

The LHMU has significant international activities at all three functional levels. Since declaring itself an 'organising union' in 1998, the LHMU has developed close strategy sharing connections to the SEIU (Tarrant 2004; Crosby 2003). At the moment, the strategy sharing links are a more or less one way flow of ideas and training from the U.S. union, but may eventually become something of an international dialogue. The LHMU is also active in regional solidarity, engaging closely in recent years with unions in Indonesia and East Timor. In 2002, the LHMU won a Solidarity Award from Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA for its involvement in regional development projects (LHMU 2002c). Lastly, in terms of global regulation, the LHMU is both a recipient and a supporter of GUF-sponsored solidarity activities, ranging from protest letters, to rallies of support. Most of these regulatory activities are instrumentally focused on creating and using points of leverage with particular companies, rather than on the production of a global legal framework.

For the last five years, the LHMU has had a structured exchange program with the SEIU. To complement their own training program, the LHMU sends mid-level organisers to work on campaigns with SEIU. The relatively more structured and entrenched organising environment at SEIU helps LHMU organisers to develop certain skills. At the same time, the SEIU sends senior officials to work in Australia with LHMU branches. From this, the LHMU gains both further legitimacy for the

organising model, but also new ideas about how to incorporate an organising perspective into strategic planning at top organisational levels (Tarrant 2004).

Curiously, the LHMU opted to not participate in the Organising Centre's 2004 lead organiser exchange program. This exchange program placed Australian lead organisers in the SEIU Wave program, a sort of boot camp for new organisers. One LHMU official said they chose not to participate because they are happy with their own training, and that the three-month duration was too long for LHMU organisers, many of whom are mothers with families. While continuing to describe the SEIU as a 'thought leader' for the LHMU, she indicated that the nature of the relationship between the two unions could be changing. Having adopted the organising model, the LHMU is now in the process of adapting it to the circumstances peculiar to their institutional and industrial environment. Once the LHMU has fully adapted organising, she anticipates the one-way flow of information about organising to become more of a dialogue (Tarrant 2004). But while the value of continuing to send organisers overseas to be trained might be waning, the LHMU still sent six senior officials to the Organising Centre's union leadership conference in Washington, D.C. (ACTU 2004c).

Regionally, the LHMU is active with APHEDA, and also engages directly with unions covering similar groups of workers in neighbouring countries. In 2002, APHEDA asked the LHMU for technical assistance in a project to develop a trade union infrastructure in the newly independent East Timor. In response, the LHMU sent an organiser, Didge McDonald from their Northern Territory branch for the six month project with the East Timorese peak union body, the Konfederasaun Sindicatu Timor Lorosa'e (KSTL). McDonald provided assistance with all aspects of union development: building national structures, training delegates, organising, and strategic planning (LHMU 2002b; 2003c). Since, the LHMU has stayed involved with the KSTL as well as with certain affiliates. In 2003, the KSTL asked the LHMU to represent them in an unfair dismissal dispute with the Australia-based Chubb Security (Schofield 2004; LHMU 2004a; 2004b). As well, the LHMU's Northern Territory office coordinated a demonstration in solidarity with workers trying to negotiate a collective agreement with a Darwin-owned aviation company (LHMU 2003d).

A two year lockout at the Shangri-La hotel in Jakarta beginning in 2001 was one of the major issues of the international union movement in recent years, and one in which the LHMU played a significant role. Over the course of the dispute, the



LHMU organised letter writing campaigns, street demonstrations, solidarity actions, and collected money to support the locked out workers. In these actions, the LHMU participated in a larger global campaign organised by the IUF, the global union representing hospitality workers. Australian participation in the campaign became particularly instrumental when, halfway through the dispute, Shangri-La announced plans to begin operating in Australia (LHMU 2003e).

The global campaign against Shangri-La is representative of the kinds of global regulatory activities that the LHMU gets involved in through the global unions. The LHMU has been the beneficiary of global union support about as often as it has been a donor. In 2000, the IUF found support for the LHMU when Cadbury-Schweppes locked out 150 members from its Tullamarine plant (LHMU 2000a). The same year, the LHMU organised a protest at the Korean embassy in support of striking hotel workers (LHMU 2000b). In 2001, the same year it sent an organiser to help with the Shangri-La campaign, the LHMU received support from the global union representing cleaners, UNI, in a dispute with French-owned finance company AXA (LHMU 2001b). In September 2002, the ICFTU coordinated a campaign backing the LHMU in a dispute at the Sydney Hilton (LHMU 2002d). That July, members working at a Coca-Cola plant in Melbourne took action in solidarity with Colombian and Guatemalan Coke employees (LHMU 2002c). A lockout of LHMU members from an Adelaide Bridgestone plant in 2003 drew support from the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), a global union that maintains a framework agreement with the tire manufacturer (LHMU 2003f).

The same year, 2003, the LHMU also organised a campaign in conjunction with SEIU against Australia-based shopping centre developer Westfield's. The campaign is significant in that it highlights the dual nature of the relationship between the LHMU and SEIU, and the complicated nature of coordinated campaigning and global regulation in the cleaning industry. The LHMU's campaign began as a national exercise, prompted by the failure of several unionised cleaning companies to bid on major Westfield's contracts. The contracts were picked up by small operators who didn't have the cash flow to keep wages current, and who competed on margins of labour costs and working conditions. Rather than go after each little cleaning company, the LHMU began to target Westfield's contract tendering practices (Schofield 2004).

This dovetailed with an SEIU Justice for Janitors campaign against Westfields in the U.S. While the LHMU national assistant secretary of the Cleaning and Security division, Jo-Anne Schofield, points to many differences between the two campaigns, they were linked by a common focus on Westfields' contract tendering practices (LHMU 2003a). LHMU and SEIU joined forces to organise coordinated industrial action against Westfields on June 15, 2003. Since, even though the Australian and SEIU Westfield's campaigns are formally separate, both unions conceive it as an international campaign. The two unions, in conjunction with UNI and the New Zealand Service and Food Workers Union have also proposed a global framework agreement on contract tendering with Westfields (LHMU 2003b). Aside from meeting with resistance to such an agreement from Westfields management, the unions have also tabled the framework agreement due to their uncertainty about the real efficacy of such instruments (Schofield 2004).

*The international activities of the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division*<sup>15</sup>

The mining division of the CFMEU engages in much more focused and conventional international activities. Since the mid-1990s, the union has been instrumentally involved in a number of international campaigns intended to regulate the human resource practices of mining giant Rio Tinto. The Rio Tinto Global Union Network (RTGUN), of which the CFMEU is a founding and key member, is one of the most active multinational networks in the global union movement. Unions dealing with Rio Tinto have also coordinated some very innovative and influential shareholder campaigns. Although the mining division has developed a strong organising unit, its strategy sharing links tend to be weak. Similarly, while supporting APHEDA development project, the union is not intimately involved in regional solidarity efforts in the same way that the TWU and LHMU have been. The focus in the CFMEU's international activity on coordinating workers globally to deal with the Rio Tinto multinational fits the more conventional ideas of international unionism as an upscaling of union activity to match the geographic range of the employer.

Before discussing the Rio Tinto network, and the other forms of global regulation that the CFMEU is involved in, a couple of comments on the CFMEU's

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<sup>15</sup> In the rest of the chapter, references to the CFMEU should be interpreted as references to the Mining Division of that amalgamated union.

efforts at strategy sharing and regional solidarities are in order. The director of the mining division's organising program notes that the relationships between the CFMEU and organising unions abroad are not as strong or as formal as those maintained by the TWU or LHMU. The CFMEU has sent a few individuals to the U.S. for training programs with the United Mineworkers. In 2004, the CFMEU agreed to send someone on the Organising Centre's lead organiser exchange program, but did so reluctantly. Nevertheless, the mining division has a strong organising program that reflects strategies and tactics borrowed from overseas. The CFMEU's organising program has occurred through the ACTU and the broader Australian union movement with few direct contacts with unions overseas (Burton 2004).

Still, international strategy sharing connections are not far away. The CFMEU's organising coordinator is a graduate of the Organising Works program and former Organising Centre lead organiser who spent six months working with the SEIU. Thus, in a 2002 campaign in Western Australia's Pilbara region, the CFMEU became the first Australian union to use a tactic called the 'blitz'. In the blitz, organisers visited a large number of unorganised miners at their homes over a single weekend (Ellem 2003). The choice and successful implementation of this tactic, which is a staple of many SEIU campaigns, is probably related to the international experiences of the CFMEU and Organising Centre staff members.<sup>16</sup>

The research conducted for this thesis did not turn up any instance of regional solidarity that was clearly distinct from forms of international activity centered around global regulation. For instance, the RTGUN includes unions in Indonesia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, but they are not active members, and the CFMEU does not seem to have taken special interest in working closely with those unions in their struggle with Rio Tinto. The national CFMEU has sponsored projects in India to build schools and prevent the use of child labour (CFMEU 2003b). While this activity shares the social justice focus that characterise the regional solidarity efforts of APHEDA and the TWU, the project is isolated, and is not occurring in the South Pacific and Oceanic region. Outside of its support for APHEDA, then, the CFMEU is not focused on regional solidarity or trade union development as part of its international activity.

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, it also depends on the implementation of those experiences in a totally different industrial relations environment, culture, and industry. The above argument should not be read as suggesting that credit for the successes of Australian unions or organisers belongs with U.S. unions or with a particular organising model. For more details on the campaign in the Pilbara, see Ellem (2003).

From 1997, the CFMEU was involved in a series of disputes with Rio Tinto over its efforts to exclude unions from its Australian operations. After the passage of the *Workplace Relations Act* in 1996, Rio Tinto swiftly attempted to move its employees onto non-union collective agreements and individual contracts. By 1998, the process resulted in strikes at all Rio Tinto operations where the CFMEU was the principal union (CFMEU 2000b). That February, the national secretary of the CFMEU attended a conference in Johannesburg organised by the ICEM. The objective of the conference was to bring together unions representing workers in Rio Tinto's operations in various countries to form the RTGUN. At its inaugural meeting, the RTGUN announced the establishment of a network that could exchange information, could thoroughly scrutinize Rio Tinto's policies and operations, and could coordinate efforts to protect basic human and trade union rights in all Rio Tinto operations (ICEM 1998). At the second meeting, in 2000, the network affirmed that it would coordinate a worldwide campaign to pressure Rio Tinto to abide by the ILO's core labour standards as well as the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The network also announced its intention to cooperate with others campaigning over human rights issues and the environmental problems stemming from Rio Tinto's operations (RTGUN 2000).

In March 2000, the CFMEU joined in a global shareholder action against Rio Tinto, putting resolutions forward at shareholder meetings in London and in Melbourne including one to implement a code of labour practice. The resolution attracted the support of 17 percent of shareholder votes cast (CFMEU 2000c; 2001). Later, in July 2000, CFMEU miners went out on strike as part of a global week of action coordinated by the RTGUN (CFMEU 2000a). As the global campaign reached its apogee, Rio Tinto had begun to resolve many of its disputes with the CFMEU. It made new certified agreements with the CFMEU at its unionised sites and agreed to give access to its non-union sites (ICEM 2001).

The CFMEU has continued to participate in the RTGUN and to work internationally to regulate working conditions at Rio Tinto. The unions continue to use shareholder actions to put corporate governance and labour rights items on the agenda at the AGM in both countries where Rio Tinto is listed. The CFMEU hosted a demonstration at Rio Tinto's headquarters in Perth prior to the 2003 AGM in Sydney that drew miners from the U.S. and Canada (CFMEU 2003a). In recent years, the RTGUN has attempted to draw Rio Tinto into a discussion about the development of

a global framework agreement. However, in December 2003, Rio Tinto's CEO cancelled a meeting with RTGUN representatives about such an agreement. Network affiliates sent letters to the CEO in protest of the cancellation. The future of the agreement, and the actions that the RTGUN affiliates might take to compel the company to negotiate remain unclear.

Perhaps due to the success of the global Rio Tinto campaign, the CFMEU has recently started another initiative to promote global regulation. In 2002, the CFMEU, along with the Maritime Union of Australia, hosted an international conference to discuss the opportunities presented by globalisation. At that meeting, trade union leaders and members from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, South Africa, the USA, Canada, Japan and France issued a "Newcastle Declaration" outlining their views on the priorities of the global union movement, with particular emphasis on the encouragement of direct links between workers in different countries, the importance of new organising, and the need for a global floor of labour rights (MUA 2002).

### **Objectives of international activity**

It should now be clear that there are very important qualitative differences in the international activities of the three unions under review. Each union appears to orient toward particular functional levels of activity. Thus, while the CFMEU is more engaged in a kind of international activity that most would immediately recognise as global unionism, it is not possible to assert that it is somehow more internationally oriented than the other two unions. Nor could one claim the same of the LHMU, even though it has a more even mix of international activities. But the object of the chapter is not to identify the most appropriate form or level of international activity, but to identify and propose explanations for differences in how unions use the international scale. Following the Harvie Ramsay conditions, the first variable affecting union choices are the objectives of international activity.

As noted earlier in the thesis, union objectives are notoriously slippery creatures, both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, the perspective taken here is the perspective of labour geography, applied to the issue of union revitalisation. In the spatial political economy of industrial relations, a strategy of union revitalisation requires that the union restores its ability to control a certain area of space, generally through some form of control over the social relations of work.

For the unions, the objective of any revitalisation strategy is to generate a capacity to control particular social relations of work, especially production relations within the confines of the nation state. Sometimes, controlling production relations within the nation state involves the use of activity at the international scale. In all cases, the objective is the ability to control space, and ultimately to secure a spatial fix.

Aside from this structural objective, which according to the spatialised contingency theory all unions must deal with, other non-structural factors also affect union objectives, and revitalisation objectives. Of particular interest in this thesis has been the impact on strategy of union identity historical ties. Ideological commitments to industrial power, socialism, or social justice can compel unions toward particular courses of action and away from others. Where the configurations of the social relations of work fail to provide a clear course of action, these pressures may be crucial. Similarly, a union's historical connections to certain ways of doing things or to particular institutions can produce similar pressures. Looking at the way union leaders describe international activities provides a window onto some of those ideological and historical factors that could otherwise be missed.<sup>17</sup>

### *Why unions say they act internationally*

In interviews, speeches, and union policy documents, leaders of the unions under review convey certain objectives for their international activities. On the one hand, examining these expressed objectives can indicate whether a concern with controlling social relations of work really matters to unions. On the other hand, the examination also reveals less tangible aspects of union objectives like ideology, history, and politics. The existence of such intangibles can be equally as influential as structural features like the scaling of the social relations of work.

One TWU official discussed the reasons he felt the union should be involved in strategy sharing and regional solidarity. Because the connection between the union and the ALP is less certain now than in the past, the TWU is seeking to get members more politically active. Through its relationship with the SEIU, the TWU is developing organising tactics, and more specifically, political organising and

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<sup>17</sup> Another way to think about the objectives of international union activity from a spatial perspective is through Johns' distinction between accommodationist and transformational solidarity (Johns 1998; Herod 2001b; 2002a; 2003). However, this distinction was rejected in Chapter Three as introducing normative distinctions that are difficult if not impossible to verify in practice.

campaigning. The relationship with UNITE is slightly different. UNITE is a militant union of U.S. textile workers, and along with SEIU is one of the strongest organising unions in the U.S. The express purpose of the relationship between the TWU and UNITE is to help get the recently amalgamated textile, clothing and footwear division more focused on organising. Aside from the strategy sharing aspects of the TWU's relationships with U.S. unions, this official felt that these links could lead to solidarity action down the road.

In its regional solidarity activities, the express motives of the TWU are both structural and historical. Many Australian water transport companies have started operations in New Zealand. By helping build union capacity in New Zealand, the TWU hopes to prevent Australian operators from getting the idea to exclude unions at home. As well, many New Zealand workers wind up in waterfront transport operations in Australia. Small operators and small fleets can recruit these workers at a fraction of what Australian workers would pay. So there is also a motive to prevent wage competition between mobile groups of workers between the two countries. In contrast to these very economic motives, the reasons for the close relationship with Fiji given by the TWU official reflected a different kind of objective. On his view, solidarity with Fiji is a product of the history of mutual support between the TWU and Fijian unions. As well, the TWU is motivated by a sense of 'neighbourliness' and a 'global perspective' that directs its strategy and activities (Sheldon 2004).

A somewhat different picture of union motives appeared in discussions of international activity with two national officers of the LHMU. For one, the objective of international activity is to help the union win. From this perspective, the relationship with the SEIU is the most important international activity for the union in providing the LHMU with 'seeds of renewal'. Her view was also that solidarity action in the region can take the union away from its central objective (Tarrant 2004). Interestingly, the other national officer interviewed took a similar perspective on the objectives of international activity, but argued that relationships with GUFs were of key importance. The objective of international activity is to build power. She said that the LHMU and SEIU had tabled a framework agreement with Westfields because it was not clear that such a tool could actually help the unions organise or give them leverage. Overall, her perspective was that international regulatory activity could be useful in the cleaning and security industries, but in fairly isolated ways (Schofield 2004).

In contrast to the focus on building power through international activity, the LHMU's media releases discussing regional solidarity focus on the importance of trade union rights, especially in companies that concern the LHMU. Reports of LHMU support in the Shangri-La dispute initially indicated that the union was concerned with the use of "North American style union-busting" practices in the region (LHMU 2001a). Once Shangri-La began to expand to Australia, the objective of support became more clearly about the mutual defence of Australian union rights, with the deputy national secretary arguing that "if [Shangri-La] wants a trouble free existence from our union [it] will make genuine attempts to fix up the problems of [its] Indonesian workforce" (LHMU 2002a). A similar sentiment appeared in a media release requesting member's support for the Chubb dispute in East Timor. The media officer encouraged members to send a message to "show that LHMU members are watching how Chubb operates – whether in Australia or East Timor" (LHMU 2004). One national officer agreed that this was a valuable objective of regional solidarity. Commenting on the Chubb dispute, she argued that informing members about a company's excesses elsewhere in the world can help agitate and mobilise them and can serve as a reminder about the benefits of unionisation (Schofield 2004).

In describing the objectives of its global campaign against Rio Tinto, the former CFMEU National Secretary John Maitland argued that:

the rationale ... is no longer based on socialist ideology or altruistic notions of aid and development. For ... the CFMEU it is based on the recognition that we are often competitors and therefore must get together to reduce the threat of cutthroat competition that leaves all workers worse off (Maitland 1998a).

Elsewhere, he argued similarly that the objective of international cooperation is to regulate the terms on which workers can compete (Maitland 1998b). The overall idea is that the same logic that drives national unionism also drives international unionism. These tie directly in to the express objectives of the RTGUN: to provide a floor of labour rights over which the company will not bargain or try to remove. In a speech on the Rio Tinto shareholder campaign, Maitland argues that it has an interest in ensuring a "fair deal" for their members (CFMEU 2001). Shareholder campaigns are just one way that the CFMEU can pursue that "fair deal". As well, the CFMEU protects the interests of its members as shareholders in the companies for which they



work. The argument runs that the interests of CFMEU members as shareholders should complement their interests as company shareholders.

Overall, the three unions express a broad range of objectives for the international activities in which they participate. In some cases, the expressed objectives coincide with the theoretical objective of controlling the social relations of work. In other cases they do not. For the CFMEU, the theoretical objective of international activity is control over the management practices of a single multinational employer, which is very close to the expressed objective. However while it was not quite possible to say why the TWU or LHMU were involved in regional solidarity, the express objectives indicate that there are ideological as well as structural reasons. In the TWU, ideology and history seem to have influenced the decision by the union to get involved in Fiji, while the regional structure of certain industries influences its relations with New Zealand. For the LHMU, regional solidarities are motivated to a much smaller extent by ideology. The regional structure of employers in the industry appears to play a more important role. These observations suggest the need for a more detailed analysis of the scalar structure of the social relations of work.

### **The incentives and impediments to international activity**

Given the objectives of international activity, the problem is to identify what might make some form of international activity a particularly attractive way to realise those objectives. Because international activities require that unions invest resources, there is an implicit calculus behind every international activity: the benefits that the activity provides in terms of its objectives must exceed the cost to the union in terms of resources and foregone opportunities. While this is easy to state in theory, it is quite hard to pinpoint the cost-benefit analysis that actually takes place in unions. The margins on which costs and benefits are to be compared are not obvious, and may not always be consistent. The objective of international activity is revitalisation or the extension of control over space, something difficult if not impossible to measure. The costs associated with international activity can be more straightforward calculation of resource costs, but even so, the comparison of resource costs and power gains may not even be sensible. In addition, unions, as bureaucratic structures cannot necessarily be attributed with the logical agency that guarantees optimal decision-making.

However, different industries have different configurations of the social relations of work. As a result, the means by which unions endeavour to control those social relations of work, including the choice of scale are shaped and constrained by those structural differences. The objective of any revitalisation strategy, and international activity in particular is to develop control over those social relations of work. Therefore, one way to look at the incentives and impediments of international activity is to look at how the social relations of work differ between the groups of workers the three unions represent. Before looking at how the spatial configuration of the social relations of work might press the different unions into different international activities, this section considers again the list of incentives and impediments developed in Chapter Three.

### **Non-spatial incentives and impediments**

In Chapter 2, the review of literature on international union activity showed that most scholars have found that the presence of international institutions, structural flexibility in unions, and improved communications technology are incentives for international union activity. As for impediments, the review identified language barriers, fear of loss of autonomy, ideological differences, legal constraints, preoccupation with national and local affairs, and lack of member interest. Each of these incentives and impediments has affected at least one union in its pursuit of international activity.

It is impossible to deny the role of international institutions in facilitating the international activities of the three unions under study. Only the TWU seems to downplay the significance of global union bodies. For the LHMU, the global bodies have provided a striking reciprocal pattern of solidarity activities. The LHMU seems to benefit from its involvement with GUFs about as often as it is supporting the campaign of some other union. As well, the CFMEU's international involvements are based almost entirely on its links through the ICEM.

The influence of the Internet is also substantial. The LHMU uses the Internet to collect messages of solidarity from its members, for both local and international campaigns, as well as for information. The CFMEU as well uses the Internet to disseminate information about its campaign with Rio Tinto and about the activities of

the RTGUN. In a speech, Maitland confirmed the value of the Internet in aiding the flow of information between unionists in different countries.

Several impediments did not apparently affect the unions in the conduct of international activities. Even where international activities involved unions in non-English-speaking countries, no union noted the importance of language barriers in limiting international activity. Nor did unions complain of their fears of losing autonomy. But the fact that these did not come up does not mean that they are not relevant. Language barriers may just reinforce patterns of international activity to the point that the obstacle to communication becomes invisible. As well, the GUFs may be so important in international activity precisely because they do not demand any loss of autonomy from their affiliates. But the limited authority of the GUFs also limits their capacities to act as peak bodies. Once again, these limitations are not obvious from the case studies, but may matter anyway.

Ideological differences have impacts for the CFMEU and the LHMU. Different ideas about the purpose of the network may compromise the efficacy of the RTGUN. One informant commented that the network has recently gotten into difficulties because of differences of opinion between U.S. and Australian unions. In particular, the U.S. unions have been more focused on pursuing their own sectional interests in meetings between the RTGUN and Rio Tinto executives, overshadowing the network's objective of global rights to collective bargaining. The LHMU Cleaning and Security division has also found itself involved in an ideological struggle within its GUF, UNI. In UNIs property services section, there is a rift emerging between European unions that favour a social partnership approach, and unions in North American and the Pacific region that favour a more grassroots organising agenda. The decision by the LHMU and SEIU to table their framework agreement with Westfields reflects this ideological schism.

Legal constraints seem only to have really affected the TWU, and there only slightly. The TWU did face a legal challenge to its ban on Fiji during the 2000 coup from the ACCC. However, through careful politicking, the union evaded prosecution. But it remains possible that the TWU will face similar challenges in the future should it pursue its threat to engage in more bans. Prohibitions on the right to strike in Australia, and on secondary boycotts can potentially hinder any union that wants to get seriously involved in solidarity actions.

Finally, the lack of member interest is not necessarily an obstacle for the three unions, and seems to be one that they have actively attempted to correct. The CFMEU keeps members involved in the RTGUN, and brought both officials and rank-and-file delegates from many countries together for the Newcastle conference. At the TWU, the branch secretary pointed out that many of their members are first-generation Australians from developing countries, and tend to be sympathetic to its regional solidarity efforts. To confirm support for its activities in Fiji, the TWU polled its membership and coordinated meetings between TWU delegates and Fijian unionists. This was true at the LHMU as well, where the union actively sought to poll its membership on issues in East Timor and to involve them in AHPEDA (Schofield 2004).

Aside from this list of factors, the empirical research provides a few other insights into what constrains and facilitates the international activities. One is the very low resource investment that the unions make in their international activities. In terms of strategy sharing relationships, unions simply pay for organisers or union leaders to travel overseas for short stays. In the lead organiser exchange with SEIU, the U.S. union pays the TWU organisers salary while she attends their training program for new organisers (Crosby 2003). Aside from paying for airfare and related costs, the TWU gets free training, while the SEIU gets a seasoned organiser for three months. The TWU's regional solidarity links with Fiji and New Zealand involve some significant investment in developing training programs. But these costs can be shared among participating unions, and in any case really only involve sending trainers abroad for brief periods.

Blockades and solidarity actions can be somewhat more expensive, especially if they happen to attract prosecution under Australia's regulations preventing secondary boycotts. For the most part, solidarity activities in the three unions under review involve low-cost activities such as non-industrial demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, and visibility activities. The TWU and CFMEU have both coordinated industrial actions to support international campaigns, but only in isolated cases. In the LHMU's campaign against Westfields, solidarity action with SEIU took the form of non-industrial demonstrations.

*How the social relations of work shape the choice of international activity*

The discussion of the social relations of work for these three unions is necessarily brief, and so is also somewhat superficial. Once again, it is meant to be taken as an illustrative, rather than a complete discussion. A more detailed analysis could focus more deeply on the social relations of work in particular industries, how they intersect with social relations in other industries, and how they are scaled, giving structural support to relationships between unions across industries and scales, as well as to relationships between unions and various social movements. Herod has recently shown how the spatial arrangement of the textile industry has lead workers to unite globally with consumer advocates (Herod 2003). In the language of this chapter, it is the sphere of consumption, rather than production or reproduction over which unions attempt to achieve control through their international activities. Similarly, the international activities studied here bear particular relationships to the social relations facing the workers that the three unions represent.

In the TWU, members generally provide services that are consumed locally or nationally: taxi and bus rides, courier services, baggage handling, transporting concrete. They are also services that can only be produced at the point of consumption. Unlike other services, such as call centre or information technology, transport services are physically produced as they are consumed. The companies that employ the workers also tend to be national firms, many times with offices only in one state or one city, though the industry is certainly not without multinational firms. The companies that purchase the services of these firms are quite often, though by no means exclusively multinational firms. Of greater significance than whether or not the firms are multinational is their financial status. If the firms are publicly listed, then management is driven by global competitive pressures -compelled to earn profits at or above the global industrial average - no matter if the company operates locally or internationally. In short, labour markets, production processes and output markets in the industry are more or less confined to national or sub-national scales. Only the prerogatives of management and of the companies that consume transportation services really extend across borders.

Also significant are the fixed costs associated with running transport companies and the regulation of the industry. Some facets of the transport industry

have the kind of increasing returns to scale that favour natural monopolies. Every facet of the transport industry requires workers to use public goods provided by local or national governments. At the same time, governments have an interest in maintaining an efficient, or at least functional system of transportation. Therefore, the relationships between transport companies, transport workers, and the state can be close; often conflictual.

The spatial configuration of the social relations confronting workers in the Cleaning and Security division of the LHMU bear some similarities to those in the transport industry. Cleaning and security services are produced and consumed on site, limiting the spatial range of labour and output markets for each particular worker. Unlike the transport industry, cleaning services are very loosely regulated outside of the system of industrial awards and federal and state labour law. Indeed, many workers in the sector are casual or part time workers, limiting their recourse to even the limited protections they do have under the law. This situation is compounded by contracting processes that dominate the industry wherein the company consuming cleaning services is not the same as the company that nominally employs the worker. While not quite as legally shadowy as the world of labour hire companies, the issue of where different duties lie in the employment contract can become hazy. Again, it is an industry where labour markets, output markets and production processes are highly localised. Managerial prerogatives are more highly localised than in the case of the transport industry, though this depends more on the particular firm. Also unlike the transport industry, Cleaning and Security services do not attract much regulatory attention from government bodies. The only special relationship between governments and the cleaning industry comes out of the privatisation process, with governments now using private contractors to provide cleaning and security services (LHMU 2003).

Not surprisingly, the social relations of work for the CFMEU mining division are utterly different. In the words of John Maitland, “the mining industry in Australia has been dominated by multinational corporations and subject to international competitive pressures for more than thirty years” (Maitland 1998b). In mining, production processes - the extraction of resources from the earth - must occur at specific sites. But these processes depend on incredibly high capital investment and rather specific kinds of tangible and intangible assets, producing the kinds of economies of scale and transaction costs that give rise to a multinational structure in

which a single firm conducts mining operations in multiple locations. Though large firms dominate, most mining output is sold in competitive commodity markets over which no one supplier or buyer has much control. In the late 1990s, coal was still Australia's single largest export industry, accounting for 11% of total export earnings. The high profile of the coal industry gives it a certain influence in domestic and local politics, and in business relationships (Maitland 1998b; 1998a). In short, for CFMEU miners, labour markets and production processes are local, while output markets and managerial prerogatives are fully international.

Considered together, the only thing that is really similar across all three unions is the local nature of labour markets and production processes. None of these unions needs to worry about their job being outsourced to another country. A slighter similarity has to do with the global nature of the managerial prerogatives that dominate the industry. The miners deal with large multinationals that conduct local operations with an eye to global profits. Transport workers and cleaners are in a somewhat similar situation, in that they also contract with multinational companies, and work for companies that must remain globally competitive. Another similarity in the scaling of the social relations of work that was discussed earlier in the thesis is the downward rescaling of industrial regulation. The globalisation of managerial prerogative compels companies to seek out effective management strategies from around the globe, whether they are multinationals or not. In Australia, this has created a diffusion of hard human resource management practices. In conjunction with the advent of enterprise bargaining in Australia and practices of union exclusion, the industrial relations environment for all three of these unions has looked much more like that of the United States since 1996. So, in a sense, the global nature of managerial prerogative in the three industries and the localisation of industrial relations provides an impetus for strategy exchanges with unions that have dealt in an environment of hostile employers and little institutional support for unions: namely U.S. unions.

A key difference between the three unions is the organisational scale of employers in the industry. Where multinational employers dominate mining, the CFMEU pursues international action to exercise influence over the management practices of the firms. This is similarly the case with the LHMU, where global regulatory action is tied to firms with multinational organisation: Westfields, Cadbury-Schweppes, Bridgestone, etc. In part, this goes some way to explaining the

greater significance of GUF involvement for those two unions. The TWU is an active partner in ITF campaigns, but not nearly as much as the MUA, whose members are generally employed by global firms in global production. Where the TWU has become more actively involved in global regulation is with its newly amalgamated textile division, the former Textile Clothing and Footwear Workers Union of Australia (TCFUA).

So far, the observations here show how differences in the social relations of work, and hence in the priorities of union renewal strategies, could produce different orientations to international activity. However, this method has only focused on similarities and differences in strategy sharing and global regulation, but not on regional solidarities. To do so would require a deeper inspection of the scalar structure of different industries, looking more closely at patterns of regionalisation versus globalisation. Some facts suggest that such an inspection could be fruitful. The Chubb dispute in East Timor shows that the LHMU must deal with firms that work in both countries. Similarly, the TWU has attributed some of its solidarity efforts in New Zealand to the existence of firms that operate in the two countries. The TWU prefers that these firms not get too comfortable working in the relatively union-free environment of New Zealand and seek to import those conditions to Australia (Sheldon 2004). In both cases, the unions have decided to complement revitalisation activities at local and national scales with international activities.

### **The relationships between different strategies and different scales**

The final Harvie Ramsay condition considers the ways in which different strategies of the union interact with one another. In addition, following on the arguments from Chapter 3, it is necessary to also consider the relationship between particular strategies and the way those strategies are scaled. Unions scale their activities deliberately according to environmental imperatives, but also with some discretion. In keeping with the relational theory of scale proposed by Fagan, Peck and others, international activities have to be understood in the context they share with other purposively scaled activities. In terms of union revitalisation strategy, this means looking at how a union's international activities fit together within a larger pattern of revitalisation activity.



Many students of international activity who are not geographers note that international activities are generally linked to activities at others scales within a broad strategic framework. Not only are these scales of activity related empirically, but the success or failure of union campaigns can depend on linking tactics at different scales (Armbruster 1999; Castree 2000; Cohen and Early 2000; Gordon and Turner 2000; Sadler 2000; Ellem 2002; Rutherford and Gertler 2002; Armbruster-Sandoval 2003). Many studies emphasise the need to combine local organising with national legal strategies and international solidarity campaigns.

These interscalar relationships among union strategies take on a further meaning in consideration of the social construction of scale. Absent in any earlier discussion of the relationships between different union activities or strategies was the notion that these activities necessarily have spatial characteristics. They play a part in shaping economic space, they are practiced by spatially embedded social actors, but more relevant to the current discussion, they are necessarily scaled in particular ways. Presumably they are scaled as they are for particular reasons by the unions that choose them. The scales are not features inherent in the activities themselves, such that the chosen activity belongs to a particular scale. Nor is the scaling of the activity foreordained by the structures of global capitalism.

Unions choose their activities and scales of activity at the same time, but neither is a consequence of the other. Unions scale activity in particular ways for particular reasons that suit their objectives and spatial context. However, these circumstances and desires are themselves the products of spatialised social conflicts and compromise. So, unions get to scale their strategies, but not just as they choose. The choice of scales and the choice of activity are always subject to union discretion. However, at the same time, this discretion is constrained and shaped by the socio-spatial relationships and conflicts within which unions are embedded. The study of the international activities of unions has to account for these cross-cutting relationships.

One such relationship is quite obvious. All three unions have adopted an organising approach to revitalisation of one form or another. In the LHMU and TWU, explicit strategy-sharing relationships with overseas unions are intimately connected with the shift toward organising and new political strategies. The development of strategic organising in those unions involves a combination of local mobilisation, state and national restructuring, and international access to innovations

and training materials. The program of institutional change requires all three strategic aspects: mobilisation, restructuring, and innovation. But equally, each strategy must be drawn out at these particular scales. The CFMEU is the exception that proves this rule. There, innovation and training has mostly been drawn within Australia, demonstrating that the scaling of activity is subject to union discretion. However, the director of the CFMEU's organising program has indicated that the decision not to develop strategy sharing links has been a deliberate one, relating to the union's internal culture and history (Burton 2004).

Practices of global regulation are also interconnected with other national and subnational strategies. Analysts of union campaigns have in recent years become increasingly adamant about the need to combine local, national and international activities. The point is that while international activity may be necessary, it is generally far from sufficient. This lesson seems clear enough in the activities of Australian unions. For instance, the LHMU regularly uses the international leverage provided by its GUFs in local campaigns. In its long campaign with Rio Tinto, the CFMEU combined localised campaigns to reverse deunionisation with state and national legal challenges. After 1998, it combined those strategies with a global shareholder campaign and the international presence of the RTGUN.

Both examples show how the connecting together of strategies and scales depends in part on the unions own objective, and in part on the structural situation with which it is confronted. Following on the arguments in the preceding sections, it seems likely that the construction of scaled strategy depends in part on the scaling of the social relations of work. While the globalisation thesis promises that economic and political activity is being scaled up, labour geography tells a different story. As social relations are continually redefined and rescaled by conflictual social relations among various agents, so will the scales at which unions find it convenient to act.

## **Observations**

The purpose of studying the international activities of three unions in this comparative way is to describe, assess and explain the differences between them. As anticipated in the introduction to this thesis, analysing the international activity of the TWU, LHMU and CFMEU reveals a heterogeneity of levels of activity, objectives of activity, incentives for activity, and relationships between international and other

activities. The spatialised contingency theory has proven to be useful tool for describing the differences in international activity. This in itself is significant, as few scholars have tried to look at patterns of international activity from the perspective of the individual union, and no such analysis of these three Australian unions has been attempted.

As importantly, this inductive review also illustrates the potential power of the spatial theory to explain the unions' choices of international activity. The theory gives conceptual clarity to the Harvie Ramsay conditions and ties them to the core ideas of control over the social relations of work and the relational politics of scale. The objectives of the union turn on the ability to control space, and hence to control particular social relations. Each union has to engage in different activities to control the social relations of work in part because they do not all confront the same social relations of work. While proponents of the globalisation thesis argue that each union will confront increasingly international social relations of work, all else the same, it turns out that the devil is in the details. The processes of internationalisation differ in important ways that shape the contours of union activity at all scales, including the international.

## Chapter Six

### Summary and Conclusions

Empirically as well as conceptually there is still very little known about international union activity. New organising and the mechanisms of social partnership are much more thoroughly researched and understood. It may well be that the reason for this is the relative insignificance of international activity in union strategy and practice. Most research on international activity is speculative and prescriptive precisely because there is too little happening to say anything definitive. Where more activity is occurring, primarily in Europe, and between the U.S. and Mexico, more analytical research is becoming possible. But on the face of it, Australian unions are more remarkable for their isolation than for their international solidarity.

Despite this perception, international activity has been a crucial form of revitalisation for the Australian unions, but not in the ways that “global unionists” or “new labour internationalists” predict. Connections with union movements in Europe and the U.S. have provided the Australian union movement with new ideas about strategy and structure. Today, many Australian unions maintain active and growing links with unions in the U.S. dedicated to developing and exchanging ideas about the organising model, and about union revitalisation more generally. Debate about the validity of the organising model, and about the appropriateness of “foreign ideas” for Australian unions continues, but in 2004, the ACTU and many Australian unions are committed to organising. Many union leaders contend that strategy-sharing links are the single most important form of international activity in Australia.

In comparative terms, the vigour of this form of international activity in Australia is unusual. It does not fit the typical model of international activity, where unions are either supposed to connect with each other because of their dealings with the same employer, or because of their commitment to global transformation. Strategy sharing seems to have more to do with a perception of commonality between the Australian situation and the situation in some other country. The relationship is about union movements in different places sharing successful ways to deal with similar, but different problems. This is rather unlike more conventional forms of

international activity, where workers are drawn together across borders to deal with a common threat.

Casual observation of these differences, and of the fact that Australian unions were actually engaged in various forms of international activity, prompted the questions guiding this thesis. The thesis attempts to find a way to understand how and why unions choose particular forms of international activity that are actually very different from one another. As one of these forms, it has also tries to understand why Australian unions become involved in strategy-sharing in particular. Finally, it explores the relationships between international activities and other kinds of union revitalisation strategies. In doing so, the thesis assumes that international activity is neither guaranteed nor inevitable.

The adapted contingency theory of Harvie Ramsay gives the idea that the form of international activity may vary according to contingent circumstances facing the union. Even more crucially, the perspective of labour geography provides a systematic way to think about spatial variations in the international economic, social and political changes that confront worker and unions, and a way to think about how spatial factors affect what unions want to do internationally. The first half of the thesis attempts to draw out the essential elements of these two literatures, in a historical context, to put together the beginnings of a workable theory. The second half of the thesis continues the theoretical development by considering international union activity in Australia. Inductive case studies of the ACTU, the TWU, LHMU and CFMEU provide a confirmation of the descriptive uses of the theory and suggest avenues for further study. In addition, they establish the special significance of strategy sharing forms of internationalism in Australia, which is the second focus of the thesis.

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarise and assess how the thesis addressed its key questions. Each of the four chapters provides a key piece to an argument that builds through the thesis. While summarising these, the first section of the chapter also identifies where the chapters directly address the questions behind the thesis. The next section offers some of the conclusions drawn in the research. This includes an attempt to anticipate some criticisms of the research, suggestions for future research projects, and ends with some thoughts on the prospects for the practice and the analysis of international union activity in Australia.

## **Studying the international activities of Australian unions: the argument revisited**

To address the research questions, the thesis argues the case for treating labour geography as a theoretical basis for industrial relations research. The spatial political economy of industrial relations proposed in Chapter Two provides key insights into particular aspects of union agency that need to be addressed to understand how unions select *particular* international activities. The nature of these important aspects are formalised in Chapter Three as a framework for “contingency theory” based on Harvie Ramsay’s insights into how unions deal with multinational firms. An analysis of the ACTU’s international activities provides a way to distinguish between the different kinds of international activity. Finally, a review of the international activities of three Australian unions, the TWU, LHMU and CFMEU shows that these unions engage in very different kinds of international activities, and suggests that the explanation lies partially in the different ways globalisation affects the industries they organise.

### *A New Political Economy of Industrial Relations*

The thesis begins by introducing labour geography as a theoretical foundation for industrial relations. Other literatures on international union activity fail to deal with the variations in the kinds of activities unions choose, and with variations in the effects of globalisation on different unions. Because labour geographers have already addressed the issue of international union activity and because industrial relations scholars are using labour geography to address other issues, labour geography was the most promising theoretical avenue. Certain concepts are crucial to the thesis; particularly the social relations of work, the politics of scale, and the notion of labour’s spatial fix. But certain aspects of the relational theory of scale, place-consciousness, and multiple labour geographies of power are underinterrogated, even though they do bear on the issue of international activity. The remainder of this summary and synthesis will try to flag some of the places where further discussion of these ideas might have been useful.

Chapter Two addresses Herod’s challenge to scholars to develop a spatially sensitive approach to explaining different kinds of international activity. But to do so, the chapter actually develops labour geography as a new political economy of

industrial relations, and then applies that general theoretical perspective to the particular problem of international union activity. The theoretical development is necessary, both to introduce the concepts of labour geography to an industrial relations audience, and because no one has outlined a general labour geography method for industrial relations. From the new political economy of industrial relations, the chapter draws key insights into how the spatiality of industrial relationships affects union agency and strategy.

The key insights of the spatial theory deal with the objectives of international activity and the incentives and constraints compelling unions towards particular kinds of activity. According to the theory, union revitalisation is about securing control over a particular place by securing control over the social relations of work. The social relations of work are overlapping, inherently spatial spheres of production, consumption, and reproduction relationships, including the regulation of those processes. Because unions organise different groups of workers, unions confront different social relations of work. The spatial arrangement of production relationships and regulatory apparatuses in particular differ for different groups of workers. It seems likely that the forms of political praxis, and particularly the forms of international activity that the union will seek to control these social relations will differ depending on their socio-spatial structure.

At the same time, the new political economy of industrial relations tells us that the union's scalar practices are part of a relational "politics of scale". How unions seek to construct activity depends on structural features, but also on relationships between the international scales and other scales, and on ideology and the perception of strengths and weaknesses. In other words, the scalar practices of unions do not merely depend on how the economic and political environment is structured, but also on the union's desire to construct space in particular ways. While this would generally dovetail with the union's need to secure a spatial fix for its members, other factors such as ideology and historical ties can also shape union internationalism.

### *Creating a Contingency Theory*

Having summarised the insights of labour geography, the thesis turns in Chapter Three to look at the ways other researchers have addressed the questions raised in the thesis. Current tendencies in international union activity and theory

reflect the evolution of tensions between socialist and institutional ideas about internationalism that characterised the history of the labour movement. It turns out that most efforts are ideologically driven, prescriptive accounts that either promote or challenge particular institutions or ideas about international activity. The problem is that they deal with international activity as an abstract kind of response to universal pressures of globalisation. These kinds of arguments serve well to articulate the need for unions to “think globally”, but are ill suited to the task of the thesis, which is to explain particular forms of international activity in particular unions.

Other scholars look at international activities descriptively as a form of revitalisation. Much of this work is oriented around assessing what kinds of international activity are most effective in particular campaigns. While this research offers useful details about the objectives, incentives and constraints for international activity in particular cases, it is not always based on the development of underlying theory. However, the leading industrial relations scholar studying international activity, Ramsay tried to collect together the aspects of research that had contributed to a more general theory of international activity. His observations about the necessary conditions for such a theory are the central organising motif of the rest of the thesis.

He argued that a theory of international activity has to account for the different levels of international activity, different objectives of international activity, and the different incentives and constraints on international activity. In addition to these three conditions, another important condition is the relationship between international strategies and other revitalisation efforts. These conditions map directly onto the central concerns of the thesis: trying to understand the different kinds of international activity and how unions choose those activities to serve certain purposes. Furthermore, they provide a useful way to test and reject different theories, and to organise the observations from various parts of the literature.

The contingency theory is easily embedded within the new political economy of industrial relations, which demands that the spatial contingencies in levels of cooperation, objectives, incentives, and strategic relationships be addressed. Not only do the concepts of labour geography help describe what the objectives of and incentives for international activity are likely to be, they articulate the nature of the relationships between international and other strategies. This leads to the insight that all union strategies are scaled, and are scaled by unions in particular ways for



particular reasons. More than just thinking about how international activity relates to other activities, contingency theory should require an understanding of how strategic choices, and choices about the scaling of activity are related to each other in complicated ways.

### *The International Activities of the ACTU*

Empirical analysis in the thesis begins with a study of the international activities and policy of the ACTU. The chapter contributes to the principal argument of the thesis by providing a framework for distinguishing between different kinds of international activity. By treating the international activities of the ACTU as representative of the Australian union movement as a whole, the chapter establishes three functional levels of activity: strategy-sharing, regional solidarity, and global regulation. The chapter also makes strong arguments about the significance of the strategy-sharing form of internationalism, and examines the material and discursive construction of the international scale within the ACTU.

The functional levels of union activity come from a more nuanced consideration of recent international activities of the ACTU based on Ellem and Shield's theory of peak union agency. International activities, like other union activities, are expressions of the ACTU's capacities as an agent of mobilisation, of representation, and of regulation. A survey of international activities reveals the intricate interplay among these forms of agency, the industrial, political, and social modes by which they are articulated, and the ways in which they are scaled. A fuller examination of this part of the ACTU's politics of scale than can be covered in this exploratory study is probably warranted. In the thesis, these connections are only hinted at, the object of the study being to extract some understanding of the different possible forms of international activity for use in the case study chapter.

Having looked at the ACTU's attempts to act at the international scale, the chapter considers how the ACTU represents its international activity in policy documents and public statements. In the language of labour geography, it looks at how the ACTU tries to construct the international scale through its actions and discourse. The ACTU has a long history of using the international as a scale of social justice and legitimacy. At moments when the union movement has had industrial or political leverage at the national scale, the international policy and activity have

centred on social justice and outward support. However, in the more hostile political and industrial climate that currently confronts the union movement, the international has become a scale offering legitimacy and a sense of moral economy that the union movement advertises as an alternative to the dominant themes of neoliberal policy making.

In this context, strategy sharing as a form of international activity is that much more odd, because it does not fit in well with the ACTU's construction of the international as either a scale at which social justice and union rights are articulated. Nor does it fit in the historical process of ideological development that shapes current policy and activity. While the union movement does have a history of going abroad for strategic innovation, this has never been an explicit part of international policy or union ideology. Therefore, the practice of strategy sharing is not only unique in a comparative international sense, but also in comparison with the history of the ACTU itself.

#### *An Analysis of International Union Activities*

Chapter Five analyses the international activities of three unions, the TWU, LHMU and CFMEU, using the tools developed in the preceding chapters. First, the chapter reviews the international activities of the three unions. Based on the framework of functional levels developed in Chapter Four, the chapter establishes a profile of the international activities of each union. The TWU focuses on regional solidarity and strategy sharing, the CFMEU on global regulation, while the LHMU divides its efforts unevenly between the three. While all three unions engage to a certain extent in each level of international activity, the review of their activities shows definite differences in the focus of each union. These variations in the use of international activity are not revealed in analyses that only focus on the global union movement, or on the activities of peak bodies. No matter how important a form of activity may be from the perspective of a peak body, individual unions make their own decisions about where to allocate resources. For example, the ACTU's emphasis on regional solidarity in the discursive construction of international activity is not uniformly reflected in the objectives and activities of the three case study unions

The remainder of the chapter tries to establish the structural and non-structural features that give rise to these differences. A discussion of evidence from interviews,

published and non-published union documents is combined and compared with the theoretical insights from labour geography the objectives, incentives and constraints for international activity. For each condition of the contingency theory, the chapter presents both theoretical insight and empirical evidence side by side. The theory is not well enough developed to provide falsifiable hypotheses, but the case studies indicate that further development is warranted.

The chapter shows that the profiles of international union activity that the TWU, LHMU and CFMEU choose are closely related to different patters in the social relations of work that the members of each union are embroiled in. The focus on global regulation in the CFMEU and it relative absence in the TWU and LHMU is partly related to the CFMEU's greater need to control the human resource management practices of a single large employer. Greater focus on strategy sharing in the LHMU and TWU is a factor of their need to deal with industries that face pressures from international investors and clients, but in which labour markets, production processes, and management imperatives are all local. In other words, the organisation of industries and patterns of regulation in transport, cleaning and security services are increasingly similar in different countries; between Australia and the U.S., but the actual social relations of work remain at subnational scales. This gives rise to a situation where the processes of control compel local or national activity, but the similarity of these local situations across space makes an international scale of innovation quite useful.

Chapter Five provided less insight into the reasons for regional solidarity activities of the TWU and LHMU. Both unions apparently deal in industries that are building stronger regional ties. Also, as some interviewees noted, intra-regional trade and investment patterns mean that the regulation of work in countries like Fiji and Indonesia can affect the regulation of work in Australia. So it may be the regulatory and investment aspects of the social relations of work that give rise to the focus on regional solidarity. On the other hand, the study of the ACTU showed that regional solidarity has a long history in Australia and is tied to a social justice identity in the union movement. The agenda of the TWU in its relationship with Fiji is characterised by such historical and ideological motives. One interviewee at the LHMU felt that regional solidarity links were not 'worth it', suggesting that they were ideologically motivated 'feel-good' activities that did not deliver sufficient reciprocal benefits. Why the unions focus on regional solidarity is an issue that warrants further study.

## Conclusions

The kind of research undertaken in this thesis has little precedent, and there is not much theory to draw on. The work of the labour geographers on international activity does not deal with union revitalisation strategy, and the research from industrial relations on the strategic aspects of international activity have not latched on to labour geography. Forging a synthesis between the two perspectives is a significant accomplishment. This thesis argues that unions scale their activities as they do for particular reasons, some of which are structural and can be specified up front, and others that are historically contingent and can only be explored on a case-by-case basis. In reaching this conclusion, the thesis redefines many of the issues in the discussion of international activity and proposes a new conceptual background for industrial relations generally. It therefore raises many potential criticisms as well as many potential directions for future research.

The major limitation of this thesis is the brevity of the case studies. It was necessary to review the activities of multiple unions, since a single case study would not capture the capacity for the theory to describe differences between unions. As a consequence of the shallowness of the case studies, it is not possible to claim validity for the theory. However, given the constraints of space and time, the structure of research in the thesis provides a compelling argument for the value of labour geography and contingency theory to answer our questions about the scale of revitalisation strategy. The study of Australian unions in Chapters Four and Five suggests the value and originality of the theoretical work in Chapters Two and Three, while indicating possible areas for further research. These are all significant contributions to answering the fundamental research questions of the thesis.

Using the concept of a politics of scale, and especially the relational theories of scale, forces a self-referential criticism of pursuing research on international cooperation at all. Clearly, the very topic supposes that it is possible to separate activities that are internationally scaled from those that are not. This assumes that there is a given ontological status for the international scale, and actually reinforces the idea of the national as a “normal” sphere for industrial relations research (Ellem and Shields 1999; Fagan 2003). However, to maintain the appeal of labour geography for industrial relations research, these conceptual distinctions have to make room for

the intuitions of industrial relations. There is a very real-seeming sense in which the national actually is the normal scale for industrial relations actors. Likewise, there are intuitive distinctions between international activities and non-international activities. While grappling with the challenge to the concept of the international posed by relational theories of scale, this thesis sticks to the view that international activities can be distinguished from 'non-international' activities for the purposes of research.

The literature review in Chapter Three and the study of the ACTU in Chapter Four develop the historical context within which international activities occur. This context heavily informs the theoretical development and the empirical analysis. These chapters both show the extent to which the international practices of today are the output of long-term dialectical struggles between conflicting ideologies and the institutions they leave in the landscape. For the ACTU, current development of international policy occurs in the wake of a tradition that actually began with the socialist internationalism of its founding years. When the ACTU today constructs the international as a scale of moral authority based on social justice, it reflects a history where the international was a scale of legitimacy based on universal class struggle.

Another product of this historical analysis is the conclusion that the literature on global unionism and the literature of new labour internationalism are of little use for the kind of research carried out in this thesis. Both theories are continuations of an ongoing ideological struggle, albeit in new and improved forms. Neither theory could provide the insight necessary for each of the Harvie Ramsay conditions for contingency theory. They are not meant to be strategic theories that explain why unions choose international activities as they do. They are meant to explain why unions ought to act internationally, and in the case of new labour internationalism, how they ought to be acting when they do. Some of the observations of the new labour internationalism inform research in labour geography and industrial relations, as they have informed this thesis. Nevertheless, new labour internationalism is not, and cannot be a contingency theory that explains revitalisation strategy and the role of international activity within it.

Overall, the message of the thesis is that articulations between industrial relations and labour geography can be much more tightly knit, to the benefit of scholars from both disciplines. The new political economy of industrial relations posed in Chapter Two offers a framework for drawing the two fields closed together in a way that should seem tractable to industrial relations scholars. Even though the

focus of research in this thesis is explaining why different unions choose particular kinds of international activities, the conceptual tools developed for the undertaking can be extended. The connections between international activities and activities at other scales have been emphasised throughout the thesis. The need to control the social relations of work will affect union strategy at all scales, and will impact on the portfolio of scaled strategies any union chooses. This thesis has taken the first steps toward unravelling this politics of scale.

### **Future directions of international activity and research**

Questioned whether the internationalism of the Australian movement is predicated on a sense of social partnership or a sense of social justice, ACTU president Sharan Burrow argues that the two are not mutually exclusive. She said that “you need the ability to mobilise and a sense of collective identity in order to cut a deal” (Burrow 2004). On that basis, she feels that the global union movement needs to foster organising and grassroots mobilisation, but at the same time develop structures that can develop and direct campaigns in a strategic way. Such a movement would have the power and the capacity to negotiate in meaningful ways with multinational employers, nation-states, and the institutions of transnational governance. It has not been the project of this thesis to deeply examine different models of international unionism. Still, in concluding, the research undertaken in the thesis provides an opportunity to make one or two statements about the prospects for a form of international unionism that is simultaneously social movement and social partnership.

From an institutional point of view, the activities that build the social movement are distinct from the activities needed to act as a social partner. Among other things, the formation of social movement unionism requires collective action to draw out and link together the issues around which workers might mobilise. Social partnership requires a collective agent that can adequately represent its members in negotiations and enforce adherence to an agreement. Within Australia during most of the twentieth century the system of compulsory arbitration and relative isolation of the national economy produced a situation in which the collective actions required for mobilisation and negotiation could optimally occur at the national scale. The transformation of the industrial relations system and the economy remove the

conditions that made the scalar synthesis of those functions possible. Taking the geographer's perspectives on globalisation and the process of regulatory rescaling, one wonders whether it is likely that the necessary scaling of mobilisation and negotiation activities will be so neatly matched in the near future.

The Australian unions examined in Chapter Five suggest that they are not. Instances of structural connection and deep alliances of interest are forming between union movements in the South Pacific region. At least with reference to international union solidarity, the process of global regionalisation is as significant as globalisation. As global forces become more pervasive, the notion of place that underlies place-consciousness, and the space within which unions need to establish a spatial fix becomes broader. Australian unionists know that the fate of working conditions and wages in Australia depends on conditions in other countries in the region with which Australia competes for investment and trade. Like all other issues, this is not universally true. Nevertheless, in the case studies examined here, unions are building constructive structural links with unions in New Zealand, Fiji, East Timor and Indonesia. In spite of the close connections between the ACTU, TWU, LHMU and certain U.S. unions, particularly SEIU, structural connections and instances of solidarity remain weak.

In contrast, the scale at which Australian unions try to enter exchange relationships with multinational firms and global economic institutions is more global, as illustrated by the CFMEU's work with the Rio Tinto Global Union Network. Naturally, the particular relationships vary from case to case, but in general, bargaining of any kind with multinational firms generally takes place through one of the global union bodies. Occasionally, a bilateral relationship is sufficient, as in the case of the LHMU's Westfields dispute. Indeed, some of the regional links between Australian unions and other union movements in Indonesia are based on the ability of Australian unions to negotiate with Australian firms that have branched out to operate in Fiji or East Timor. Cases like these notwithstanding, to act as a social partner requires a capacity to represent national unions in a range of global settings.

In short, mobilisation activities might be increasingly suited to a regional scale, while negotiation activities are optimally global. The question, then, is whether global union bodies will devote substantial attention and resources to the issue of regional mobilisation, or alternatively, whether regional union movements would confer the necessary measure of authority and adequately resource a global

negotiating body. The structures and activities of the global union movement will have to deal with the fact that the optimal scale of worker organisation may differ for different kinds of agency. Political will, not abstract theory, will determine how the union movement manages the tensions that arise from the changing landscape of capitalism.



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