

**SWIMMING WITH OR AGAINST THE TIDE:
HAS THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION BEEN
CO-OPTED BY NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY?**

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in Partial Fulfilment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master of International Relations
(MIR)

School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International
Relations

Victoria University of Wellington
March 1st 2010

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Chapter One: Introduction

Work is one, if not the, primary mechanism through which the majority of the world's population experience economic globalisation.¹ Work is intimately connected to matters of human rights, social equality, welfare, and class struggle and it is increasingly determined by activities that occur in the international and transnational levels. Neoliberal globalisation has fundamentally restructured the world of work. It has also undermined the social democratic worldview of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on which the global governance portfolio for labour most squarely falls. The ILO's current Director General Juan Somavia, in referring to this era of neoliberal hegemony, has said that "the ILO has often been swimming against the tide". This thesis undertakes a thorough examination of Somavia's statement in order to determine the extent to which the neoliberal tide has saturated the organisation and its ideas?²

The ILO, a specialist agency of the United Nations (UN), sits within a cohort of international liberal institutions tasked with doing what states acting alone would be unable to achieve. These global governance institutions, in particular those with an economic mandate such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Group of Eight (G8) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are closely associated with the emergence and sustenance of neoliberal hegemony, epitomised by the Washington Consensus. Neo-Gramscian thought, for which a thorough literature review is provided in chapter two, has been deployed with great fervour to analyse this restructuring of capitalism into a neoliberal and global form.³ It places great importance on these international institutions that mediate the actions of states and markets and have facilitated the reconfiguration of material power and indeed the way global wealth is redistributed. But most crucially, Neo-Gramscians study the way these institutions have moulded ideas - that is the formation of ideology, ethics and

¹ Stephen Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation," *New Political Economy* 10, no. 3 (2005). p. 424

² Juan Somavia, ed. *Foreword, The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: ILO, 2009). p. x

³ Andreas and Morton Bieler, Adam, D., ed. *Introduction: International Relations as Political Theory, Images of Gramsci: Connections and Contentions in Political Theory and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). p. 3

intersubjective meanings associated with the international political economy that filters through into everyday life.⁴ The ideas that these institutions espouse have been steered by the interests of capitalist social classes that have their roots in the American hegemonic state. These institutions advocated minimal external controls on the economy and were at the heart of promoting structural adjustment, aid conditionality, and trade liberalisation into the far corners of the globe. They did so under the guise that there was no other alternative. As such they are associated with subjecting workers to the whims of the market, stunting social development, widening inequalities, and fostering a survival of the fittest mentality; all of which have occurred at the expense of real socio-economic progress and ecological sustainability.

Unlike these institutions, the ILO has never been an organisation at the top of the global governance ladder, dictating the state of play. The role of labour in the international political economy has also become more peripheral over the neoliberal period. As a result, the ILO has been largely excluded from the narrative regarding neoliberal hegemony, with the majority of academic attention being lavished on the aforementioned more powerful economic institutions that are the centres of capital accumulation. If the organisation does receive a mention, it is most often in the form of a passing comment; some tarnish it with the same neoliberal brush,⁵ while others suggest it has a different worldview. In the background, there are more vociferous voices that accuse the organisation of propping up the interests of the most powerful during the fundamental shifts in the political and economic order: from the allied dominance in the post second World War order; as an imperialist device in the decolonization process; a promoter of democracy during the rise of authoritarianism in developing countries; a useful tool against communism in the Cold War political climate; an instrument to channel capitalism into Eastern Europe through technical assistance programmes as communism crumbled, and in more recent times a co-conspirator in the rise of hegemonic neoliberalism.⁶

⁴ Stephen Gill, ed. *Theorizing the Interregnum: The Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s*, The Global Resistance Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). p. 54-55

⁵ Phillip Cerny, "Embedding Neoliberalism: The Evolution of a Hegemonic Paradigm," *The Journal of International Trade and Diplomacy* 2, no. 1 (2008). p. 30

⁶ Guy Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?," *Development and Change* 39, no. 3 (2008). p. 356

This thesis explores the direction of the ILO throughout this neoliberal shift. It charts the ILO's response to these substantial political and economic challenges and explores how the organisation has attempted to become more relevant in this neoliberal age. It considers the way in which the ILO has positioned itself in response to mounting disillusionment and resentment about the negative social (and environmental) externalities of the neoliberal system and the growing calls for more stringent global regulation of the labour and capital markets. The purpose is to determine the extent to which neoliberalism has infiltrated this socially grounded organisation. And as a result, this thesis becomes an interrogation of the efficacy of the Gramscian concept of neoliberal hegemony vis-à-vis international institutions, as much as it is an interrogation of the ILO.

I find, as neo-Gramscians infer, that it is at the ideological level where the insipience of neoliberal hegemony has had the biggest impact on the ILO. It creates a dogmatic prison which prevents the ILO, as it does with other hegemonic subjects, from being able to see out over its thick walls. This conditions the scope of the market controls that the ILO seeks to implement.⁷ Yet in comparison to the other prominent international economic institutions, the ILO has held on to a socially progressive agenda and demonstrated a great deal of resistance. Because of this I remain unconvinced that the ILO supports the neoliberal project and prefer to explain the patterns of resistance in the neoliberal era in the terms of Polanyi's double movement. This infers that for the ILO, its struggle can be traced back to the organisation's ideological roots - its Constitution, the 1944 Declaration, and the social justice agenda – which stand at the stark opposite to neoliberal capitalist values. The ILO has remained a counterweight to some extent against an increasingly liberalised economy and seeks to re-embed it into its social roots. As such an alternative vision of capitalism is still being kept alive which means the narrative of neoliberal hegemony is less complete than it would first appear.

This story of hegemony in the context of the ILO has evolved in a unique way given the purpose and structure of this organisation, which is explored in greater depth in chapter three. The ILO is the oldest surviving international institution after being

⁷ Brian Langille, "What Is International Labour Law For?," in *International Institute for Labour Studies* (Geneva: ILO, 2005).

formed under the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and surviving the subsequent collapse of the League of Nations. The ILO was tasked with re-embedding economic activity into social life, with the objective of improving the situation of the world's workforce through social justice. Alongside its technical assistance programmes, the primary function of the organisation has been international standard setting, which involves the adoption, creation and monitoring of international conventions and recommendations for the purposes of national ratification. The heyday of the ILO coincided with the period of embedded liberalism, epitomised in Western capitalist nations by a highly regulated but relatively open economy that fostered strong rates of economic growth, high employment rates and vastly improved living standards. This was a time of strong union movements that had some substantial say in the direction that domestic economies were moving. The ILO supported the push for a greater redistribution of wealth via the welfare state which ensured a societal buffer against the capitalist political economy.

As such, the ILO acts as a regulator of capitalism with the intent of ensuring Polanyi's double movement.⁸ The ILO, like Polanyi, saw significant social dangers of a self-regulating market because labour – or human activity – is a fictitious commodity that is not created to be bought or sold on the market. Therefore, if the market treats society as an appendage, it can lead to excesses and social destruction, as happened during the Great Depression. To protect society, there must be a counter-weight to reign in free market and ensure that it serves the interests of society. These two facets constitute the double movement. To foster a double movement, the ILO has a tripartite structure that devolves decision-making equally amongst representatives from government, business and workers. Tripartism exhibits many normatively positive aspects. It is closely associated with political and civil rights, such as freedom of association and choice as well as industrial democracy which better links the ILO into economic realities and gives these constituents additional voice. It makes the ILO's structure far more complex than purely intergovernmental organisations and its very existence permits the ILO to claim that it is the custodian of workers' rights; a body serving the interests of workers. This tripartite structure indicates an organisation at odds with the dominant

⁸ Karl Polanyi, ed. *The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities*, The Global Resistance Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 (1957)).

market fundamentalist view, which perceives such arrangements as irrelevant and the cause of market distortions.⁹

In Chapter Two, we turn to a key juncture in the history of the organisation; the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944. The Declaration made explicit the links between social and economic policy and was instrumental in forming a consensus on the importance of advancing workers' rights at the international level. It was recognised that the condition and status of work had a tangible relationship with human dignity and human rights. These principles helped inform the ILO's basic needs approach to development, which was facilitated through its World Employment Programme (WEP). In 1969, the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work on social justice and the pursuit of peace.¹⁰

But the relative stability of the 'Golden Age' unravelled during the oil shocks, stagflation and hyper-inflation of the 1970s. The neoliberal shift that ensued disrupted the relatively privileged position of labour and the ILO. The shift amounted to a sustained attack on the ILO's core foundations: of unionism, labour market regulation, the embedded nature of the economy, the welfare state, and national production systems.¹¹ This neoliberal shift made the ILO appear superfluous to the goals of the global economy.¹² The response to the challenges presented by a hegemonic neoliberal globalisation form the basis of the discussion in chapters four and five. Under the leadership of the two most recent Director Generals, Michel Hansenne and Juan Somavia, the lagging ILO has tried to fashion a new social consensus. Haworth and Hughes say this period has given the ILO the opportunity to put forward an alternative perspective on the social dimension of globalisation whilst also bolstering the international standing of the organisation.¹³ A key mechanism has been their new take on the international labour standards regime in an attempt to adjust and update standards to the current economic and social circumstances.¹⁴

⁹ Nigel Haworth and Stephen Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010 (Given access to draft)). Chapter 3

¹⁰ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation."

¹¹ Gerry Rodgers, Lee, Eddy, Swepston, Less and Van Daele, Jasmien, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009), Gerry Rodgers, "The Goal of Decent Work," *IDS Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (2008). p. 33

¹² Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p. 415

¹³ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 3

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Introduction

One of the principal outcomes of this internal evaluation was the 1998 Declaration of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at work, often denoted by the term core labour standards. These standards include four basic human rights that are: freedom of association and right to collective bargaining; freedom from forced labour; freedom from child labour and freedom from discrimination at work. The Declaration, the second in the ILO's history, has become a main pillar in the ILO's current work programme, 'Decent Work'. The Declaration was also intended to further help another of the ILO's aims: that of achieving a more respected position amongst the institutions of global governance. The very language of the ILO in this period hints at a sympathetic treatment of neoliberal globalisation within the organisation.

Indeed, this reinvigorated agenda, the new work programmes and the repositioning of the ILO in the global governance arena has been applauded by some and deplored by others. There are a mounting number of critics who say that in consolidating these moves the ILO has essentially become a puppet of neoliberalism and complicit in furthering its global hegemony.¹⁵ Others simply consider the ILO to be overwhelmed by the prevailing neoliberal ideology.¹⁶ They have accused the ILO of failing to react in a timely fashion and failing to make dents in the current neoliberal juggernaut. Standing's tirade suggests that the battle for alternatives has been closed off within the ILO because of the degree to which it has become co-opted.¹⁷ He views the core labour standards as symptomatic of an organisation pandering to neoliberalism and as such is no longer fulfilling its mandate as a workers' organisation. Alston and Heenan are as equally critical about the core labour standards, saying that they subordinate social and economic rights to civil and political rights; a move that is more accustomed to neoliberal preferences.

By applying such a hegemonic theoretical framework to the ILO and using the issue of international labour rights as a key heuristic device I do find that the ILO has leant towards more neoliberal tenets and that there has been some degree of co-option. I

¹⁵ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?."

¹⁶ Philip Alston, ed. *'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime*, Social Issues, Globalisation and International Institutions (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006).; Philip Alston and James Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work," *International Law and Politics* 36 (2004).

¹⁷ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?."

suggest that the unrelenting tide of neoliberalism has tested the ILO's ideology, leaving it simply treading water during the peak of neoliberal hegemony. There is also evidence of the ILO being dragged along in the neoliberal tide. However, much of the ILO's work demonstrates that progressive thinking has not been lost in the ILO. The resolute nature of the ILO continues to resist the common sense of neoliberalism and challenges neo-Gramscian assumptions about the pervasiveness of the ideological hegemony. The project that ILO has been engaging in is the re-embedding a Polanyi-inspired version of capitalism, which recognises the limits of how far society, like nature, can be stretched. Neoliberalism it seems has been edging close and closer to such limits. Today, the ILO is actively inserting itself into a new global order, like it did back in 1944.¹⁸ In so doing it acts as a counter-weight to neoliberal hegemony. However, its effectiveness at playing this role is hindered by some structural organisational issues that the ILO must work to resolve. Nevertheless, its noble ideals expose free-market myths and contradictions in neoliberalism. This makes space for conflicting and contesting ideologies to emerge, which form the basis of resistance and the potential to create alternative versions of the market society.¹⁹

¹⁸ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 8

¹⁹ Mark Rupert, "Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-) Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 1 (2004).

Chapter Two: Hegemony, Globalisation and the Scope for Alternatives

Neo-Gramscians and World Order

The work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, in *Prison Notebooks* builds upon Marx's historical materialism and capitalist social relations whilst also considering how alternatives to the capitalist system emerge and why these alternatives fail to be revolutionary. This is where Gramsci's notion of hegemony has proved extremely significant. It serves as "a theoretical resource for radical scholars committed to nonreductionist, noneconomistic versions of Marxism."²⁰ His account of social power identifies the material processes of production but in addition he considers the way the economic sphere is also produced and reproduced through interrelated political, cultural, and most importantly ideological forces.²¹ It is the combination of all of these factors that amounts to a dominant social class becoming a hegemonic force. "For Gramsci, hegemony is a dynamic lived process in which social identities, relations, organizations, and structures based on asymmetrical distributions of power and influence are constituted by the dominant political classes".²²

Hegemony is reliant upon these dominant classes exercising coercion when needed and consent the remainder of the time.²³ Consent is crucial to hegemony because it helps to legitimise and sustain social relations. This contrasts to a negative hegemony that is secured through the use of overt and prolonged coercion, which is more likely to be destabilising and sow revolutionary seeds.²⁴ Consent permits some compromises to be made so long as not to endanger the authority of the dominant group. It has enabled capitalist classes to exert a rule over workers and other

²⁰ Jim Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and US Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography," *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 22 (2004). p.

²¹ Ibid. p. 576, 590

²² James Mittleman and Christine Chin, eds., *Conceptualizing Resistance to Globalization*, The Global Resistance Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

²³ Robert Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 12, no. 2 (1983).

²⁴ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and US Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p 575-576; Vicki Birchfield, "Contesting the Hegemony of Market Ideology: Gramsci's 'Good Sense' and Polanyi's 'Double Movement'," *Review of International Political Economy* 6, no. 1 (1999). p. 44

subordinate classes by delivering some material gains as well as exerting political domination.²⁵ As Cox describes, “the language of consensus is a language of common interest expressed in universalist terms, though the structure of power underlying it is skewed in favour of the dominant groups.”²⁶ And as such, a historic bloc of actors that are organised around a dominant ideology can become hegemonic, with their power grounded within a stable order and a consensual society²⁷. This condition of hegemony is constructed through a combined onslaught of dominant ideas, material capabilities and increased dissemination via social institutions²⁸. Once this ensemble has been achieved the ‘controlled’ will consent to the dominant power because their power is seen as legitimate.²⁹

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and its underpinnings of coercion and consent have been interpreted in a number of different ways, but most notable for international relations are the adaptations by the neo-Gramscian school and the subsequent interpretations of the Amsterdam School.³⁰ This critical approach represented a major break with conventional international relations theory.³¹ Gramsci’s inquiry focused on the dominance of social classes as they played out at the national level. However, in an era of globalisation, it no longer makes sense to confine Gramscian thinking to national political economies; states are just one of the actors that dominate society today.³² Robert Cox took the lead in interpreting Gramsci to explain the dynamics of modern capitalism and how the existing world order came into

²⁵ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 575

²⁶ Robert Cox, "Labor and Hegemony," *International Organization* 31, no. 3 (1977). p. 387

²⁷ William Robinson, I., ed. *Gramsci and Globalisation: From Nation-State to Transnational Hegemony*, Images of Gramsci: Connections and Contentions in Political Theory and International Relations (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). p. 176

²⁸ Peter Burnham, ed. *Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order*, Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour: Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). p. 29

²⁹ Ibid. p. 30

³⁰ Robert Cox and Stephen Gill epitomise the neo-Gramscian school and the Amsterdam School, which closely aligns with Neo-Gramscian thought includes the academic work of Henk Overbeek, Kees Van der Pijl; Andreas Bieler, Bonefeld, Werner, Burnham, Peter and Morton, Adam D, ed. *Globalisation, the State and Class Struggle: An Introduction*, Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour (Basingstoke, UK and New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). p. 86

³¹ Adam David Bieler and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations*, Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour: Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). p. 9

³² Robinson, ed. *Gramsci and Globalisation: From Nation-State to Transnational Hegemony*. p. 167; Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 575

being.³³ He sees that power in international relations is increasingly determined by economic interactions (at both the interstate and transnational levels), which are based upon the way that capitalist production has been, and continues to be, organised.³⁴

The current world order has stemmed from the ideological leadership and supremacy of the USA - a hegemonic state – and has emanated outwards to encapsulate the entire international political economy. The first period of this order is identified as *Pax Americana* and second period is identified by the restructuring of the global capitalist economy that began during the 1970s.³⁵ Neo-Gramscians go on to explain how capitalist class alliances are increasingly cutting across state boundaries and forming a transnational capitalist class (as well as a transnational proletariat that inhabit the international division of labour)³⁶. As Cox states, an understanding of class antagonisms remains critical to the study of international relations because “power struggles involving labor concern the control of production, the ultimate resource on which political power rests”.³⁷ This dominant mode of production must penetrate the political realms, the economic structures and social institutions in a national and international sense in order to become a world hegemony.³⁸ For Cox, world hegemony manifests a set of “universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries – rules which support the dominant mode of production”.³⁹

³³ Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 43; Bieler, ed. *Introduction: International Relations as Political Theory*. p. 3)

³⁴ Mark and Solomon Rupert, Scott, *Globalization and the International Political Economy: The Politics of Alternative Futures* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006). p. 14

³⁵ Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 167

³⁶ Henk Overbeek, 'Theories of Transnational Class Formation and World Order', in Palan, Ronen (eds) *Global Political Economy: Contemporary Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 169 The international division of labour is formed by capital seeking a comparative advantage and establishing pockets of specialised production on an international rather than national scale in the pursuit of efficiency and productivity as per Adam Smith's thesis of comparative advantage.³⁶

³⁷ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p. 386-87

³⁸ ———, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 44; Burnham, ed. *Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order*. p. 30

³⁹ Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 172

Neoliberalism is an “economic doctrine, public policy agenda, descriptive framework, analytical paradigm and social discourse” that has assumed world hegemony.⁴⁰ This doctrine provided the framework for a new historic bloc who capitalised on the instability caused by the oil shocks in the 1970s, rising macro-economic instability and the ‘crumbling’ Keynesian welfare state.⁴¹ Its governing ideology is most closely associated with the intellectual work of Hayek and Friedman who endorsed the principles of laissez-faire economics, with the core tenets of liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation. This adherence to supply-side economics was pushed vigorously by the Anglo-American alliance of the Reagan-Thatcher governments. Their leadership marked a global policy shift toward market-oriented reforms that took place across much of the capitalist world. For such free market proponents, state interferences in the form of regulations and welfare are seen to unnecessarily distort economic efficiency. As a result external controls that were formerly placed on the economy have been shunned, enabling the unrestricted movement of investment capital and trade. Patterns of accumulation, production, consumption and proletarianisation have intensified and expanded geographically. Vast global supply chains and multinational corporations (MNCs) have proliferated to the extent that one-third of world trade is thought to take place within the web of individual corporations.⁴² Neoliberalism has accelerated and intensified commodification of land and private ownership, labour, and family life with social relations and everyday life becoming overwhelmed by the commodity logic of capital.⁴³ Economic globalisation has therefore occurred within, and been very much driven by, the structures and superstructures that enable neoliberalism.⁴⁴

Navarro states that “[t]here is nothing intrinsically good or bad in the flow of capital, labor, and knowledge around the world; its goodness or badness depends on who

⁴⁰ Cerny, "Embedding Neoliberalism: The Evolution of a Hegemonic Paradigm."

⁴¹ Henk Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*, Contending Perspectives on Global Governance: Coherence, Contestation and World Order (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). p. 48; Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 579-580

⁴² Goldman, Ian and Ronen Palan "Corporate Citizenship" in May, Christopher (ed) *Global Corporate Power: International Political Economy Yearbook Volume 15* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006)

181. Muldoon, James, Jnr. "'The Diplomacy of Business' *Diplomacy and Statecraft* Vol. 16 (2005) pp. 341- 359, p. 345

⁴³ Gill, Stephen, Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism in *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* Vol, 24 (1995) pp. 399 – 423 p. 399

⁴⁴ Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 167

governs the flow which determines who benefits from it".⁴⁵ Neoliberal globalisation best serves financial and industrial capital accumulation and the interests of stock market investors, rent seekers, bond raters, banking executives, as well as the 'centaur'-like actions of treasuries and central banks in powerful states. This transnational social class have elevated the role of capital in decision-making and have shifted the focus of governments accordingly.⁴⁶ Their interests most closely align with the interests of affluent developed country citizens, as well as elites and burgeoning middle classes in the developing world.⁴⁷ They have been able to frame the debate and influence the direction of the global economy without necessarily requiring a popular political base.⁴⁸ The power of neoliberal capital is ideational as well as material, which has meant that the dominant classes have been able to serve their own interests while also portraying these interests as being compatible with the interests of subordinate classes and wider society as a whole.⁴⁹ This ideology is essential for the functioning and continued legitimacy of a hegemonic regime.

Global Governance and Hegemony

According to neo-Gramscians, capitalist international institutions have been the nucleus of the transnational historic bloc and are heavily involved in the maintenance of hierarchical and exploitative social relations.⁵⁰ As Bieler and Morton state:

the structural power of capital has also been supported by an 'axis of influence', consisting of institutions such as the World Bank, which have ensured the ideological osmosis and dissemination of neo-liberal economics in favour of the perceived exigencies of the global political economy.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Vincente Navarro, "Comment: Whose Globalization?," *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 5 (1998). p. 743

⁴⁶ Manfred Bienefeld, ed. *Suppressing the Double Movement to Secure the Dictatorship of Finance*, Reading Karl Polanyi for the Twenty-First Century: Market Economy as a Political Project (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴⁷ Stephen Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 24 (1995). p. 405

⁴⁸ Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 45, 174

⁴⁹ Giovanni Arrighi, ed. *Global Governance and Hegemony in the Modern World System*, Contending Perspectives on Global Governance: Coherence, Contestation and World Order (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). p. 57

⁵⁰ Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*. p. 41

⁵¹ Bieler Andreas and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations*. p. 19

However, international organisations were originally established to pursue peace through the creation of a Kantian inspired liberal world order by charting a path to progress that can be achieved through the realisation of individual human rights, democratic governments and the virtue of the market.⁵² Because of their liberal goals, international organisations are bestowed authority and legitimacy,⁵³ but the goals of international organisations have never been apolitical or free from predominantly Western value judgements.⁵⁴ In the post-war years and the pursuit of international stability, the Bretton Woods institutions were concerned with pursuing embedded liberalism in the form of a heavily regulated, but largely open trade regime; a model more compatible with the ILO worldview.⁵⁵ However, in more recent times, international economic organisations have shifted their gaze toward deregulation and market reform that accord with the neoliberal narrative.⁵⁶ Overbeek argues that the progressive and normative dimension of these global governance institutions have “been hijacked by social forces that have emptied it of its counter-hegemonic content and redefined it in such a way that the concept in fact supports the further consolidation of the world-wide rule of capital”⁵⁷

This capture has made the current substance of global governance overwhelmingly neoliberal. It has accompanied the expansion of the society of capitalist states and as well as an internationalisation of the state, which generates interstate consensus about what policies are required for the world economy, ensuring their emulation the world over.⁵⁸ Neoliberalism has been sold as the only viable way for states to pursue their interests. The structural power of capital relative to the state (and indeed labour) has been seen to increase over the neoliberal era, leading to a dramatic restructuring of the role of the state.⁵⁹ In tandem, there has been a contradictory effort to create an artificial separation of the economic and politic spheres in order to

⁵² Michael and Finnemore Barnett, Martha, ed. *The Power of Liberal International Organizations*, Power in Global Governance (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005). p. 163

⁵³ Ibid. p. 162

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 166

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 167; John Ruggie, Gerard, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," *International Organization* (1982).

⁵⁶ Barnett, ed. *The Power of Liberal International Organizations*. p. 167-168

⁵⁷ Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*. p. 53

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 49-50

⁵⁹ Bieler Andreas and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations*. p. 19; Gill, ed. *Theorizing the Interregnum: The Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s*. p. 55

depoliticise economic relations, despite their embryonic relationship. The rhetoric of deregulation and the removal of impediments to the market obscure the fact that the market would not be able to function without the policies, legitimising activities and coercive abilities of the capitalist state.⁶⁰ The state is instrumental in lessening rigidities, removing restraints on capital mobility, enabling the financialisation of the economy through monetarism as well as shaping the way that labour is used through the production of both a national and international division of labour.⁶¹ States have essentially locked-in neoliberal policies by inscribing them into their national legal systems.⁶² Left to their own devices markets would be incapable of generating efficient outcomes.⁶³

As a result foreign policies and development agendas exhibit an inherent market discipline that has priority over all other interests.⁶⁴ Such global governance during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s is often summed up by the term the “Washington Consensus” which refers to the US-led consensus push for liberalisation and market fundamentalism that was perpetrated by the Washington based economic institutions.⁶⁵ This supposed consensus left little room for other perspectives that might have delivered more equitable growth, fairer rules, and more sustainable socio-economic development.⁶⁶ Instead rhetoric and policy has been packaged into a one size fits all approach to development that failed to meet the development needs of many countries. It has been able to “normalize, neutralize, and legitimize increasingly austere forms of capitalist restructuring and expansion, which may be regarded as a deepening and broadening of neoliberalism that has

⁶⁰ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 422

⁶¹ Corresponding with the neoliberal rise is a trend which sees the labour market as a natural feature of the market; i.e. something that pre-exists rather than being socially constructed. Marcus Taylor, ed. *Power and Conflict and the Production of the Global Economy*, Global Economy Contested: Power and Conflict across the International Division of Labour (London and New York: Routledge,2008). p. 21

⁶² Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*. p. 53

⁶³ Narcis Serra, Spiegel, Shari and Stiglitz, Joseph, ed. *Introduction: From the Washington Consensus Towards a New Global Governance*, The Washington Consensus Reconsidered (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2008). p. 8

⁶⁴ Li Xing and Jacques Hersh 'Understanding Global Capitalism: Passive Revolution and Double Movement in the Era of Globalization' *American Review of Political Economy*, Vol 4, No 1/2 pp. 36-55). p.48

⁶⁵ Although this is not what the term's creator, Williamson, intended

⁶⁶ Serra, ed. *Introduction: From the Washington Consensus Towards a New Global Governance*. p. 6

taken place over the past several decades".⁶⁷ In Marxist terms it could be said that like states, international institutions became "the executive committee of the whole bourgeoisie" in that they have been at the heart of maintaining unequal relations in the international political economy.⁶⁸

Despite a supposed softening of their stance during the Post-Washington consensus years, this ensemble of international organisations are seen as tools of ideological hegemony and are embroiled in its production and reproduction. They have played a crucial role in circumscribing and validating certain social institutions, class relations and policies at the national level.⁶⁹ They are able to further hegemonic interests and the current world order through the creation of rules and norms and by co-opting potential opponents, often absorbing their counter-hegemonic ideas into their sphere of thinking.⁷⁰ International institutions may adapt to the winds of discontent and make minor adjustments to policy or rhetoric accordingly but in Gramscian terms it is the process of *transformismo* (or co-option) that guarantees their future. As Cox states, individuals from peripheral countries "may come to international institutions with the idea of working from within to change the system, [but] are condemned to work within the structures of passive revolution. At best they will help transfer elements of 'modernisation' to the peripheries but only as these are consistent with the interests of established local powers. Hegemony is like a pillow: it absorbs blows".⁷¹

Neoliberalism has been loudly celebrated for the new opportunities it creates. It is assumed that it will lead to increased progress, prosperity and incomes; "a purely beneficial force that allows market forces to distribute resources into the areas of highest productivity and returns".⁷² It is often equated with creating a more civilised world, bringing efficiency, wellbeing, democracy, and boundless social advancement.⁷³ And yet, the gains from globalisation remain ambiguous. The integration of the global economy has been associated with the uneven distribution

⁶⁷ Susanne Soederberg, *Global Governance in Question: Empire, Class and the New Common Sense in Managing North-South Relations* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006). p. 157

⁶⁸ Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* (Penguin, 1948).

⁶⁹ Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." p. 172

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 172

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 173

⁷² Taylor, ed. *Power and Conflict and the Production of the Global Economy*. p. p. 13

⁷³ Gill, ed. *Theorizing the Interregnum: The Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s*, ———, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 406

of resources, the creation rather than reduction of poverty (in both absolute and relative terms), and marginalisation within and between nations over the past decades. Quantitative measures, such as people's income, are regularly trotted out to illuminate the severity of poverty in much of the developing world, and how this poverty became more deeply engrained in the societal fabric as a result of the economic and regulatory adjustments that took place. In industrialised countries, economic growth has stagnated, unemployment has risen and capital has assumed a far greater proportion of the gains than labour.⁷⁴ These negativities associated with neoliberal economic policies have often been viewed in temporary terms as "substantive irrationalities of capitalist development" that are "a tangential and temporary evil" that will wither away as material needs are met and societal wealth improves.⁷⁵ But these long-term societal benefits that are supposed to flow from an unfettered neoliberal globalisation have failed to eventuate for many.

This brand of ideological global governance has been largely devoid of ethics as its 'social purpose' is dictated almost entirely by the drive to maximise profits at all costs.⁷⁶ It has marked a phase where the global economy has been dislocated from its social sockets. Policies that create the ideal economic conditions for business and investment often result in the socialisation of market risks. This sacrifices the needs of the majority in order to protect the interests of the powerful minority. It has enabled these minority classes to lay claims to public goods that help to further its own interests⁷⁷. Such policies have been portrayed as the only acceptable response.⁷⁸ There are no longer any viable alternatives in the Post Cold War world; and as Fukuyama suggests this marked the end of history⁷⁹.

Neoliberal hegemony is therefore viewed by Neo-Gramscians as being complete. It has filtered through and has control over social, political, economic, cultural, and

⁷⁴ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 403

⁷⁵ Taylor, ed. *Power and Conflict and the Production of the Global Economy*. p. 13

⁷⁶ Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*. p. 53

⁷⁷ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 405; Dan Gallin, "Trade Unions and Ngos: A Necessary Partnerships for Social Development," in *UNRISD Civil Society and Social Movements* (2000). p. 1; Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*. p. 48

⁷⁸ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 417

⁷⁹ Might want to add about how this is a hollow aptitude – boredom – no struggle etc (gill mentions this 406).

ideological structures. It essentially shapes the world in its own image. It enjoys stability as a result of its capture of ideas, material capabilities and institutions.⁸⁰ Its epistemology becomes accepted and dispersed as the form of appropriate knowledge - a discourse - which serve the agenda of capitalist classes.⁸¹ It “transmits and produces power”, which puts limits on the bounds of change.⁸² This means it is able to absorb the struggles that have bubbled to the surface; struggles which nevertheless remain inherent ontological features of capitalist society because of its nature of being “simultaneously exploitative and progressive, creates both wealth and poverty, and brings into being forms of freedom and unfreedom, power and powerlessness”.⁸³ This shift has destroyed the potential for history to be re-made by collective human action and in Polanyist terms it “holds out the reified prospect of a ‘stark utopia’”.⁸⁴

How is the ILO Implicated in Neoliberal Hegemony?

The ILO’s participation in this neoliberal hegemony is a largely unexplored area compared to the analysis given to other more lofty economic international institutions. Neo-Gramscians, who sponsor the concept of world hegemony, have tended to be enamoured by and hence focused on the role of capital rather than that of labour. This thesis fills this gap by asking the question as to whether the ILO serves to reinforce the discipline of the neoliberal market or whether it has been more of a counter-hegemonic force.

The trends associated with the free market doctrine have undoubtedly proved an enormous challenge to the international labour organisation, challenging “some of the key assumptions that had guided the ILO’s work in the first six decades of its existence”.⁸⁵ The neoliberal ideology has meant working people, labour movements and the political left have been increasingly marginalised in both national and

⁸⁰ Bieler Andreas and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations*. p. 11-12

⁸¹ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 403

⁸² Louise Amoore, ed. *Introduction: Global Resistance - Global Politics* The Global Resistance Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). p. 4, 14-415

⁸³ Rupert, *Globalization and the International Political Economy: The Politics of Alternative Futures*. p. 7

⁸⁴ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism."

⁸⁵ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 195

international political economies and there has been little attention to how workers would be protected in an increasingly flexible and private labour market.⁸⁶ There have been arid opportunities to pursue the interests of labour along the lines of the class-based negotiations and social compromise of the given the depoliticisation and naturalisation of the current economic model. The hegemonic position of neoliberalism and the apparent absence of alternatives have reduced the motivation for capitalist classes to accommodate the working class and other counter-hegemonic movements as had been the norm in the Post-War boom era.⁸⁷

It is also important to note that the ability for the ILO to participate in a countermovement to neoliberal hegemony is predicated on its internal structure. The tripartite approach inherently involves accommodation, which exposes the organisation to neoliberal ideology. It emerges from the idea that workers and employers share transnational interests.⁸⁸ Tripartism forms the basis for decision-making in both the annual Conference and in the Governing Body.⁸⁹ Each of the 183 member states can send four delegates to the Conference: two government representatives, one workers' representative and one employers' representative, who may act and vote independently from one another.⁹⁰ The Conference adopts international labour standards and then supervises countries' compliance as well as dealing with administrative matters. The Conference serves as an international forum for deliberating on social and labour matters of global significance.⁹¹ It provides a space for interests to be discussed and debated; creating a channel for resistance and contestation. As Sengenberger states "The tripartite constituency ensures that

⁸⁶ Serra, ed. *Introduction: From the Washington Consensus Towards a New Global Governance*. p. 10; Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 399

⁸⁷ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 587-588; Ronaldo Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*, Global Economy Contested: Power and Conflict across the International Division of Labour (London and New York: Routledge, 2008). p. 221; Overbeek, ed. *Global Governance, Class, Hegemony: A Historical Materialist Perspective*. p. 49

⁸⁸ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 12, 15

⁸⁹ The current ILO Governing Body is made up of the permanent members of Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, and UK, with the remaining 18 seats being filled by three-yearly elections that are held at the Conference (Hughes, 414).

⁹⁰ From Press release

http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang-en/WCMS_108501/index.htm *International Labour Conference concludes its work 19/06/2009*

⁹¹ From Press release

http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang-en/WCMS_108501/index.htm *International Labour Conference concludes its work 19/06/2009*

the crafting of standards, and their subsequent exposure to practical tests and improvements through their application in member countries, accommodate various criteria and interests, including improved well-being for workers, economic feasibility and practicality”.⁹²

The interests of employers are likely to be pro-market and align more comfortably with the neoliberal worldview. Employers frequently try to curb worker-oriented initiatives that are proposed by the workers group and from the ILO, which means they are able to slow down the pace of change.⁹³ The role of states in the tripartite structure is also significant, especially since they are “transmission belts” for neoliberalism.⁹⁴ As Alston states, the “assumption that governments will represent the national interest and provide a counter-balance to employers and workers is more and more fraught as governments seek to shrink the public sector, unleash the private sector, and are more likely to be preoccupied by the need to attract private foreign investment at almost any cost”.⁹⁵

So, the ability for the ILO to be counter-hegemonic rests more or less on the ability of the workers group to mount a struggle and challenge hegemony. Juan Somavia has said that “transnational trade union networks are the most organized actors and the most articulate voice in society”.⁹⁶ The workers group pursue a far more enthusiastic agenda than employers because the ILO offers a major opportunity for achieving their goals.⁹⁷ The presence of worker representatives in the tripartite structure helps to prevent policies being chosen for political convenience and adds a real world perspective to proceedings. But trade unions cannot claim to speak on behalf of all workers with the vast majority not affiliated to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC, formerly ICFTU). Globalisation has led to the fractionalization rather than solidarity of the working class given the myriad of specific interests that

⁹² Werner Sengenberger, *Globalization and Social Progress: The Role and Impact of International Labour Standards* 2nd Revised and Extended Version ed. (Bonn: Bonner Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 2005).p. 10

⁹³ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 16

⁹⁴ As opposed to reciprocals for globalisation that is driven from the global arena down to the state arena: Bieler Andreas and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations*. p. 19

⁹⁵ Philip Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*, Labour Rights as Human Rights (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2005). p. 23

⁹⁶ Amoore, ed. *Introduction: Global Resistance - Global Politics* p. 7

⁹⁷ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 16

exist across the expansive international division of labour.⁹⁸ As well as well-known polarization between workers and employers, there is a less obvious polarization between workers.⁹⁹ Cox's 1977 treatment of the ILO in his seminal piece of work in 1977 titled *Labour and Hegemony* also suggests that there are divisions within the workers group and more tellingly he articulates how labour representatives can also be captured by and integral to hegemonic ideologies.

Cox claimed that most analyses of the ILO were: "inadequate and inaccurate representations of basic social and political power relations". Cox explicates how the ILO was, in the context of the Cold War, a significant player in another aspect of hegemony - American liberal capitalist hegemony.¹⁰⁰ Cox suggests that the hegemonic hand of the US, with its privileged position in the global economy, had considerable power over the internal dynamics, bureaucratic tendencies, and overall ideology of the ILO. With the support of the American Federation of Labour (AFL), the US government pressed for the realisation of freedom of association and collective bargaining because it was an aspect of political life that was non-existent in the communist setting.¹⁰¹ This conditioned the way economic and social relations were viewed and transpired with the ILO endorsing the hegemonic model of production relations of the time; corporatism¹⁰². This version of tripartism, Cox says, institutionalized conflict by placing class struggle into a controllable space and results in pacific industrial relations based upon the mutual interests of stability and predictability in the economy that workers, the state, and enterprise all benefit from.¹⁰³ In cooperating with the state, labour engineered a window of opportunity for itself, but in doing so it had to cut out its radical members.¹⁰⁴ Cox calls tripartism, a substitute for real democracy and a "bureaucratized organization of material interests". Tripartism only permitted middle income workers (and often male and

⁹⁸ i.e. Between workers in the formal economy of core states, to workers in peripheral states versus those working in global supply chains versus workers in non-standard and informal employment.

⁹⁹ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and US Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 577

¹⁰⁰ Fuelling Cox's diatribe was that at the time of writing the US threatened it would withdraw from the ILO— a threat that it did enact between 1977-1980 and in doing so took approximately 25 percent of the organisation's funding. The US uncompromising stance meant the ILO had no choice but to pander to its biggest donor's requests.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰¹ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p. 387, 394

¹⁰² Where workers and big companies find mutual benefits in cooperation

¹⁰³ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p.407-08

¹⁰⁴ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and US Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 583

white workers) a say in the management of the economy which meant 'minority' workers (women, racial and ethnic minority and non-standard workers) were often discarded as 'human buffer' that could absorb economic crises.¹⁰⁵ Because of this, the ILO, in this Cold War period was continuously constrained by what it could do, a matter which Cox says weakened the organisation's reformist character and undermined its struggle for social justice.¹⁰⁶ As Glassman sums up, this interdependence and "'dual character' of unions as statist institutions rooted in a segment of civil society helps explain the ways in which they are incorporated into hegemonic projects."¹⁰⁷

As such, the representative structure of the ILO's two social partners has presented numerous challenges and calls into question the ability of the ILO to resist the neoliberal impulse. As well as being a membership driven organisation, the ILO is also guided by Director Generals and the secretariat, which play a significant cog in the organisation's wheel and help shape ideology, uphold values, and steer the organisation's performance.¹⁰⁸ Cox claimed that the will of the ILO bureaucracy has more influence over the programme design and focus than the will of the Conference's formal voting system.¹⁰⁹ He goes on to make the following statements: "The relative obscurity of these bureaucratic decisions has made of them means for the effective maintenance of hegemony"¹¹⁰ and "hegemony avoids open confrontation on clear issues, and works more subtly and effectively through bureaucratic channels and personnel changes."¹¹¹ And as Weber illustrated, bureaucracies have the power to do harm as well as good.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." P. 390, 394

¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 407; Leah Vosko, F., "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice," *Global Social Policy* 2, no. 1 (2002). p. 22

¹⁰⁷ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 582

¹⁰⁸ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 10; Barnett, ed. *The Power of Liberal International Organizations*.

¹⁰⁹ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p. 412

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 411-412

¹¹¹ Cox proposes that the International Institution for Labour Studies was established for the purpose of questioning the overriding ILO philosophy and as a conduit for considering alternatives through a research agenda. But it was not long until it too became integrated into the bureaucracy that meant any potential for innovation or renewal was stalled. Ibid. p. 410-411, 420

¹¹² Barnett, ed. *The Power of Liberal International Organizations*. p. 184

Cox illuminates important power dynamics within the ILO, some of which are still visible (although quite transformed) in the ILO today. In addition to these useful insights for this investigation of neoliberal hegemony and the ILO, Cox's asserts that that the ILO is a fruitful heuristic device for exploring the nature of hegemony. In 1977 he stated that:

The ILO's current predicament becomes something less interesting for its own sake than as a thread enabling us to trace these deeper tendencies. It becomes the occasion, not the real subject matter of the inquiry.¹¹³

This is a poignant point for my own treatment of the ILO in the context of today's world order. A recent critique of the ILO that provides the greatest stimulus for this piece of research comes from a complaint that the ILO has undergone a 'strategic misdirection' as a result of its new and damaging trajectory in the 1990s that has been heavily influenced by neoliberal logic.¹¹⁴ Authors that fall into this school, such as Guy Standing, believe that the ILO was "merely a weed of opposition to the supply-side economic revolution"¹¹⁵ after the organisation failed to react and "regulate the excesses of industrial labour markets".¹¹⁶ He sees that the ILO has failed to create an alternative to a global economy that has emerged from labour based competition. Rodgers also states, the response from Geneva, given their previous high-profile work programmes and attention to matters of employment, development and basic needs was a "strikingly muted one".¹¹⁷ As will be demonstrated in chapter four the adoption of Core Labour Standards and their impact on labour rights are emblematic of these concerns. As Haworth and Hughes state, these critiques "recognize that changing global circumstances required the ILO to change. The problem for them was that the change was in the wrong direction".¹¹⁸ However, these criticisms are met by a number of sympathetic commentators who have seen these changes, such as the 1998 Declaration of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, as a suitable solution that has come better late than

¹¹³ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p. 386

¹¹⁴ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 8

¹¹⁵ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 361

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 357

¹¹⁷ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 196

¹¹⁸ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. p. 5, Chapter 8

never for dealing with the current social dislocations caused by economic globalisation.¹¹⁹

Implications

It is widely considered that over the past three decades, neoliberalism has assumed a hegemonic position as the dominant ideology of the global economic order. Neoliberal ideology has conditioned intellectual debate, political direction, our socio-economic epistemology and dictates what rational thought. As such it has gathered a wide support base. Neo-Gramscians assert that neoliberalism seeks to make common sense monolithic. It acquires a norm-like status that becomes so pervasive that it is able to close off political debate and reject any alternative counter-ideologies.¹²⁰ This ideology makes neoliberal capitalism appear to be a natural and spontaneous way of life even though it is very much a man-made material way of organising human social life.¹²¹

However, Rupert builds upon a historical materialism to argue that the absolutist narrative of neoliberal hegemony is doubtful because of the historically constituted contradictions that appear within capitalist society.¹²² He argues that neoliberalism's contradictory nature can be used as an arsenal for social movements to problematise this narrow and one-dimensional version of human progress and therefore create room for alternatives and mount a war of movement.¹²³ This implies that alternative socio-economic ideas are not trapped in a flawless web of neoliberal oppression and creates possibilities for counter-hegemonic movements. He agrees with the insight of Bieler and Mortom who suggest that "the hegemony of transnational capital has been over-estimated and how the possibility for transformation within world order is thereby diminished by neo-Gramscian perspectives".¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Chapter 8

¹²⁰ Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism." p. 420

¹²¹ Rupert, *Globalization and the International Political Economy: The Politics of Alternative Futures*. p. 13

¹²² ———, "Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-) Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance."

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Bieler, ed. *Introduction: International Relations as Political Theory*. p. 26

Neo-Gramscian's concur that economic globalisation is a contested issue given its negative economic, environmental and social externalities. They also concur that neoliberalism has lost its triumphalist grip after a series of crisis during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, neo-Gramscians such as Gill say that that consent-based neoliberal hegemony has given way to a more coercive or disciplinary based supremacy.¹²⁵ However, neo-Gramscians remain overtly pessimistic about the potential for such struggle given the power of neoliberalism and the institutions that uphold this mode of production. They see that states remain the only real site for civil society struggles and the primary site for the consolidation of new historic blocs. However in a global world hegemony, where many aspects of state sovereignty have been ceded, a global civil society has no firm ground in which to organise a counter-hegemonic movement.¹²⁶ This occurs despite a class-based struggle, populated by a much broader set of interests, rumbling away in the background.¹²⁷ Consequently, they remain convinced that all contestation will be suffocated by the impermeable parameters of the free market ideology. As such, neo-Gramscians are accused of being too preoccupied with the power of ideology over material interests.¹²⁸ This has had the effect of neo-Gramscians being overly enamoured by the ideational power of capital and has subordinated the agency of labour in its analysis. As Bienefeld states:

an undue emphasis on the systemic nature of the global capitalist threat can serve to disempower people and play into the hands of those who would peddle the mantra that "there is no alternative" to neoliberalism. The danger with emphasizing the systemic nature of the problem is that it can create the impression that nothing is possible, until everything is possible; that nothing

¹²⁵ Li and Hersh Xing, Jacques, "Understanding Global Capitalism: Passive Revolution and Double Movement in the Era of Globalization," *American Review of Political Economy* 4, no. 1/2 (2006). p. 40; Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism."

¹²⁶ Gill, ed. *Theorizing the Interregnum: The Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s.*; Xing, "Understanding Global Capitalism: Passive Revolution and Double Movement in the Era of Globalization." p. 40

¹²⁷ Kees Van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). p. 36-49

¹²⁸ Bieler Andreas and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations.* p. 23

can be done, until the centre has been overthrown and which is clearly a recipe for paralysis.¹²⁹

Perhaps the coherence of neoliberal power is less than complete, and that the materialistically driven opportunities for counter-hegemonic activity and the possibility of change are closer than neo-Gramscians would imagine.¹³⁰ This is not to diminish the importance of undertaking a hegemonic analysis, because as Beiler and Morton suggest it is “the absolutely essential first step towards an investigation into potential alternative developments; and resistance can only be successfully mounted if one understands what precisely needs to be resisted”.¹³¹ So, using this as our basis, it is time to turn to the question of the degree to which the ILO has been co-opted by neoliberalism. To do this I add Karl Polanyi to this theoretical mix to consider the way the ILO has been a part of a counter-movement in the past. This enables us to see the biggest flaw in neoliberal thinking. Namely, that it has been too willing to forfeit the protection of fictitious commodities, seeing them as luxuries, even though they are essential preconditions of the successful operation of the market. And by building on this we are able to determine the type of agency the ILO has in the current world order and whether is able to mount an emancipatory challenge for workers.

¹²⁹ Bienefeld, ed. *Suppressing the Double Movement to Secure the Dictatorship of Finance*. p. 28

¹³⁰ Bieler Andreas and Morton, ed. *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations*. P. 26

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 26

Chapter Three: The ILO and Polanyi's Double Movement

This chapter investigates the theoretical underpinnings of the organisation's values and principles. It establishes a comprehensive framework in which to make sense of the current contestation in regards to the ILO's position within the dominant neoliberal paradigm. The ILO has a quite distinct set of values which means it is often viewed as having a differentiated worldview from that of the international financial institutions (IFIs). The ILO sees that a free market must be counterbalanced by the social dimensions of the global economy. The organisation has remained conscious of the fact that power relations, material interests and social conflicts are inherent ontological features of the market.¹³² The ILO has always reiterated that labour is not a given in the production process; it is commodified and therefore cannot be treated like other market commodities.¹³³ And because of these features, the ILO rejects the concept of a self-regulating market.

Nevertheless, the ILO remains very much a capitalist organisation. It was formed as a reaction to the social unrest caused in parts of Europe as a result of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The ILO was "a means of helping to redirect the forward march of the working class".¹³⁴ The ILO has played an intermediary role between the three main groups that participate in capitalist social relations. By agreeing to engage in this project, the working classes essentially shifted rightwards and were brought into the embrace of capitalism, or welfare capitalism to be more precise, which promised greater social protections and voice in industrial reform.¹³⁵ As such the ILO is not revolutionary; its debates and struggles are predisposed to work within the confines of capitalist logic.

After the protracted crisis of the Great Depression, the perceived virtues of the free market lost their credibility and in response, capitalism in industrialised countries was put under far greater political supervision. This coincided with the "creative destruction"

¹³² Marcus Taylor, ed. *Introduction: Global Economy Contested*, *Global Economy Contested: Power and Conflict across the International Division of Labour* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

p.2

¹³³ Sengenberger, *Globalization and Social Progress: The Role and Impact of International Labour Standards* p. 8

¹³⁴ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 356

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 356

of the World Wars that gave a new lease of life to the capitalist project.¹³⁶ What materialised was a set of macroeconomic policies, typified by Keynesian economics and the 'New Deal', that placed restrictive boundaries on capitalist production.¹³⁷ The ILO had an embryonic link with the Keynesian welfare state model that was widespread across Western capitalist nations during this phase of embedded liberalism.¹³⁸ The welfare state formed the basis of a social contract in capitalist states that reduced workers' sole dependency – or de commodification – on market forces. It was accompanied by a highly regulated, but relatively open economy that fostered strong economic growth, high employment, vastly improved living standards, and a largely appeased union movement that had some substantial say in the direction that domestic economies were moving.

This political input into economic affairs can be described in terms of Karl Polanyi's double movement.¹³⁹ Polanyi was a non-Marxist socialist, rather than a Keynesian. Although there are some asymmetries, the Keynesian period can be described as just one of a myriad of potential outcomes of a double movement.¹⁴⁰ Polanyi doubted the validity of the invisible hand of the market and the assumption that it would lead to an increased general collective welfare. Instead Polanyi saw dangers lurking in an unfettered market and felt that a distinction between economics and society was a false dichotomy that had not always existed.¹⁴¹ Labour, like land and money, is a fictitious commodity; labelled as such because they were not intended to be bought and sold on the market.¹⁴² "Labour is simply the activity of human beings, land is subdivided nature, and the supply of money and credit in modern societies is necessarily shaped government policies."¹⁴³ Market society gives these fictitious commodities a price in the form of wages, rent and interest. However, given their social origins, these commodity prices should not be at the mercy of the market

¹³⁶ Xing, "Understanding Global Capitalism: Passive Revolution and Double Movement in the Era of Globalization." p. 38

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 38

¹³⁸ Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order."

¹³⁹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁰ Fred Block, "'Introduction': To the Great Transformation by Karl Polanyi," in *The Great Transformation*, ed. Karl Polanyi (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). p. 6; Ayse Bugra, ed. *Introduction, Reading Karl Polanyi for the Twenty-First Century: Market Economy as a Political Project* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). p. 2

¹⁴¹ Polanyi, ed. *The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities*.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 51

¹⁴³ Block, "'Introduction': To the Great Transformation by Karl Polanyi." p. 9

alone, i.e. they should never become fully commodified.¹⁴⁴ Polanyi asserts that the economy must be re-embedded in society: “the economic order is merely a function of the social, in which it is contained”.¹⁴⁵ However, the ‘political project’ of the market economy has and continues to perilously “subordinate the subsistence of society itself into the laws of the market”.¹⁴⁶ To disembod the market presents a ‘stark utopia’ for Polanyi because it would expose the sacrosanct nature of human life to “the ravages of this satanic mill”, which amounts to the destruction of society.¹⁴⁷

However, such immense social stress, Polanyi said, would inevitably lead to the economic system reverting back into an embedded form.¹⁴⁸ Block likens society to a rubber band, arguing that “with further stretching, either the band will snap – representing social disintegration – or the economy will revert to a more embedded position”.¹⁴⁹ Morals have to be placed upon the amoral and rationally driven market because it was fundamentally wrong to expect society to carry the risks of the market.¹⁵⁰ And it is not only morally wrong to expect society to withstand this market induced battering ram, it is also unsustainable and unrealistic. As a result, the market must be modified by society and this has become the purview of politics. This involvement of the state in economic affairs must go beyond creating stability for the market in terms of territorial security, the rule of law and property rights, and the provision of goods and services that are not economical for the market to supply. Polanyi explains how this manifests in a double movement that must underpin the political economy. This double movement consists of two diverging factions; the free market and a counter-movement that is dominated by the working classes, and is also supported by capitalists who seek greater stability in the economy.¹⁵¹ Polanyi presents these movements not as an either or, but as mutually dependent parts of the whole.

¹⁴⁴ Polanyi, ed. *The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities*. p. 48

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 50

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 50

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 51; Block, ""Introduction": To the Great Transformation by Karl Polanyi." p. 9

¹⁴⁸ Block, ""Introduction": To the Great Transformation by Karl Polanyi." p. 5,8

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.p. 9

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 9

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 12

In the neoliberal age there has been disequilibrium in this double movement. He also explains that as the market evolves it necessitates a change in the way society is organised because “human society has become an accessory of the economic system”.¹⁵² In this context, Polanyi’s assertion that a completely free market is an impossible utopia provides a useful lens in which to view the struggles associated with neoliberal free market. Another useful insight is Polanyi’s consideration of the role that international institutions of the global economy have played in shaping domestic double movements. He explained how the internationally imposed mechanism of the gold standard had restricted state-driven responses to economic insecurity and placed a large burden on society. This resulted in protectionist policies, the scramble for Africa, the rise of Fascism and two World Wars.¹⁵³ As a result, Polanyi doubts whether economic liberalism (that is supposed to contain competition within the economic realm) can really lead to a peaceful world.

The Declaration of Philadelphia

The ILO’s 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, which is annexed to the ILO’s Constitution, is the bedrock for the modern ILO. By analysing this Declaration through the lens of a Polanyian theoretical framework, which it seemingly sits quite comfortable alongside, helps explicate and clarify the root values and purpose of the ILO. In Section I. the Declaration states that the following as the organisation’s fundamental principles:

- a) labour is not a commodity
- b) freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress
- (c) poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere
- (d) the war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Polanyi, ed. *The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities*. p. 53

¹⁵³ Block, "Introduction": To the Great Transformation by Karl Polanyi." p. 16

¹⁵⁴ ILO, "Text of the Constitution " <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/iloconst.htm>. Accessed 21 January 2010

These values are most compatible with and indeed mirror Polanyian values. The ILO advocates that social life should not be a secondary concern behind that of the market. It promotes an economy that is subject to greater political democracy and regulatory mechanisms to protect all people from contradictions of the market.¹⁵⁵ The ILO, on the basis of the 1944 Declaration has a vision for society based upon adherence to civil liberties and social and economic justice.

The ILO and Global Double Movement

The 1944 Philadelphia Declaration was a catalyst that moved the ILO from being purely concerned with standard setting to an organisation that was concerned with international development. In its development guise, (which still continues to this day), the ILO has become an advocate for a global double movement. The Declaration also enabled the ILO to secede its colonial heritage by speaking in terms of the equal rights of all.¹⁵⁶ In Section II, amongst a number of other statements, the following stands out: "all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity".¹⁵⁷ Prior to the Declaration, human rights only applied to colonial populations in a very limited sense and prior to the 1930s these populations had virtually no rights. Western powers (who seemingly had intellectual ownership of human rights) refused to bestow equal rights to 'native' labour, enabling forced labour and other exploitations in the colonies.¹⁵⁸ The Philadelphia Declaration coincided with the end of World War II, the formulation of the UN Charter, and a time when the post-colonial World was becoming more of a reality. In fact, the ILO was the first international organisation to move resolutely into the human rights arena, defining a set of entitlements to human dignity, many of which were transferred into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).¹⁵⁹ During the process of independence the former colonial territories and their workers began to feature in the decision-making

¹⁵⁵ A belief that Polanyi also extrapolated to the domestic and the international levels. Block, ""Introduction": To the Great Transformation by Karl Polanyi." p. 21

¹⁵⁶ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 43

¹⁵⁷ ILO, "Text of the Constitution ". Accessed 21 January 2010

¹⁵⁸ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 42-43

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 29; Alison Brysk, ed. *Globalization and Human Rights* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002). [1

and work programmes of the Organisation. Rodgers *et al* say that as the ILO expanded its membership in response to the process of decolonisation it created a “more positive reorientation” that expanded the ILO’s horizons and “changed the pattern of debate”.¹⁶⁰ The ILO was being driven by a more global agenda. And while this was recognition of the serious problem of poverty in the Third World, it was also part and parcel of a moral discourse to emancipate the former colonies for a distinctly capitalist, rather than communist world.¹⁶¹

The ILO’s World Employment Programme (WEP) was launched in 1969 at the end of the UN’s first Development Decade and emerged in the context of decolonisation and Cold War tensions.¹⁶² Throughout the 1970s and 1980s it was the primary work stream for the ILO, absorbing the bulk of the ILO’s budget.¹⁶³ The WEP acts upon the Philadelphia Declaration’s emphasis on the need to fight poverty. Again this was an opportunity for the ILO to promote social and economic development as two sides to the same coin. Central to this was the conviction that “development measures would succeed only if those concerned had the opportunity to participate fully and create local structures ‘from the bottom up’ which would represent their interests”.¹⁶⁴ The WEP’s development and modernisation agenda was very much based upon reconciling the precepts of self-determination, rights, welfare, equality and economic development, which were seen as interdependent.¹⁶⁵ The WEP placed productive employment growth at the forefront of the macroeconomic agenda, as something to be pursued in its own right and a means to an end.¹⁶⁶ Gaining access to good quality, secure and adequately remunerated work was central to a pathway out of poverty.¹⁶⁷ In fact, it was a basic need and this concept became a defining feature of

¹⁶⁰ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 31

¹⁶¹ David Maul, “‘Help Them Move the Ilo Way’: The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (2009). p. 403

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 400

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p.44

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 41

¹⁶⁶ Maul, “‘Help Them Move the Ilo Way’: The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ”.p. 399; James Grant, P., *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem* (New York and London: ILO, Preager Publishers, 1977). p. 31

¹⁶⁷ ILO, “The World Employment Programme at the Ilo,” http://www.ilo.org/public/english/century/information_resources/download/wep.pdf. : Accessed 15/11/2009;

the ILO's ideology at this time.¹⁶⁸ Basic needs are defined "as the minimum standards of living which a society should set for the poorest groups of its people" for the eradication of poverty.¹⁶⁹ Other aspects that made up the package of basic needs include having adequate access to: food, shelter, clothing; safe drinking-water; sanitation; transport; health; education; being able to live in a healthy environment and to participate in the decisions that affect one's life and livelihood.¹⁷⁰ Basic needs are basic human rights.

The WEP pursued a thorough research agenda which informed the ILOs capability-building, educational and technical assistance programmes. This covered a whole array of programmes such as income distribution, technology dissemination, public works programmes, population policies, education and training, trade linkages, migration, rural/urban employment, poverty, the gendered dimensions of work and the rise of MNCs.¹⁷¹ Another key focus for the WEP during the 1970s was establishing guidelines to ensure the expansive and exploitative practices of MNCs provided some developmental benefits for the recipient countries and their workers. The work of WEP culminated in the 1976 World Employment Conference which attempted to pioneer and form a greater consensus around its employment-oriented style of development. The outcomes of the conference were supported by the UN's General Assembly and Economic and Social Council.¹⁷²

However, the overall impact of the WEP, as viewed by results on the ground, was limited.¹⁷³ The WEP was disjointed from the rest of the ILO's repertoire of work and this incoherence has been blamed for its downfall.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore it was isolated from the related concerns of aid, international monetary reform and trade which were

Maul, "'Help Them Move the Ilo Way': The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ". p. 399; Grant, *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*. p. 33

¹⁶⁸ Grant, *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 7

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 7

¹⁷¹ Maul, "'Help Them Move the Ilo Way': The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ". p. 399; Grant, *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*. p. 3

¹⁷² ILO, "The World Employment Programme at the Ilo."

¹⁷³ Grant, *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*. p. 10; Maul, "'Help Them Move the Ilo Way': The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ".

¹⁷⁴ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 212

considered the premise of other international actors.¹⁷⁵ It was, therefore, ill-equipped to deal with the kind of social problems that were emerging, such as the new international division of labour, growing urban poverty and the consequences of land reforms. Nor was the Programme assisted by the ILO's traditional tripartite structure and dominant corporatist ideology that has continued to facilitate an ongoing western bias. The majority of the world's labour force often fell outside of "the ILO's official consciousness".¹⁷⁶ There was the threat that full employment on a global scale would require some sacrifice from the industrialised workers, employers and governments in order for the have-nots to catch up and receive a bigger share of the pie. For these reasons, the ILO did not provide the New International Economic Order (NIEO) a fertile environment for the calls to redirect international economic relations in the 1970s.¹⁷⁷ The ILO's concerted development agenda struggled to maintain significance into the 1980s and was disestablished in the 1990s. This also coincided with the rise of neoliberalism.

Perhaps the biggest achievement of the ILO's WEP and its basic needs approach was that it questioned the conventional wisdom regarding the 'problem' of development, which could be solved by economic growth alone.¹⁷⁸ The major glitch with this growth-first approach was that it did not necessarily correspond with improved employment outcomes or living standards. Trickle down was either not occurring or not happening at a pace that could absolve the abject poverty of millions. For the ILO, letting the market take over the driving seat was not "acceptable in human terms or responsible in political terms".¹⁷⁹ Growth needed to be accompanied by more socially oriented goals and a more equitable distribution of the gains.¹⁸⁰ The concept of basic needs filled this requirement. As a result, the ILO has played a key role in development discourse. It has been an intellectual leader in a branch of development thinking that had been largely ignored by the key institutions such as the UN and World Bank.¹⁸¹ The basic needs approach was at a

¹⁷⁵ Grant, *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*. p. 10

¹⁷⁶ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p. 410

¹⁷⁷ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 212

¹⁷⁸ Grant, *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*. p. 2

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 4

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 8

¹⁸¹ Maul, "'Help Them Move the Ilo Way': The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ". p. 399

later date translated into the United Nation's Development Programme's (UNDP) human development approach, instigated by Muhab al Haq. This counter-narrative challenged the dominant thinking in international organisations at the time.¹⁸²

The characteristics of the neoliberal paradigm present an unprecedented challenge to these values and have disturbed the ILO's entire orientation. This shift has meant that the social and indeed economic benefits of international labour standards and labour market regulations are no longer common sense in the global political economy.¹⁸³ There has been a great imbalance towards the self-regulating market in the dialectics of the double movement. The next chapter considers the degree to which these ILO values, which I have explained through a Polanyian framework, have continued in the organisation's more recent work. I consider the potential the ILO has in reasserting a greater equilibrium to the double movement and forging another Great Transformation as it did in the 1940s. I discuss whether the ILO been able to continue one of its prime tasks of mediating the tension between inherently unequal markets and the protection of human freedoms and whether the ILO has been able to persuade states to be a buffer between the harsh effects of capitalism on society? And I attempt to answer whether the ILO still promote the regulation of the market for the betterment of human society or whether neoliberal hegemony has had its way with this international institution?

¹⁸² Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 362

¹⁸³ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 195

Chapter Four: The 1998 Declaration and Hegemonic Forces

In this section I discuss the rationale and content of the ILO's core labour standards which have emerged from the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The Declaration has divided opinion amongst commentators. As Langille states, this debate about core labour standards is actually about "how to understand the politics of the last 25 years or so, about the ascendancy of neoliberalism and the "Washington Consensus", the impact of globalisation, of how to think about the relationship between the economic and the social".¹⁸⁴ As such, I am utilising the core labour standards debate to make sense of a Neo-Gramscian's account of hegemony in the context of the ILO. Cox said that "the ILOs' ideological commitment has retained a certain ambiguity".¹⁸⁵ Surely then, this period presents the ultimate test for measuring the extent to which the ILO has been blown from its ideological Polanyian moorings and towards the monolithic ideological hegemony of neoliberalism that is proffered as the explanatory framework of neo-Gramscians.

The collapse of the Cold War political order was monumental for the ILO. The West had used the organisation "to demonstrate its own commitment to the ILO social justice principles and to highlight the deficiencies in the approach championed by the communist countries, which portrayed themselves as the true champions of the workers."¹⁸⁶ Promoting the virtues of freedom of association no longer held the same political convenience in the political climate. According to Standing, this was also the time that the neoliberal takeover began. The ILO secured large sums of funding toward technical assistance programmes from the World Bank to invest in the strategic corner of former Communist Europe as Communism started to fall.¹⁸⁷ The role of the ILO in cold war politics was hardly new, but by engaging in the shock therapy programmes, it was helping to issue in this new era of neoliberalism. For Standing, this compliance has meant "expediency and a loss of voice in the international debates around the nature of reform" as neoliberalism and structural

¹⁸⁴ Brian Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*, Social Issues, Globalisation and International Institutions (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006). p. 118

¹⁸⁵ Cox, "Labor and Hegemony." p. 407

¹⁸⁶ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 264

¹⁸⁷ Standing, "The ILO: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 364

adjustments were ushered in.¹⁸⁸ Standing also suggests that the USA helped engineer this situation through its time away from the organisation during the late 1970s.¹⁸⁹ He criticises the basic needs approach, addressed in the previous chapter, saying that “it preoccupied the ILO and diverted attention away from dealing with the fragmentation of the industrial model the ILO had been founded upon”.¹⁹⁰ He also goes on to say that the ILO’s other major work focus on the informal sector work was a “safer hobby horse” than challenging the anti-worker momentum of the global economy.¹⁹¹ Consequently these initiatives “distracted attention from an intellectual response to the World Bank’s structural adjustment strategies, which were a repudiation of the ILO’s perspective, particularly in the form they took in the 1980s when the so-called Washington Consensus came into being. The language of deregulations took hold... dismantling of protective regulations and a substitution of pro-individualistic, pro-market regulations”.¹⁹² The ILO’s response to this rise of market fundamentalism amounted to the expression of “unease” about the purpose and course of the reforms.¹⁹³ Consequently, the ILO accepted its position on the bottom rung of the international decision-making ladder, with the World Bank, the OECD, the G7, and the IMF assuming the main leadership roles.¹⁹⁴

The 1980s has been defined as the lost decade for much of the world’s population and it seems it too was a lost decade for the ILO. WEP had run out of intellectual steam, scaled back its existing programmes and seemingly lost its direction. The ILO gave way to other UN agencies, such as UNICEF, who adopted and promoted a more socially-oriented stance.¹⁹⁵ The reason Rodgers *et al* gives for this decline was an insufficient political consensus in the ILO during this time. Key states were pushing a neo-liberal mantra in other international platforms and the employers and workers were unable or unwilling to come in from their opposing stances, leaving the ILO marooned and unable to deploy resources in any direction.¹⁹⁶ As Standing states, “[t]he ILO was thus in no position to formulate academically respectable

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 364

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 361

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 363

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 363

¹⁹² Ibid. p. 363

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 363

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 364

¹⁹⁵ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 197

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 197

alternatives to conventional structural adjustment programmes that could have served to increase political support for a more socially-oriented approach".¹⁹⁷

By the 1990s, under Michel Hansenne as the Director General, the ILO was embarking on a hunt for a different paradigm to give the organisation a new political impetus and a foundation on which to base its work on employment and poverty eradication.¹⁹⁸ The 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen was instrumental in opening up new avenues for the ILO. This conference, chaired by Juan Somavia (prior to his role at the ILO) brought international attention to the appalling employment situation in developing countries. The conference asserted that the ILO's promotion of full employment was still relevant to macroeconomic policy in spite of neo-liberal offerings that implied otherwise.¹⁹⁹ This conference was the first international setting outside of the ILO where core labour standards received formal recognition.²⁰⁰

By the mid 1990s, the negative effects of this intensive period of capital accumulation on labour was beginning to receive much greater recognition.²⁰¹ The commodification and destruction of the environment was becoming a major concern given the ecological impact of unsustainable consumption patterns and the finite nature of these resources. Neoliberal policies were facing growing criticism from social and environmental movements. At the forefront of this criticism have been calls for greater controls on the global economy and better recognition of international labour rights. In this period the issue of workers' rights entered the spheres of an increasing array of international, transnational and regional organisations and actors, and have made their way on to an increasing number of public and private policies and agendas.²⁰² However, the neoliberal response was to nonchalantly make some minor amendments at the edges, whilst leaving core neoliberal tenets largely unchanged.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 197

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 199

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 200

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 219

²⁰¹ Beverly Silver, and Arrighi, Giovanni, ed. *Workers North and South*, Global Resistance Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). p. 277

²⁰² Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 231

The ILO's contribution to this was the 1998 Declaration. This marked a redesign of the organisation's *modus operandi* to coincide with the shifting nature of the global labour market and the broader political and economic challenges facing labour.²⁰³ This necessitated an evaluation of the ILO's bread and butter role of standard setter. Standards are calls for action, and set out the principles that often become the thrust of national labour codes.²⁰⁴ However, national law, based upon a domestic political economy is little match for global commodity chains and highly mobile finance that can evade tax and jump ship if they disapprove of a national regulatory environment.²⁰⁵ The current model of labour regulations was therefore becoming ineffective and even inconsequential for the provision and protection of labour rights in a globalised economy.²⁰⁶ Standards are also designed to establish the boundaries of unequal employer-employee relations. However, this model is very much predicated upon on a traditional, male-oriented, and formal employment model that does not exist in the majority of places of work around the world, especially with the rise of more flexible and casual work arrangements.²⁰⁷ Given that this employment relationship is becoming less and less the norm, it is no longer the prudent space in which to channel all labour regulations.²⁰⁸

In addition to these were the issues of ratification and compliance. Standard setting is based upon a voluntarist framework where, as Standing remarks, "Governments have been able to ratify Conventions they liked, not ratify those they have not liked, and 'denounce' ('deratify') those they have come to dislike".²⁰⁹ America is often singled out for criticism in this regard as it has paid little attention to ratifying standards, seeing them as irrelevant to the operation of its free market.²¹⁰ In addition to these ideological reasons for shunning standards, international labour standards have also been accused of becoming overly detailed and exhaustive rights which results in many states deferring ratification as they are unable to comply with their

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 226

²⁰⁴ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 357

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 355

²⁰⁶ John Knapp, C., "Boundaries of the Ilo: A Labor Rights Argument for Institutional Cooperation," *Brooklyn Journal of International Law*. 29, no. 1 (2003). p. 372

²⁰⁷ Langille, "What Is International Labour Law For?." p. 10

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 10

²⁰⁹ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 356

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 359

meticulous legal detail.²¹¹ These standards were gradually losing support amongst the ILO's constituents and lacked traction with the real world.²¹²

The problem with international labour laws in Langille's eyes is that they have become fixated on the means, rather than on the ultimate ends.²¹³ He describes this aspect of the ILO's work as a self-serving beast that prevents the ILO from moving forward. He also believes it has become instrumental in fuelling a 'perceived wisdom' that labour law (and therefore the pursuit of social justice and an over human progress) is a cost and at odds with economic growth. As Langille says, "it is the shared understanding of how the world works, rather than how to react to it, which is the problem."²¹⁴ As a result he sees this current working model of international labour law as clearly outdated,²¹⁵ and is clear that the old approach was not working and should neither be romanticised nor protected.²¹⁶ He believes the shift to a rights-based paradigm is the best route for realising the pursuit of the ILO's true goals of fairness and decency.²¹⁷ He argues that the CLS have potential to lift the ILO out of its quagmire and change the terms of the debate away from the protection of workers being seen as an economic trade-off and towards protection being seen as right in its own sake. Core labour standards create a new way of working rather than the ILO continuing to tinker round the edges.²¹⁸ Langille states that, "the 1998 ILO Declaration, at least in its original design and theory, looks like the way of the future".²¹⁹

Many other observers have been positive about the introduction of core labour standards. They see that the new focus enables the ILO to best utilise its intellectual, administrative and technical abilities, whilst ensuring that it takes a stand as the defender of the social pillar in the global economy.²²⁰ In addition, the Declaration is seen to have paved the way for increased co-operation with other

²¹¹ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*. p. 105, 108

²¹² Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 4

²¹³ Langille, "What Is International Labour Law For?."

²¹⁴ Ibid. p. 16

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 17

²¹⁶ ———, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*.

²¹⁷ ———, "What Is International Labour Law For?." p. 17

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 17

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 26

²²⁰ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. p. 8, Chapter 8

international organisations that make for better social outcomes and policy coherence in the area of global economic governance.²²¹ But the Declaration has also received fairly heavy criticism. Alston and Heenan state that core labour standards “conceal a retrogressive trend in relation to efforts to defend labor rights globally.”²²² They also see that it waters down the ILO, given that its “essential strength lies in its system of conventions and the supervision of obligations accepted by states”.²²³ In short, the 1998 Declaration runs the risk of uprooting the organisation’s Polanyist grounding in the effort to move with the times and speak the language that other players in the international political economy are more attuned to hearing.

The 1998 Declaration is the second such statement that ILO has ever made - the other being the 1944 Philadelphia Declaration – a fact which signifies its poignancy. It contains four basic labour rights: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of the worst forms of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.²²⁴ All states are bound to the Declaration as a result of their membership, regardless of whether they have ratified the specific ILO conventions that these standards originate from.²²⁵ Since its emergence, the core conventions have been a numerical success in that the standards they are based upon have ratified at a much greater pace than the ratification of other standards.²²⁶ But ratification is only ratification; it does not necessarily lead to observance or actions.²²⁷ The ILO cannot enforce the core labour standards. Instead it relies on its old faithful tools of moral suasion and the hope that countries will emulate one another.²²⁸ The Declaration also has an inbuilt follow up process, which enables the ILO to monitor each country that has not ratified the relevant standards and to publish a major annual report on the different

²²¹ Ibid. p. 8-9, Chapter 8

²²² Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 224

²²³ Ibid. p. 14

²²⁴ ILO, "ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles at Work," <http://www.ilo.org/declaration/thedeclaration/textdeclaration/lang--en/index.htm>.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 4

²²⁷ Sengenberger, *Globalization and Social Progress: The Role and Impact of International Labour Standards* p. 7

²²⁸ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 4

core standards.²²⁹ The intention is to create incentives for states to ratify rather than condemn states that have not.²³⁰ The ILO is acutely aware of the fact that many member states do not have the social, legal or economic networks and structures to enact labour rights. As a result the Declaration now informs a large portion of the ILO's technical assistance work to support countries to ratify and to adhere to their commitments.²³¹

Moving From Standards to Rights

The consensus on workers' rights fell by the wayside in the latter part of the 1980s. As Alston states, there was "no shortage of voices playing down the utility of labour rights and advocating instead the need to promote labour market flexibility and overall economic growth as not only best, but the only realistic way to move towards the realization of the adequate standard of living to which workers, and indeed all individuals, are entitled".²³² Polanyi warned that the free market would always try to subordinate social rights and values to the economic rights and values.²³³ However, in a Polanyian sense, human rights and economic progress should not be seen in opposition to one another because a market society serves a far greater social purpose than accumulation of capital for its own sake.

The 1998 Declaration follows a long line of human rights related work in the ILO.²³⁴ The ILO embodies an extensive collection of rights in 200 plus standards that cover a broad range of interdependent economic, social, civil and political rights that intend to protect workers' (and indeed employers') rights. The ILO is rare in having never chosen to distinguish positive and negative rights,²³⁵ having "historically championed the interdependence of civil and political and economic and social rights at work,

²²⁹ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 28-29

²³⁰ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*. p. 107

²³¹ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p. 420; Knapp, "Boundaries of the Ilo: A Labor Rights Argument for Institutional Cooperation." p. 383

²³² Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 5

²³³ Birchfield, "Contesting the Hegemony of Market Ideology: Gramsci's 'Good Sense' and Polanyi's 'Double Movement'."

²³⁴ This has included activism during the Apartheid era, in regards to freedom of association including actions supporting Solidarnosc in Poland, to upholding gender equality, pertaining to rights of migrant workers, the rights of migrant labour, and the rights of indigenous and tribal people, as well as previous campaigns on child labour and forced labour, (Rodgers et al)

²³⁵ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 39

arguing that the traditional categories used within the U.N. made little sense in relation to the labor market".²³⁶ Nevertheless, labour rights have received a high level of formal recognition, having featured heavily in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 as well as in the two human rights covenants that were ratified in 1966, covering Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.²³⁷ Labour rights are considered to be universal rights in that they "belong to people by virtue of being human and who work in order to sustain their existence and the existence of others".²³⁸ They have emerged as norms and have filtered down to become central features of a liberal international society that in turn compose our social and political reality.²³⁹

The predominant mechanism for promoting human rights at the ILO has been through creating international labour standards.²⁴⁰ The shift toward the core labour standards is a move toward a human-rights inspired 'normative floor' to globalisation.²⁴¹ It constitutes a minimum set of conditions that focus on the most vulnerable to being exploited in the work environment and were chosen for their ability to provide the biggest punch. The Declaration addresses some of the most basic human rights abuses that prevent the realisation of justice both inside and outside of the work environment.²⁴² It is an attempt to eliminate the stark inequalities between those that enjoy labour rights and those that do not.²⁴³ Deakin says that the Declaration was a notable attempt to "restate social rights" in a transnational legal instrument which has helped put social rights back on the radar; a radar that has

²³⁶ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 255

²³⁷ These include: freedom from slavery (Art 5), to non-discrimination and equal protection under the law (Art , freedom of association (Art 20), to social security (Art 22) to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment (Art. 23), to equal pay for equal work (Art. 23); the right to form and to join trade union (art 23), the right to reasonable limitation of working hours (Art. 23). Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 2

²³⁸ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." 417

²³⁹ Jack Donnelly, ed. *Human Rights, Globalizing Flows, and State Power*, Globalization and Human Rights (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002). p. 61

²⁴⁰ Leo Swepston, ed. *Ilo Standards and Globalization*, Confronting Globalization: The Quest for a Social Agenda (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2005). p. 12

²⁴¹ Robert Howse, and Langille, Brian and Burda, Julien, ed. *The World Trade Organization and Labour Rights: Man Bites Dog*, Social Issues, Globalisation and International Institutions (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006). p. 158

²⁴² Alston, ed. 'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime. p. 105-108. p. 45

²⁴³ Michael Goodhart, "Origins and Universality in the Human Rights Debates: Cultural Essentialism and the Challenge of Globalization," *Human Rights Quarterly* 25, no. 935-964 (2003). p. 958

been far more receptive of economic demands in recent times.²⁴⁴ They provide a framework to pursue a more human face to globalisation. They encourage states to uphold rights (which in the context of globalisation are increasingly given or taken away by social forces other than the state) and integrate social strategies into broader economic policies.²⁴⁵ Hughes states that this has been one of the ILO's "principal achievements... to expand labour protection into the domain of human rights and tie these to the pursuit of freedom and economic progress".²⁴⁶ As a result of the Declaration, rights have become even more integral facet of the ILO's social justice agenda.

These labour rights also translate into union rights. The rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining are the most controversial in the Declaration as well as being some of the most scrutinized existing human rights.²⁴⁷ However, the ILO views these rights as being fundamental because they allow workers to bring to bear their other rights. Having the freedom to form independent associations means that people can defend their interests; an essential facet in the realisation of political democracy, emancipation and citizenship, which is very much in line with the ethos of the ILO.²⁴⁸ Freedom to associate in independent and democratic trade unions and bargain collectively is seen as virtually the only way for workers to increase their bargaining power and articulate their collective interests.²⁴⁹ Collective bargaining is something that is too thinly spread in global terms and is too often subject to curtailment and violent rebuttals from government. The normative purpose and language of rights (especially trade union rights) suggests a more Polanyi-style bias, rather than neoliberal one.

Langille affirms that the aforementioned crisis in the international labour standards regime was the underlying motivation for the Declaration rather than the ILO

²⁴⁴ Simon Deakin, ed. *Social Rights in a Globalized Economy*, Labour Rights as Human Rights (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). p. 25

²⁴⁵ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*.

²⁴⁶ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p. 414

²⁴⁷ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 49

²⁴⁸ Maul, "'Help Them Move the Ilo Way': The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War"; Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*, Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 108

²⁴⁹ Gallin, "Trade Unions and Ngos: A Necessary Partnerships for Social Development." p. 29

becoming a protagonist in a neoliberal plot.²⁵⁰ However it is also argued that these rights are a lot less controversial to neoliberal capitalist interests than they would first appear. There was actually a great deal of government and employer consensus around the Declaration especially in light of their waning support for the ILO in the previous years.²⁵¹ As will be demonstrated there is some fairly persuasive evidence that the Declaration aligns quite comfortably with the neoliberal agenda. This boils down to the political-economic context from which the Declaration emerged and the subsequent content and intent of the actual standards.

The Context of Core Labour Standards

The WTO and the Social Clause

With the WTO at its helm since 1995, the multilateral trading system has become, one, if not the, most significant and persistent item on the international agenda since the end of the Cold War.²⁵² The WTO's philosophy represents neoliberal orthodoxy and the organisation is implicitly involved in the production of hegemonic power.²⁵³ It is strongly in favour of the self-regulating market and takes a minimalist attitude to international labour regulation. It views development through a one-sized fits all approach that can be achieved through liberalism, from which employment growth will naturally flow. As Langille states the "WTO is not only a system of rules but a vehicle for the transmission of social and economic ideology"²⁵⁴

The WTO has invited countries to engage in open trade irrespective of their social policies, which has resulted in a debate about labour and trade, referred to as the 'social clause'.²⁵⁵ The intention of the social clause was to remove labour from the increased competition in international markets. To gain entry into the international trading regime, countries would have had to adhere to a set of minimum social

²⁵⁰ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*. p. 110

²⁵¹ Haworth and Hughes, *(Forthcoming) the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 4

²⁵² Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 231

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 225

²⁵⁴ Howse, ed. *The World Trade Organization and Labour Rights: Man Bites Dog*. p. 219

²⁵⁵ The concept of a social clause harks back to the failed attempts to form an International Trade Organisation in the 1940s.

standards.²⁵⁶ The WTO was seen to be a key vehicle for pursuing rights given its ability to place sanctions on states. This debate caused impasse at the WTO. In 1996, in the Singapore Declaration, the ILO stated it would not be taking up such a regulatory task and instead passed the responsibility to the ILO:

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the competent body to set and deal with these [core labour] standards and we reaffirm our support for its work in promoting them. We believe that economic growth and development fostered by increased trade and further trade liberalization contribute to the promotion of these standards. We reject the use of labour standards for protectionist purposes, and agree that the comparative advantage of countries, particularly low-wage developing countries, must in no way be put into question.²⁵⁷

Although the Declaration is not explicitly linked to trade, the ILO did inherit trade related aspects. The Declaration explicitly states that: "labour standards should be used for protectionist trade purposes and that nothing in this Declaration and its follow-up shall be invoked or otherwise used for such purposes; in addition, the comparative advantage of any should in no way be called in question by this Declaration."²⁵⁸ This came about because some Western governments saw a benefit in penalizing countries with low labour standards, through such mechanisms as economic sanctions, aid conditionality, and social labeling. This enabled them to shield their domestic markets from undercutting.²⁵⁹ Whilst G77 representatives, while not necessarily doubting the principles of the Declaration, did oppose the potential for protectionism and the impact the Declaration would have on their comparative advantage.²⁶⁰ As Kabeer proposes the ethics and trade debate classed the utilisation

²⁵⁶ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 213

²⁵⁷ WTO, "Singapore Ministerial Declaration,"

http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min96_e/wtodec_e.htm. Accessed 08/02/2010

²⁵⁸ ILO, "ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles at Work." Accessed 19/01/2010

²⁵⁹ For example, the Clinton administration favoured the possibility of sanctions and binding controls for offending governments; Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 30; Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*.

²⁶⁰ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 30 Langille actually counter poses this argument saying that much of this argument is flawed because capital is not as fickle as rational economic models would have us understand and that labour costs are not the only determinant persuading capital to shift in certain flows meaning that states are not necessarily going to benefit economically by cutting back on labour law provisions. Langille, "What Is International Labour Law For?." p. 18

of all low-cost and abundant labour an 'unfair advantage' that was inherently exploitative, irrespective of the realities of real working people.²⁶¹

Labour unions have tended to be vociferous proponents and supporters of this kind of thinking. This also aroused accusations of imperialistic, protectionist and indeed racial underpinnings.²⁶² The problem is that in a competitive international economy, workers have been pushed into direct competition with one-another. As Taylor says, "the unevenness of global economic integration serves to divide working classes, both internally and across borders, because the restructuring of capital repeatedly pressures specific groups of workers to protect their status at the expense of others".²⁶³ On top of this, the rights, standards and social protections promulgated by the ILO have often had a bias toward protecting the interests of workers and economies in industrialised countries.²⁶⁴ The reality is that in a deeply integrated global economy, actions in one place to protect or improve the quality and security of work are felt in other parts of the international division of labour.²⁶⁵ There is only a flimsy solidarity between workers in the majority and minority worlds, and this has been a barrier to creating a set of universally applicable core labour standards that are supposed to represent the interests of all workers.²⁶⁶ Some workers may actually benefit from neoliberal shifts, and therefore do not have a shared interest in mobilising to put an end to exploitation.²⁶⁷

Despite these issues, the removal of the WTO from the core labour standards debate has been applauded.²⁶⁸ By taking an assertive role in coming up with the Declaration, the ILO helped to ensure that labour standards remained their domain.

²⁶¹ Kabeer suggest that there are is deep politics of misrepresentation in international institutions, including the ILO, which permits a portrayal of work as helpless and grim for those in the developing world Naila Kabeer, ed. *Labour Standards, Women's Rights, Basic Needs: Challenges to Collective Action Global Tensions: Challenges and Opportunities in the World Economy* (London and New York: Routledge,2004). P. 176

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Taylor, ed. *Introduction: Global Economy Contested*. p. 8

²⁶⁴ Alston, ed. *'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime*. p. 14

²⁶⁵ Taylor, ed. *Power and Conflict and the Production of the Global Economy*. p. 28

²⁶⁶ Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*. p. 221-222;

²⁶⁷ Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 578-580

²⁶⁸ Howse, ed. *The World Trade Organization and Labour Rights: Man Bites Dog.*; Sengenberger, *Globalization and Social Progress: The Role and Impact of International Labour Standards*

For example Vosko says: "I concur with analysts rejecting social clauses as a route to achieving global social justice. The problems flowing from tying labour rights and labour standards to market-generating agreements are far-reaching. Embedding social clauses in trade agreements inevitably means that violations of labour and social standards will *only* be assessed on the basis of whether they constitute unfair trade practices"²⁶⁹ This would have the potential to infringe on the elevated moral status of human rights and attach an economic rationale to their adherence, perpetuating a race to the bottom.²⁷⁰ However, others remain concerned about regarding the WTO origins of the ILO's core labour standards. They hold deep reservations about who was involved in promoting and dictating the original terms of the debate, given that the Declaration does bear close resemblance to the proposed social clause.²⁷¹ They believe the concept of the core labour standards makes the ILO subservient to the neoliberal interests of the WTO and its counterparts.²⁷²

The Content of Core Labour Standards

It is widely acknowledged that the framework for the 1998 Declaration, with its focus on non-binding mechanisms, was driven and supported by the employers group.²⁷³ They pushed for the Declaration to contain statements of principle, inferring a more voluntarist system. The workers' group responded with caution to the employers calls and the initial debate of the core labour standards was heated.²⁷⁴ However, workers' opposition reduced as the social clause agenda, which unions had campaigned for, disintegrated.²⁷⁵ Alston and Heenan say that rather than empowering workers the core labour standards actually do more to empower capital, especially MNCs, to simply set their own standards.²⁷⁶ They see that soft and promotional mechanisms reduce the ILO's to ability to embed the market in

²⁶⁹ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 22

²⁷⁰ Howse, ed. *The World Trade Organization and Labour Rights: Man Bites Dog*. p. 167

²⁷¹ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 224

²⁷² Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p.416

²⁷³ Alston, ed. *'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime*. p. 9-10; Katherine Hagen, "The International Labour Organization: Can It Deliver the Social Dimension of Globalization," *Dialogue of Globalization, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* 11 (2003).

²⁷⁴ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 37, 221

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 220-221

²⁷⁶ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 19

society.²⁷⁷ Vosko similarly dismisses the Declaration saying that the outcome has been to reinforce the cozy corporate/state power relationships in the ILO rather than equipping states with the more hard and fast tools that would enable them to take on global capital.²⁷⁸ Consequently Vosko says that it “fails to prevent downward harmonization in labour standards” because capital retains its authority and an ability to control the state of play.²⁷⁹ She maintains that to prevent the erosion of human and labour rights, the ILO must adopt much tighter market-controlling measures.²⁸⁰ The Declaration endows the ILO with limited ability to enforce these core labour standards, other than suasion and technical assistance.²⁸¹ In addition, the large amount of attention given to the 1998 Declaration means that the ILO’s other more traditional supervisory and monitory mechanisms are being under-utilised.²⁸² However, Langille refutes these claims saying that the ILO has always relied on soft mechanisms – namely persuasion – and has always tended toward the carrot, rather than the stick method of promoting its standards.²⁸³ The Declaration, he says does nothing to alter that status quo. Nevertheless, the fact that the employer groups promoted this development should not go un-noted.

In addition, the 1998 Declaration coincided with a proliferation of neoliberally inspired corporate social responsibility initiatives.²⁸⁴ These often involve soft-law codes of conduct and self-reporting initiatives that are drive by private actors in order to appeal to consumer preferences. Many activist fear that this development will fundamentally alter the employment relationship and erode the social justice potential of standards.²⁸⁵ The ILO has done little to monitor these codes of conduct

²⁷⁷ Ibid. p. iii; Alston, ed. *'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime*. p. 19

²⁷⁸ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 21

²⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 21

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 30

²⁸¹ There is only example of enforcement, came under Article 33 of the constitution, when Myanmar was pulled up at ILO's 2004 Conference as a mechanism of last resort regarding its consistence use of forced labour. More information on this can be found in numerous resource such as Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*.p. 64-65 or Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 16-17; Swepston, ed. *Ilo Standards and Globalization*. p. 14-19

²⁸² Alston, ed. *'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime*.

²⁸³ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*. p. 107

²⁸⁴ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 246

²⁸⁵ Taylor, ed. *Introduction: Global Economy Contested*. p. 5; George Tsogas, "International Labour Regulation: What Have We Really Learnt So Far," *Relations Industrielles* 64, no. 1 (2009).

or attempt to push them in the direction of greater accountability and transparency.²⁸⁶ Instead the ILO has essentially entered into competition with this proliferation; hoping that by having a set of targeted, high-impact standards it would maintain its position as the primary body in international labour law.²⁸⁷ By creating one central location for non-threatening for standards, the Declaration has also helped to allay employers who were nervous about calls for more robust regulatory mechanisms.²⁸⁸

In addition to the regulatory nature of the core labour standards, another stumbling block for the Declaration has been the content of the four core rights. As Hughes suggests the very act of defining a set of core rights entails a never ending dispute about whether the list is complete.²⁸⁹ Although, these four areas do signify a greater visibility of labour rights and a more coherent rhetoric about rights in general, the Declaration is by no means a full blown commitment to human rights. It expresses a rather different conception of rights when compared to the broader human rights agenda contained in the 1944 Declaration. The 1998 Declaration narrows down all of the ILO's Conventions, which has meant a broad spectrum of human and labour rights have fallen by the wayside. Alston and Heenan say that as a result, the core standards are too narrow and amount to meager principles, representing the "lowest common denominator approach to content".²⁹⁰ Alston, therefore considers the Declaration as an inferior model and an attack on the jurisprudence and enforcement of existing Conventions.

The final package of rights contained in the Declaration amount to a collection of civil and political rights at the exclusion of economic and social rights.²⁹¹ This negates the equal weighting that the ILO has supposedly given to the various human rights in the past.

²⁸⁶ Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 21

²⁸⁷ Haworth and Hughes, *(Forthcoming) the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 4

²⁸⁸ Alston, ed. *'Core Labour Standards' and the Transformation of the International Labour Rights Regime*. p. 14

²⁸⁹ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p. 418

²⁹⁰ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 254

²⁹¹ Ibid.

This skewing in favor of civil and political rights is the antithesis of the ILO approach, which led the way in the promotion of a non-discriminating approach to the two sets of rights, based on an overarching commitment to social justice.²⁹²

The channelling of attention towards these four areas sends a message that justice in the world of work can be separated from crucial elements of economic and social justice. The rebuttal to such claims is that these civil and political rights create the preconditions for the realisation of other rights, helping to remove obstacles in terms of accessing work and economic opportunities and they help providing the basis for creating decent work conditions.²⁹³ Alston and Heenan doubt the validity of this rhetoric, saying that rights are supposed to be indivisible and interdependent, which means that some rights cannot prioritised over others.²⁹⁴ Such a view would certainly accord with the recommendations of the Vienna Declaration. Langille retorts by saying that there has always been a hierarchy of importance within the ILO's numerous labour conventions.²⁹⁵

However, those that are more sceptical see this as a signifier of ILO conformity to the logic of a neoliberal conception of rights. The focus on civil and political rights, which are negative rights - generally meaning freedom from - are endemic within neoliberal international institutions and are more closely associated with orthodox or neoclassical thinking. Goodhart makes the connection between the rise of capitalism and the growth of individual rather than collective human rights. Goodhart says that neoliberal globalization necessitates "a certain system of rights and liberties for its successful operation"²⁹⁶ and that these have a lot in common with the character and conservative leaning of Lockean rights.²⁹⁷ A narrow neoliberal account of human

²⁹² Ibid. p. 254

²⁹³ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 38, 45

²⁹⁴ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 253

²⁹⁵ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*.

²⁹⁶ Goodhart, "Origins and Universality in the Human Rights Debates: Cultural Essentialism and the Challenge of Globalization." p. 955

²⁹⁷ Lockean rights are concerned with the natural rights of property, which enabled both the enclosure of the commons and that any work done by a labour became the property of the master. And because these rights were considered 'natural', government was prohibited to interfere in the private sphere of the economy. Ibid.

rights is quite distinct from the broader notion of universal human rights that the ILO has been more concerned with.²⁹⁸ He also makes the following statement that:

In Polanyi's view the capitalist economy – including the account of individual, uniform, universal rights it entails – disrupts extant social, economic and political relations. Something like a Lockean account of rights helps to explain and justify this transition. And while the process is described in different terms – privatization, deregulation, markets discipline – contemporary SAPs associated with neoliberal globalization have similar disruptive and transformative effects and rely on similar justifications.²⁹⁹

Goodhart argues that universal human rights are failing to keep pace with the expansion of capital and that in order to defend against the threats of globalisation, there needs to be a more concerted political struggle to ensure rights work for everyone.³⁰⁰

Western liberal values have tended to neglect the more collectively focused economic and social rights and promote the more individually focused civil and political rights. The debate over the two types of rights is exemplified by the existence of two human rights covenants: there was a tendency for the communist bloc to pay greater attention to one and the Western capitalist nations to pay more attention to the other. Authors such as Whelan and Donnelly try to claim that the existence of welfare state regimes are the embodiment economic and social rights but they do so in the context of an embedded liberalism rather than a conflictual neoliberal world.³⁰¹ As Goodhart states:

The individualistic civil and political right associated with neoliberalism as policy, and its underlying philosophical premise of the moral desirability of limiting state interference in self-regulating and natural economic processes as a way of enhancing

²⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 936

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 954

³⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 942, 959

³⁰¹ Daniel Whelan and Jack Donnelly, "The West, Economic and Social Rights, and the Global Human Rights Regime: Setting the Record Straight," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29 (2007).

freedom is routinely lambasted by critics as an ideological cover for the interests of powerful global and domestic economic actors³⁰²

The CLS represent “classic negative” rights in the sense that they have a legal origin that requires governments to refrain from certain activities and to prevent others from engaging in them in order to defend personal security.³⁰³ Positive rights on the other hand compel the state to sponsor, secure and advance social and economic protections that essentially enable human subsistence.³⁰⁴ Positive rights have been typecast as imposing economic resources, whereas negative rights are more dependent on legal mechanisms.³⁰⁵ Caraway notes that because core labour standards are conceptualised as human rights, as opposed to economic rights, it has lessened the controversy of the Declaration.³⁰⁶ Alston and Heenan assert that there can be no economic or moral justification for omitting a whole list of rights that are clearly stated in the international human rights instruments. They say it limits the scope of the Declaration and its ability address more systematic exploitation and commodification of workers.³⁰⁷ Tellingly, this is a claim that Langille, who has presented the most academically robust rebuttal against the ILO’s critics, does not to respond to.³⁰⁸

The realisation of labour rights is inextricably interconnected with the realisation of social and economic rights and yet they are too frequently dismissed by international human rights agendas and too frequently violated. As a result, Knapp proposes that the ILO should be expanding its positive obligations in order to protect worker’s rights.³⁰⁹ Kabeer highlights concerns that basic rights could actually get in the way of securing basic needs by taking work opportunities away from the world’s most

³⁰² Goodhart, "Origins and Universality in the Human Rights Debates: Cultural Essentialism and the Challenge of Globalization." p. 937

³⁰³ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 253

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 253

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 254

³⁰⁶ Teri Caraway, "Freedom of Association: Battering Ram or Trojan Horse," *Review of International Political Economy* 13, no. 2 (2006).

³⁰⁷ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 254

³⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 224

³⁰⁹ Knapp, "Boundaries of the Ilo: A Labor Rights Argument for Institutional Cooperation." p. 382

disadvantaged workers, especially female workers.³¹⁰ She argues that core labour standards must also have a greater acknowledgement of basic needs.³¹¹ Deakin suggests that standards could become a “a corrosive force, which by individualizing legal claims to access to resources undermines those solidaristic forms of social cohesion around which the twentieth century welfare state was constructed”.³¹² Important economic rights that the working classes have often pushed for are being gradually discarded. In addition, industrial democracy that seeks greater democratisation of the economic realm (as well as the political) becomes less and less of reality.³¹³

Core Labour Standards: A Neoliberal Plot?

Since their first formal outing in Copenhagen 1995, there has been some galvanisation of opinions amongst the international community in respect to core labour standards.³¹⁴ As will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter, the outward focus of core labour standards has contributed to the ILO repositioning, heightening the ILO's relevance to the current global economy, and in so doing has created greater scope for furthering the interests of workers.³¹⁵ The momentum around core labour standards can be seen, for example, in the fact that they have become: benchmarks in multilateral and regional organisations trade agreements, including American free trade agreements, such as NAFTA,³¹⁶ integral to policies in regional organisations like the Asian Development Bank and the European Union; central elements to somewhat questionable multilateral initiatives such as the Global Compact initiative that began in 2000;³¹⁷ and incorporated into the work of development agencies and into documents and agreements such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).³¹⁸

³¹⁰ Kabeer, ed. *Labour Standards, Women's Rights, Basic Needs: Challenges to Collective Action* . p. 190-91

³¹¹ Ibid. p. 178

³¹² Deakin, ed. *Social Rights in a Globalized Economy*. p. 25

³¹³ Caraway, "Freedom of Association: Battering Ram or Trojan Horse." p. 227

³¹⁴ ILO, "A Fair Globalization: The Role of the Ilo," in *Report of the Director-General on the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization* (Geneva2004). p. 43

³¹⁵ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*.

³¹⁶ Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 4

³¹⁷ Soederberg, *Global Governance in Question: Empire, Class and the New Common Sense in Managing North-South Relations*.

³¹⁸ ILO, "A Fair Globalization: The Role of the Ilo." p. 48;

The core labour standards have definitely helped the ILO to assume or more assertive role the global governance of the economy, but this also poses risks. For example, the US government has also thrown their support behind the Declaration and have donated considerable amount of funds to the ILO towards their work in this area.³¹⁹ As Standing suggests “money is not democratic; it is coming from those with the capacity to pay”.³²⁰ It also brings the ILO into much closer contact with the institutions who are undoubtedly serving a neoliberal agenda. This potentially exposes the concept of core rights to being captured by such parties, who can use these civil rights to signify whatever it is they want them to.³²¹ And such institutions may only be too happy to dethatch these rights from their long lineage of labour struggle in the ILO.³²²

The global governance arena, has for too long considered “labour standards and social protection derivatives of economic policy, rather than objectives in their own right”.³²³ Sometimes the ILO exacerbates this by portraying these as ‘taxes’ on economic interests when in fact, they are crucial for forging a more sustainable society, of which the economy is an appendage.³²⁴ Nevertheless, neoliberal interests continue to undermine the remainder of the ILO’s work by treating labour standards, social welfare, and market regulations as unnecessary rigidities that curtail capital accumulation and economic efficiency; something that core labour standards also remain implicated in. This discourse about economic trade-off prevents any coherent agreement about the values of social rights.³²⁵ It also demonstrates the far-reaching aspect of hegemonic ideology, which as neo-Gramscian’s suggest, makes itself present in all aspects of human life. Neoliberalism has, to a certain extent, been able to frame the basic working model of the ILO as well as the rationales and the content of the core labour standards.

³¹⁹ Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 367

³²⁰ Ibid. p. 381

³²¹ Alston and Heenan, "Shrinking the International Labour Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 Ilo Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work." p. 244

³²² Standing, "The Ilo: An Agency for Globalization?." p. 368

³²³ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p. 422

³²⁴ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*.

³²⁵ Deakin, ed. *Social Rights in a Globalized Economy*. p. 25

As I have demonstrated, there are deep tensions over the interpretation of these standards and concerns over the ways that they can be manipulated. I agree that they are too market friendly, too soft, and so narrow so as to become dislocated from the broader social and labour rights. However, I also consider the 1998 Declaration as a middle ground - something that ameliorates these opposing views. The Declaration is not a pure neo-liberal plot. There remains something deeper and more complex about this initiative, which does help the ILO to break from a period of stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s. The Declaration addresses some serious human rights abuses, and applies protection to a much broader range of workers than the old standards model could manage. The Declaration holds issues of morality and fairness at its core and demonstrates an institutional desire to not relinquish the importance of social justice. However, there is a pragmatic aspect to identifying the needs of workers in the language of rights. As Haworth and Hughes state, the “‘core’ labour standards, when applied, simultaneously meet the requirements of the market and of human rights and dignity”³²⁶ Using a neoliberal hegemony reading, this statement screams co-option. However, from a Polanyian reading, this statement infers something quite different. It implies that the market and rights are not in conflict with one another and that the ILO still seems to hold this value dear.

The Declaration is representative of the ILO taking moving to dilute the omnipotence of neoliberal hegemony. In so doing, the ILO is able to expose some of the fissures that are appearing in the neoliberal ideology to promote the need for a greater social consciousness. Despite its weaknesses the 1998 Declaration can be “treated as a first step towards the building of a universal social floor to the global economy”.³²⁷ However, given the dominance of the economic and trade arguments that have consumed the debate, core labour standards are rarely framed from a labour perspective. In this respect core labour standards remain a ‘relatively blunt instrument’ that glosses over many of the deep structural issues pertaining to the global economy that cause poverty and inequality.³²⁸ The realisation of a package of basic labour rights alongside the realisation of basic needs remains too distant for

³²⁶ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 4, p.3

³²⁷ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 220

³²⁸ Vosko, “‘Decent Work’ the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice.” P. 39

too many workers.³²⁹ However, as we shall see, in the next chapter, the ILO is beginning to get more currency through what could be described as a far more labour-driven approach, that of Decent Work, to which we now turn.

³²⁹ Sengenberger, *Globalization and Social Progress: The Role and Impact of International Labour Standards* p. 5

Chapter Five: The ILO and the Creation of a New Common Sense?

The Core Labour Standards, whilst not a complete sell-out, demonstrate the degree to which the ILO had been hemmed in by the dominance of free market principles. It was concessionary and essentially became a negotiation for a variety of neoliberalism, rather than a variety of capitalism per se.³³⁰ However, the 1998 Declaration emerged alongside some contradictions in the totality of neoliberal hegemony. Those contradictions have continued into the 21st Century and the more recent approach of the ILO reveals an organisation taking advantage of these, attempting to prise them open further, and to create alternatives to neoliberalism. The Decent Work agenda was launched in 1999. It was followed in 2008 by the ILO's third Declaration, titled Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, which aims to further cement the principles of Decent Work into the organisation's overall ethos.³³¹ While this is by no means a complete reassertion of Polanyi – given that the grip of neoliberalism is far from over – Decent Work does demonstrate how the anchor of Polanyian values have re-emerged to a far greater extent than was evident during the disembedding phase of neoliberalism. As a result the ILO is playing a more concerted role in reigniting a double movement at the global level.

The Decent Work Agenda is the overall goal as well as the primary work programme of the ILO today. It ties together nearly all facets of the ILO's operations and gives a clear set of priorities for the ILO to act upon. This is something that the ILO had lacked in the past and which further exposed the organisation to the neoliberal onslaught.³³² As Haworth and Hughes explain, Somavia condensed the purpose of the ILO into one "pithy statement", noting that "[t]he primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity."³³³ Decent Work is based upon four strategic objectives that together create a holistic and indivisible package to:

³³⁰ Cerny, "Embedding Neoliberalism: The Evolution of a Hegemonic Paradigm."

³³¹ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 234-236

³³² Ibid. p. 207, 222

³³³ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 6

- Promote and realise standards and fundamental principles and rights at work;
- Create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income through enterprise and employment creation;
- Enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all;
- Strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.³³⁴

In integrating these work-related aspects, the ILO pays a much greater attention to whether its work-related policies are mutually reinforcing, or whether they involve unintended trade-offs.³³⁵

The Core Labour Standards are a central pillar to the Decent Work agenda and have become the framework on which all subsequent work of the ILO hangs.³³⁶ The World Commission on a Fair Globalization that was established by the ILO pushes for the realisation of the Fundamental Principles and Rights because they are “vital to human dignity, equality and security. They are also stepping-stones to the realization of other human and labour rights”.³³⁷ Decent Work helps foster that realisation. “Under Decent Work, the rights enshrined in the Declaration provide the opportunity to gain access to the fruits of economic growth and prosperity. In substance they offer no material entitlements but provide the necessary political space, inherent in the rights themselves, to advance the interest of workers”.³³⁸ Placing core labour standards inside a broader agenda of Decent Work gives a more even weighting to both negative and positive conceptions of human rights and goes some way toward ameliorating some of the failings of the Declaration. Decent Work also incorporates a far more holistic response to the challenge of globalization than the Declaration. As Rodgers *et al* state “[i]n a broader sense... the term “human rights” incorporates all the notions that make up what the ILO terms “decent work””³³⁹ Decent Work also,

³³⁴ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 224

³³⁵ Ibid. p. 10

³³⁶ Vosko, "Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." P. 20

³³⁷ ILO, "A Fair Globalization: The Role of the Ilo." p. 34

³³⁸ Hughes, "The International Labour Organisation." p. 420

³³⁹ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 38

This concept is very compatible with Sen's human capability approach. Sen, who has been an advocate of the Decent Work, suggests that the concept of human freedom, provides scholarly leadership that marries together the goals of social justice, political democracy, and economic progress as parts that make up the whole rather than elements that are in conflict with one another.

builds upon the Declaration's attempts to make labour rights available to a broader spectrum of the world's workforce. This essentially means rights apply to workers "regardless of their location in the economy and the status of their employment".³⁴⁰ Everyone should have the right to a decent working life.³⁴¹

Since the 1944 Declaration, the ILO has assumed a significant development focus, which marked a shift away from a purely law driven organisation. As a result, Maul says the ILO housed a "labor standards faction" who were more concerned with the normative role the ILO could play and a "development faction" who wanted to see the application of ILO standards to development issues.³⁴² Decent Work³⁴³ has managed to better marry these two groups. It has built upon the past accomplishments of the ILO's WEP and basic needs initiatives and continues to change 'the frame of reference for work on employment and poverty reduction' at the ILO.³⁴⁴ It has understood that in order for work to be a pathway out of poverty, it must be good quality and secure work.³⁴⁵ From the perspective of the ILO, a strong employment focus still remains essential to an integrated development strategy.³⁴⁶ As Cook *et al* state, the "focus on decent work as a dimension of development helps to ensure that development trajectories encompass social as well as economic goals."³⁴⁷ The Decent Work agenda hopes to guide the invisible hand and not leave the realization of decent work, and therefore human development and people's quality of life, up to the vagaries of the market.³⁴⁸

As Sen says: "Political freedoms (in the form of free speech and elections) help to promote economic security. Social opportunities (in the form of education and health facilities) facilitate economic participation. Economic facilities (in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production) can help to generate personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities. Freedoms of different kinds can strengthen one another. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). P. 11

³⁴⁰ Sarah Cook, Heintz, James and Kabeer, Naila "Economic Growth, Social Protection and 'Real' Labour Markets: Linking Theory and Policy," *IDS Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (2008). p. 9

³⁴¹ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 38

³⁴² Maul, "'Help Them Move the Ilo Way': The International Labour Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War ". p. 402

³⁴³ Decent Work is operationalised through the ILO's regional and local offices provide technical assistance programmes to further the principles of Decent Work in numerous developing countries.

³⁴⁴ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 203

³⁴⁵ ———, "The Goal of Decent Work."

³⁴⁶ ILO, "The World Employment Programme at the Ilo."

³⁴⁷ Cook, "Economic Growth, Social Protection and 'Real' Labour Markets: Linking Theory and Policy." p. 5

³⁴⁸ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 26

The ILO did not invent social security, but it has spent a great deal of attention promoting this concept, internationalising it and pushing for its recognition as a basic human right in an array of international human rights instruments.³⁴⁹ However as Rodgers says, the ILO's success in this area has been social protection for some rather than all.³⁵⁰ It is thought that only one out of five people has access to adequate levels of social security and that more than half have no access at all.³⁵¹ This creates untold destitution for workers and their families who are subjected to the risks of the market.³⁵² Juan Somavia, who is notably the first Director General from a developing country, called poverty "the biggest challenge to multilateralism today. As the multilateral system continues to be tested on classical security issues, we simply cannot fail on issues of human security".³⁵³ However, social protection now has pride of place as one of the four pillars of the Decent Work programme. The ILO has reiterated that social security is a basic human right and in 2003 it launched a campaign that promotes a global social security floor, under the banner of Social Security and Coverage for All. It promotes the idea that social security should be provided on the basis of citizenship rather than work status, inferring that participation in the informal sector should not be a barrier to realising basic rights. It argues for a social dialogue approach to instigate and promote more substantial social security efforts at the national level.³⁵⁴ A social security floor, although a far off goal, is integral to lifting a large number of people out of poverty through basic income protection and is crucial for the realisation of other freedoms.

The ILO's stance on social protection still challenges the dominant neoliberal ideology that has traditionally portrayed unemployment and destitution as a product

³⁴⁹ For example, it's Convention 102, adopted in 1952, on Minimum Standards of Social Security covers medical care, sickness, unemployment, workplace injury, maternity, invalidity, survivors, family allowances, and old age cemented the concept that access to social security is a right; Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 144,156

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 170

³⁵¹ ILO Press Release 'ILO Launches global campaign on social security for all' 18/06/2003 http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang--en/WCMS_005285/index.htm Accessed 19/01/2010

³⁵² ILO, "A Fair Globalization: The Role of the Ilo." p. 33

³⁵³ ———, "ILO Launches Global Campaign for Social Security for All," (2003).

Fraille argues that utilising such a tripartite approach in general has meant the ILO has had more success on the ground at mediating the speed and content of neoliberal reforms than it has had either ideologically or in the high level policies that come out of Geneva.³⁵³

³⁵⁴ ILO Press Release 'ILO Launches global campaign on social security for all' 18/06/2003 http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang--en/WCMS_005285/index.htm Accessed 19/01/2010

of individual irresponsibility. This perception continues in current policies, such as the World Bank's 'social risk management', which views individuals as "entrepreneurs managing their own life" largely relinquishing the responsibility of the state to provide welfare assistance.³⁵⁵ This pervasive outlook fails to recognise the unequal opportunities that exist in the global economy, the knock on effects of fictitious commodification, and that economic and social security are two sides of same coin; neglect one and you neglect the other as well.³⁵⁶

Decent Work represents a shift into a more complete and sophisticated packaged approach to employment that is focused on quality of work as well as encapsulating the social and economic aspects of development. This shift has also come under fire because the Decent Work framework allows for a certain amount of flexibility in terms of how it is interpreted. As Rodger *et al* state, "the concept lacks analytical rigour and has not been given enough substantive and empirical content by the Office. In addition, the word decent is rather subjective and does not always translate into languages other than English"³⁵⁷. However, this flexibility means that countries can place greater emphasis on certain aspects Decent Work, whilst recognising the interdependent nature of these elements.³⁵⁸ This enables the ILO to better respond to the realities of work in the global economy. The Decent Work's holistic approach helps to "collapse many of the old distinctions between the formal and informal sectors" by creating a universally applicable programme.³⁵⁹

Other than the obvious social imperatives of doing this, Vosko also says that this shift is an indication of an organisation that no longer works in a tripartite vacuum. She draws on Cox's *Labour and Hegemony* thesis and states that the agendas of industrialised countries and industrialised labour still have heavy sway on proceedings at the ILO.³⁶⁰ She reveals the struggles building at the margins of the ILO in response to this unrepresentative organisational structure.³⁶¹ As a result the

³⁵⁵ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 167

³⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 167-168

³⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 233

³⁵⁸ ———, "The Goal of Decent Work."p. 67

³⁵⁹ Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 22

³⁶⁰ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice."; Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography."

³⁶¹ Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 40

ILO has been slowly opening itself up to the more marginalised groups in the global economy in an effort to incorporate a mass of unrepresented workers into its policy making and standard-setting endeavours.³⁶² The ILO's field of inquiry today covers an expanding international division of labour, which encompasses a huge diversity of workers who work in all manners of work, all of which are connected, however loosely, to the global economy.³⁶³ The ILO has moved to redefine its definition of the 'worker' which is no longer solely associated with formal, male, full time, stable employment. It has recognised that the informal economy is a major coping strategy for the global poor, absorbing the unemployed and underemployed. And yet the informal economy is an "awkward, almost existentialist issue... that still bedevils the ILO today."³⁶⁴ They know that all too often, informal work can be insecure, unsafe, poor quality, discriminatory, irregular and lowly paid, which furthermore divorces such workers from accessing social protections and representation.³⁶⁵ It is perpetuated by jobless growth and an over-supply of labour, lack of capital, land and resources. However, the existence of the informal economy shows no sign of fading away, as had been expected in the ILO's earlier days. The problem for these workers is that 'social dialogue' is an unrealistic aspiration that remains completely unavailable to them.³⁶⁶ This lack of voice leaves these workers even more exposed to the sharper edges of neoliberal policies.³⁶⁷

This massive expansion of the global labour force is also occurring in the context of what some call the "terminal decline" of unionisation, leaving the union movement largely paralysed in the face of neoliberal globalisation.³⁶⁸ To compensate, many

³⁶² Another increasing priority area not detailed here is that of migrant workers. It is also interesting to note that mobility of labour remains hugely curtailed when compared to global mobility of capital.

³⁶³ There is an entire web of social organisations that facilitate this such as MNCs, commodity chains, market exchanges, and the international flows of goods, capital and knowledge Taylor, ed. *Power and Conflict and the Production of the Global Economy*. p. 11

³⁶⁴ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 31

³⁶⁵ ———, "The Goal of Decent Work." p. 65

³⁶⁶ Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*. 222; Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 23; Lydia Fraile, ed. *Executive Summary to Blunting Neoliberalism: Tripartism and Economic Reforms in the Developing World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

³⁶⁷ Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 23; Fraile, ed. *Executive Summary to Blunting Neoliberalism: Tripartism and Economic Reforms in the Developing World*.

³⁶⁸ Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*. p. 220, 223

advocate for a more comprehensive global social movement shift in the ILO.³⁶⁹ Vosko cites evidence that this social force has been counter-hegemonic and has pressured the ILO into adopting more universal programmes in the form of the 1998 Declaration and in the Decent Work agenda.³⁷⁰ She goes on to say, “these developments suggest that the ILO potentially offers a space – indeed a transnational space – for greater coordination between women’s groups, other NGOs, emerging labour organization in the informal sector and the international trade union movement.”³⁷¹ Although the ILO’s more recent work programmes are signals of greater solidarity among interest groups, reminiscent of an overarching global social movement, the concept of incorporating the informal and NGO sector into the union’s domain remains tentative and fragile.³⁷²

Unionism is indeed at a crossroads as to whether it chooses to unite more broadly with the wider civil society and justice movements in order to pursue its activism.³⁷³ However social movement unionism is treated with immense suspicion by the ILO’s members.³⁷⁴ NGOs, unlike unions, cannot lay claim to being democratic. Union movements also fear that their accession would divert attention away from the importance of class-based social struggle and toward a more general welfare focus.³⁷⁵ However, the union movement also recognises that it must adapt to the new global order so that it can reassert itself and win more substantial gains for workers.³⁷⁶ Unions no longer enjoy a privileged position in the political economy, but the clawing back of economic gains for workers is still very reliant on the power of unions. “The challenge is to find a balance that gives voice to workers while creating powerful unions that can fight for them”.³⁷⁷ This requires a multi-faceted response,

³⁶⁹ Vosko, "‘Decent Work’ the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice."

³⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 32; Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography."; Kabeer, ed. *Labour Standards, Women's Rights, Basic Needs: Challenges to Collective Action*

³⁷¹ Vosko, "‘Decent Work’ the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 33

³⁷² Rupert, "Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-) Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance."

³⁷³ Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*. p. 221

³⁷⁴ Guy Standing, "Global Governance: The Democratic Mirage?," *Development and Change* 35, no. 5 (2004). p. 1067

³⁷⁵ Gallin, "Trade Unions and Ngos: A Necessary Partnerships for Social Development." p. 28

³⁷⁶ Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*. p. 222, 227

³⁷⁷ Caraway, "Freedom of Association: Battering Ram or Trojan Horse." p. 226-7

where global unions seem a logical response to the global economy.³⁷⁸ The problem remains for the time being that working classes are intertwined first and foremost within the vertical structures of the state and although shared interests do exist, it remains difficult to make the leap to organising horizontally across states.³⁷⁹ As Silver *et al* argue, “we need a general theory of international labour solidarity that recognizes the need for local community built on planning and some degree of protection from the unfettered market, at the same time as it embraces international labour solidarity and rejects racism and xenophobia”.³⁸⁰ For the time being state-based trade unions remain far from neutral actors in shaping global employment policy, and labour activism at the ILO still has the tendency to favour the policies in core-countries. This has ramifications for the lives of workers in the periphery, despite the intentions of the Decent Work agenda.

The ILO is nevertheless reliant on the international mobilisation of labour in order to maintain its legitimacy and to be able to say that it operates for the benefit of all workers. As with other global governance institutions, maintaining its legitimacy is crucial for the ILO. At least the ILO can claim, unlike the majority of international organisations, that it is democratic. However as Standing remarks, after working “in what is arguably the most ‘democratic’ of the major institutions, the image that comes to mind is a babble of platitudes coupled with timidity and deepening inertia, thinly hiding a deep conservatism.”³⁸¹ Clearly, the ILO’s structure is far from perfect, but the input of organized labour has been the key factor in preventing the organisation and its ideology from drowning during the neoliberal era. As long as the ILO provides internal space for counter-hegemonic forces, debate and struggle, it increases the likelihood that this contestation will emanate outwards in the form of the ILO’s work programmes on the ground and its activism amongst the international community. Being receptive to the struggles in more marginalised locations in the global economy challenges the ILO and creates a growing space for resistance. As such, the more inclusive agenda of Decent Work, I suggest, assists the ILO to be a

³⁷⁸ Munck, ed. *Globalisation, Contestation and Labour Internationalism: A Transformationalist Perspective*. p. 220

³⁷⁹ Robinson, ed. *Gramsci and Globalisation: From Nation-State to Transnational Hegemony*. p. 168; Glassman, "Transnational Hegemony and Us Labor Foreign Policy: Towards a Gramscian International Labor Geography." p. 574

³⁸⁰ Silver, ed. *Workers North and South*. p. 285

³⁸¹ Standing, "Global Governance: The Democratic Mirage?." p. 1067

transformative force and better affect the social relations surrounding global production.³⁸²

ILO and counter-hegemony in the sphere of global governance

In an attempt to relinquish its own marginal status, the ILO has made a significant effort to insert itself in the global governance arena, especially under the leadership of Somavia.³⁸³ Decent Work and the 1998 Declaration have been vehicles that help to fulfill these goals.³⁸⁴ The outward focus of these policies has given the ILO a platform on which it can call for international collaboration – from both NGOs and from international organisations - in creating a fairer distribution of the gains of globalisation.³⁸⁵ The Decent Work agenda is the most comprehensive attempt by the ILO to promote the normative goal of a socially embedded economy.³⁸⁶ The ILO has pushed for its consideration across all global governance institutions, which has meant that Decent Work features in the World Bank's PRSPs and even the Millennium Development Goals.³⁸⁷ In addition, the ILO also has an agreement to share drafts with the World Bank and IMF in advance of their publication, has observer status for the IMF's Interim committee, and is a frequent attendee at the G8's Labour and Employment Ministry meetings.³⁸⁸ Although there is the risk of transformismo, this high-level engagement has enabled the ILO and the labour movement to be better poised to counter dominant ideologies through the promotion of socially-oriented policies.³⁸⁹ It is clearly important that the ILO has a presence in the corridors of the world's most powerful economic institutions. As Haworth and Hughes state: "Somavia has extended the change process strategically and organizationally, and with success, and has undoubtedly placed the ILO more firmly in the public gaze and in the deliberations of other international agencies."³⁹⁰

³⁸² Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice." p. 25

³⁸³ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. chapter 6

The ILO's constitution also asserted that there should be cooperation between the international organisations in order for the ILO to affect the direction of international economic policy; Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*.

³⁸⁵ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 226

³⁸⁶ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 3

³⁸⁷ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 226

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 201

³⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 205

³⁹⁰ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 6

How the ILO's input is received in these fora is perhaps the subject of another thesis, but it does appear labour issues are being treated less like special interests and are assuming a more significant role in the core programmes of these agencies, rather than being channelled into specialised side projects.³⁹¹ However, it cannot be claimed that the ILO has achieved the full insertion of a social agenda on equal terms to the economic agenda. What the ILO is aware of is that employment matters cannot be isolated from the political and economic spheres of which it is a part.³⁹² As Knapp states, the struggle for worker rights "exceeds the boundaries and capacities of the ILO, and so the assistance of other institutions must be enlisted".³⁹³ Standing concurs, saying that "in this 'linked-up' globalization era, health, work, rights, development, trade, finance and much more are inherently interrelated, and it is fanciful to preach that each agency should have its turf and not trespass on the turf of the other".³⁹⁴

A World Commission on Fair Globalisation was established by Juan Somavia to push the ILO's urgent goal to protect workers' rights, given the continued march of an unfair globalisation and the lack of attention social issues had received in the trade agenda.³⁹⁵ The Commission created further impetus for the ILO to try and push the idea of fairness and the appropriate treatment of labour within the fields of trade, global production, and international finance.³⁹⁶ It also explicitly aligned core labour standards with the broader development agenda. One of its key recommendations was that of mainstreaming policy between international organisations to ensure that actions undertaken by these agencies do not "impede" the realisation of core labour standards.³⁹⁷ This is of course a very flimsy statement but its rationale was that "[t]here is a worldwide consensus that the ILO is the lead agency in the drive to further rights at work in a globalized economy" but "respecting the rights of all the

³⁹¹ Gill, ed. *Theorizing the Interregnum: The Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s*. p. 50

³⁹² Knapp, "Boundaries of the Ilo: A Labor Rights Argument for Institutional Cooperation." p. 406

³⁹³ Ibid. p. 372

³⁹⁴ Standing, "Global Governance: The Democratic Mirage?." p. 1068

³⁹⁵ Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art*. p. 7

³⁹⁶ Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 3

³⁹⁷ ILO, "A Fair Globalization: The Role of the Ilo." p. 5

world's workers and employers increasingly depends on the commitment of numerous global actors and institutions and their pursuit of supportive policies".³⁹⁸

As I have demonstrated, Decent Work has enabled the ILO to address some persistent issues that were hampering the ILO's ability to make a difference.³⁹⁹ It, along with its subsequent 2008 Declaration, created a better framework for the ILO to progress in recreating a global double movement. They do so under slogans such as 'globalisation with a human face' and 'fair globalisation,' that are increasingly brandished around in global governance institutions.⁴⁰⁰ These statements imply the need for the benefits of economic globalisation to flow on to labour and society through more sound economic management. Concurrently, the more sceptical see this as an alibi that simply paves the way for more of the same as neoliberal hegemony absorbs its counter-hegemonic potential. Neo-Gramscians pessimistically claim that neoliberal international institutions suck counter-hegemonic ideas into their neoliberal orbit. Therefore, any attempt the ILO makes to rise above this and mount a proactive countermovement will be seemingly neutralised and co-opted by hegemonic interests. Nevertheless, there is increasing evidence to show that those top layers of the political and economic hierarchies are becoming increasingly sensitive to social resistance because these movements undermine their legitimacy and therefore their power.⁴⁰¹

Although the ILO may have been co-opted by neoliberal hegemony to a certain extent, the organisation has never actually seen eye to eye with the pure free market ideology of trade liberalisation, 'sound' macroeconomic management and fiscal responsibility. When the ILO engages in these fora it continues to sell its mantra of a race to the top. As Rodgers states "the core ILO philosophy and governance structure is surprisingly resilient. In a world which has changed radically, much of what was put in place in 1919, and firmly established in 1944, seems to be as valid today as it was then".⁴⁰² These values facilitate the ILO's ongoing counter-hegemonic position in the sphere of global economic and political governance that

³⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 43; Haworth and Hughes, (*Forthcoming*) *the International Labour Organisation*. Chapter 3

³⁹⁹ Cook, "Economic Growth, Social Protection and 'Real' Labour Markets: Linking Theory and Policy." p. 4

⁴⁰⁰ Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 201

⁴⁰¹ Bugra, ed. *Introduction*.

⁴⁰² Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*. p. 236

pushes for an economic growth that raises the welfare of people, reduces inequality and increases people's socio-economic security, regardless of the prevailing ideology.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰³ Susan Hayter, ed. *The Social Dimension of Globalization: Striking the Balance*, Confronting Globalization: The Quest for a Social Agenda (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2005). p. 3

Conclusion

Neoliberal hegemony is based upon multi-faceted asymmetries of power, of which international institutions are a part. These international organisations have been able to obscure hegemonic power relations, their ideological underpinnings and the dominant forms of knowledge that they represent.⁴⁰⁴ The neoliberal policies they espouse have attempted to disconnect social justice from economic progress in the interests of a transnational historic bloc. As a result huge numbers of workers have had their rights and well-being forfeited for the purposes of a neoliberal informed progress.⁴⁰⁵ As Rupert states, it is "[i]n this ideological construction, the social and moral claims of working people and the poor are reduced to the pleadings of 'special interests' which must be resisted in order to secure the conditions of stable accumulation".⁴⁰⁶ This thinking has become common sense which paralyses political debate and closes off all alternatives.⁴⁰⁷ This ideological hegemony has been especially effective at removing social relations from the public and democratic sphere and into the private where social relations can be disciplined by market mechanisms and the power of capital.⁴⁰⁸

However, the presence of neoliberal hegemony has not eliminated all forms of resistance, struggle and contestation. The global economy remains an increasingly contested site which prevents a totally neoliberal world from materialising. This is not to say that the world has been relinquished from the grip of neoliberal supremacy, but that the ability of the hegemony to absorb all ideological debate is highly questionable. As a result there remain deep discontents about the current world order and the moral authority of neoliberal international institutions, which reduces the ability for these powers to exercise consensual modes of domination.⁴⁰⁹ Most interestingly, this thesis demonstrates that this resistance is also occurring to some

⁴⁰⁴ Taylor, ed. *Introduction: Global Economy Contested*. p. 2

⁴⁰⁵ Howse, ed. *The World Trade Organization and Labour Rights: Man Bites Dog*.

⁴⁰⁶ Rupert, "Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-) Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance." p. 192

⁴⁰⁷ Birchfield, "Contesting the Hegemony of Market Ideology: Gramsci's 'Good Sense' and Polanyi's 'Double Movement'." p. 30

⁴⁰⁸ Rupert, "Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-) Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance." p. 192

⁴⁰⁹⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.196

extent within the sphere of global governance, which is supposedly the *nébuleuse* of this transnational historic bloc.

To explain this phenomenon I have drawn on the critical work of Polanyi. I find that the ILO is part of a counter-movement against the self-regulating market and has attempted to re-forge a double movement. Neoliberal hegemony whilst bolstering one side of this double movement has severely weakened the resolve of the other. However, I find that it has not entirely saturated. Although hegemony has certainly affected the proceedings of the ILO, the organisation has been slowly rebuilding its agency. Its Decent Work programme and its move from margins of global governance ILO has enabled the ILO to make more progress as it swims against the free market tide. In so doing, the ILO exhibits counter-hegemonic traits as it calls for a more socially just world based upon its guiding values. By continuing to reject the idea that it is acceptable to commodify labour and by calling upon states to protect workers, the ILO remains a crucial actor for contesting the myths of the free market ideologies.⁴¹⁰ As Birchfield states, "a contestation of neoliberalism must begin by a dereification of the market which would demonstrate the fundamentally social, and therefore public nature of economic relations".⁴¹¹

The ILO's contemporary mission to blunt neo-liberalism has necessitated a turbulent change in the *modus operandi* of the organisation. Its limited stock of controls have been refocused through Core Labour Standards to better align with this task. However, this instrument is seen to conform to a more market fundamentalist approach that narrows down worker's rights, privileges a set of negative rights, diverts attention away from the unfair trade regime, and fails to place any binding regulations on capital and capitalist states. Whilst they highlight the fact that participation in the global labour market has the potential to be a double-edged sword for many of the world's population, these standards have not been all that they could have been. This Declaration and more so the period leading up to it, represent what I would consider a blip in the overall ideological trajectory of the ILO.

⁴¹⁰ Giuseppe Casale, ed. *Globalization, Labour Law and Industrial Relations: Some Reflections* Confronting Globalization: The Quest for a Social Agenda (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2005). p. 37

⁴¹¹ Birchfield, "Contesting the Hegemony of Market Ideology: Gramsci's 'Good Sense' and Polanyi's 'Double Movement'." p. 45

The ILO is still an agency on the periphery that is largely reacting to the currents of the global economy rather than fuelling its direction and pace. This position has meant that neoliberal hegemony has been more far more ambiguous than has been the case within the core institutions.⁴¹² It has meant that while the ILO's worldview is considered to be socially progressive, it is also often conditioned by certain political and economic circumstances that sit outside of its control. The ILO and its fields of enquiry, namely global social policy and employment policy, remain marginal to international economic organisations, taking a back seat in the decisions that are made.

The effectiveness of the ILO in forging a social response to globalisation is hamstrung by this, as well as a number of other challenges. It faces an uphill battle in reprogramming current understandings about the interdependency of social justice, rights and economic progress.⁴¹³ Its continued lack of capacity remains an ongoing challenge. The ILO's representative structure continues to be problematic – with the unrepresentative structure of the workers' group having been common theme throughout each of the chapters. In addition, the employers' associations in the ILO, including the International Organization of Employers, tend only to represent small and medium sized enterprises rather than the MNCs, who are often considered to pose the biggest threats to workers rights because of their mobility and outsourcing practices.⁴¹⁴ On the workers' front there are problems given that the conversations in the corridors of the ILO have not always been representative of the majority of workers from marginalised parts of the neoliberal economy.⁴¹⁵ However, there have been encouraging noises from the international union movement that it is opening itself up to a broader spectrum of workers. Nevertheless, I do concur with many commentators, that the ultimate barrier for the ILO – its Achilles heel – is the

⁴¹² This statement originates from Robert Cox's statement that "In the world-hegemonic model, hegemony is more intense and consistent at the core and more laden with contradictions at the periphery" Although Cox was speaking in geographical terms, this statement seems to apply for the ILO given its peripheral position amongst the family of international organisations. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method."

⁴¹³ Langille, "What Is International Labour Law For?." P. 16, 20

⁴¹⁴ Alston, ed. *Labour Rights as Human Rights: The Not So Happy State of the Art.* p. 23

⁴¹⁵ Amore, ed. *Introduction: Global Resistance - Global Politics* p. 7

lack of solidarity amongst its worker constituents rather than the problem of neoliberal hegemony per se.⁴¹⁶

The ILO is situated within a distributional struggle between capital and labour and as such, the debates still form around class-based interests. This denotes a very material element to the struggle of labour on top of ideological struggles. This has often been lost in the neo-Gramscian account which can act to reinforce the declining role of labour, rather than assist it in challenging the unfairness that exists in the ownership of the means of production in the global economy. This ownership has also led to an increased socialisation of the risks, which stretch society's resolve. There is a certain amount of inevitability that society will move to protect themselves from commodification and that society will demand new balance in the double movement. The global financial crisis is a case in point. Such upheavals have the potential to cause untold social unrest that will upset the free market's dominance.⁴¹⁷ However, unjust they also create opportunities on which to cement social struggles. The ILO has been presented with an opportunity and has formulated a Global Jobs Pact in response. An examination of the fruits of this initiative would be an interesting addition to the research undertaken here.

The ILO has a potentially larger role to play here, but it is important to remember that the ILO is just one venue where this struggle against the free market can be seen.⁴¹⁸ As Sen has said: "while there is much room for and need of other laws and institutions to make for a just workplace, the most valuable legal technique (instrumentally and as an end in itself) has always been, and is, to unleash the power of individuals themselves to pursue their own freedoms."⁴¹⁹ Workers do not rely solely on what happens at the ILO for an acknowledgement of their rights and dignity; they are not waiting for change to emerge from external sources. "Capitalism entails rights of a certain form, but the substance of those rights is, again, a political question".⁴²⁰ Furthermore, politics are not just situated at the level of the state, they

⁴¹⁶For example, Rodgers, *The Ilo and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*.p. 237; Vosko, "'Decent Work' the Shifting Role of the Ilo and the Struggle for Global Social Justice."

⁴¹⁷ Langille, "What Is International Labour Law For?." p. 17

⁴¹⁸ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

⁴¹⁹ Langille, ed. *Core Labour Rights - the True Story*. p. 120-121

⁴²⁰ Goodhart, "Origins and Universality in the Human Rights Debates: Cultural Essentialism and the Challenge of Globalization." p. 962

are all around us and although forms of everyday resistance may not be that visible in the ILO they are no less important.⁴²¹

A growing global social movement exists and is helping to expose the contradictions and hidden forms of power in neoliberal rule and is therefore providing a platform for counter-hegemonic ideologies to emerge. By demonstrating neoliberalism as a 'political project' opens up possibilities for society to work to change its course. All struggles, however small, permeate power relations of the international political economy, creating change. Social conflict remains an inherent ontological feature of the market that shapes and reshapes economic life.⁴²² The World Social Forum says another world, and another globalisation is possible. This thesis has demonstrated that the ILO still has the opportune ideological underpinnings to be able to help affect such a transformation in our global market society.

⁴²¹ Amore, ed. *Introduction: Global Resistance - Global Politics* p. 14

⁴²² Taylor, ed. *Introduction: Global Economy Contested*. p. 2; Rupert, "Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-) Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance."p. 14

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