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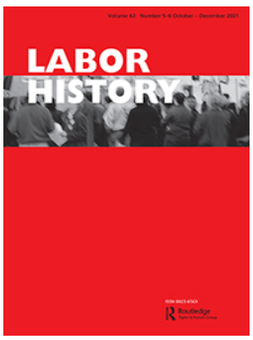

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Katy Fox-Hodess

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The 'iron law of oligarchy' and North-South Relations in Global Union Organisations: a case study of the International Dockworkers Council's expansion in the Global South

Katy Fox-Hodess

Centre for Decent Work, School of Management, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

Global union organisations face recurrent organisational challenges concerning 1) the tendency towards bureaucratisation and oligarchy as they operate at increasing scales and 2) the tendency to reinscribe unequal relations of power between trade unions in the Global North and the Global South. This double problem is investigated through a case study of the International Dockworkers Council (IDC), an independent global union organisation, which underwent a period of rapid expansion in the Global South, particularly in Latin America, in the 2010's. The IDC has been remarkably successful in adapting its organisational model, developed in Europe, to the Latin American context, building an effective regional-level organisation of rank-and-file activists while relying more heavily than in Europe on a regional coordinator as denser relationships within the regional network develop. At the same time, at the global level, the story is somewhat more mixed. Latin American activists have the autonomy to develop and carry out their own priorities with appropriate financial, industrial and technical support from the global organisation. Yet, the Global South's influence on shaping the global organisation as a whole is less evident. In addition, organisational changes brought about by global expansion raise concerns about bureaucratisation and oligarchy at the global level.

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Introduction

The ever-greater utilisation and complexity of global supply chains as an integral component of capitalist growth strategies since the 1970's have linked workers in disparate locations across the world as never before. The trade union movement has responded with periodic attempts to organise across borders (Anner, 2011; Bieler et al., 2015; Brookes, 2019; Evans, 2010; Fairbrother et al., 2013; McCallum, 2013; O'Brien, 2019; Williams, 2020). In the 'virtuous circle' ideal of global unionism, workers in nodes of global supply chains located in both the Global North and the Global South increase their leverage against employers through international cooperation. Yet, in practice, the challenges of building effective transnational union organisations as a result of the very different conditions shaping trade unionism in different parts of the world make these alliances far more complex than they might at first appear.

In particular, the tendency towards bureaucratisation and oligarchy as trade unions operate at increasing scales, as well as the tendency for global union organisations to reinscribe unequal relations of power between trade unions in the Global North and the Global South, pose recurrent

CONTACT Katy Fox-Hodess katy.fox-hodess@sheffield.ac.uk Centre for Decent Work, School of Management, University of Sheffield, Conduit Road S10 1FL

challenges. In this paper, this double problem facing the global trade union movement is investigated through a case study of the International Dockworkers Council (IDC), an independent global union organisation, which underwent a period of rapid expansion in the Global South, above all in Latin America, in the 2010's. Unlike the hierarchical and bureaucratic organisational model of the mainstream global union federations (GUF's), the IDC has developed a horizontal, networked organisational model of 'bottom-up' internationalism, driven by the volunteer efforts of rank-and-file trade unionists at the local port level (Fox-Hodess, 2020). As such, the IDC provides an excellent test case for understanding the possibilities for the development of more egalitarian forms of global trade unionism.

To what extent has the IDC been successful in realising these possibilities and what strategies has it employed to do so? In short, the IDC has been remarkably successful in adapting its organisational model, developed in Europe, to the Latin American context, building an effective regional-level organisation on the principles of 'bottom-up' rank-and-file activism while relying more heavily than in Europe on a regional coordinator as denser relationships among activists in the regional network continue to develop. At the same time, at the global level, the story is somewhat more mixed. Dockworker activists from the Global South have the autonomy to develop and carry out their own priorities at the national and regional level with appropriate financial, industrial and technical support from the global organisation. Yet, the influence of the Global South on shaping the global organisation as a whole is less evident. In addition, organisational changes brought about as a result of global expansion have raised concerns about bureaucratisation and oligarchy at the global level.

The next section provides an overview of the literature on bureaucracy, oligarchy and North/South relations in the global trade union movement, followed by a discussion of research design. Next, the IDC's foundational experiences of international solidarity in Europe from the 1970's to the early 2000's are discussed and the organisational model that developed therein is examined. From there, the paper turns to the organisation's expansion in the Global South since 2010, with a particular focus on Latin America, and considers the changes brought about for the organisation as a whole. In the conclusion, lessons from the IDC's expansion for international trade unionism more generally are considered.

Global unionism, 'the iron law of oligarchy' and the North/South Divide

At the centre of efforts to build a transnational trade union movement are the Global Union Federations (GUF's) which 'produce and disseminate knowledge, conduct education and training, provide worker representation at international institutions (ILO, World Bank), help local unions internationalize conflicts, assist with organising and recruitment, shape codes of conduct, and support transnational union networks' (O'Brien, 2019: 66). Yet, while there has been a great deal of attention in the scholarly literature to the efficacy of various tactics and strategies of international trade unionism (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005; Anner, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 2007; Brookes, 2019; Fairbrother et al., 2013; McCallum, 2013; Seidman, 2011; Stevis & Boswell, 2008; Williams, 2020), there has been little attention paid to the impacts of geographic expansion on the structures and priorities of global union organisations themselves (Hennebert & Bourque, 2013: 223). A large body of literature on trade union democracy, however, suggests that as trade unions expand and become more complex, they tend to move away from direct democracy and towards representative democracy, bureaucratisation and oligarchical leadership (see, Darlington & Upchurch, 2011; Stepan-Norris & Zeitlin, 1996 for an overview of this perspective in the post-war industrial relations literature of the UK and US respectively). Writing more than a century ago, Michels (2016) argued for the existence of an 'iron law of oligarchy', by which decision-making authority inevitably comes to be concentrated over time in the hands of a small number of elected leaders and professional staff with vested interests in organisational stability, typically resulting in greater conservatism, to the detriment of the rank-and-file (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Voss & Sherman, 2000). Nevertheless, empirical studies by

Lipset et al. (1956), Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin (1996), and Levi et al. (2009), among others, have demonstrated instances of unions which have ostensibly managed to evade the 'iron law' as a result of their organisational culture, formal institutional practices or enduring organised factions.

Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2020: 263), citing the work of Croucher and Cotton (2009) and Ford and Gillan (2015), argue that most global union federations are organised in a bureaucratic and hierarchical manner removed from the day-to-day realities of the rank-and-file and have only become increasingly so over time because of the complexities of navigating relationships with global organisational counterparts. While Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2019: 103) acknowledge the need for competent professional staff, they remain critical of the large gap between global union organisations and the workers they purport to represent, because 'effectiveness requires active commitment and openness to mobilization among the members (and potential members), together with a capacity to inspire broader societal support through a social vision.' In fact, the call to institute structures within global union organisations that more closely involve the rank-and-file in decision-making in order to increase efficacy has been a frequent refrain in the literature (Dufresne, 2015; Harvey & Turnbull, 2015; Hyman, 2013; Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2013; Moody, 1997; Waterman, 1998; Wills, 1998).

In addition to the literature examining the impact of 'scaling up' on worker voice and organisational priorities, a closely related though distinct literature examines how worker voice and organisational priorities are impacted via encounters between trade unions in the Global North and Global South. As Nostovski (2021: 126) asks, 'do these strategies [of labour transnationalism] reinforce hierarchies built on the legacies of colonialism, imperialism and slavery, and maintained through the borders of Northern national states?' A wide-ranging literature on 'trade union imperialism' (Battista, 2002; Collambat, 2011; Nostovski, 2016; Scipes, 2010; Sims, 1991; Spalding, 1992; Thomson & Larson, 1978) finds that more egalitarian and mutually beneficial forms of internationalism were consistently undermined during the Cold War by anti-Communist trade unions in the North who preferentially supported conservative or 'yellow' unions in the South. This Cold War legacy has reverberations in the present, in the form of distrust of Northern trade unionists by many trade unionists in the South (Dufour-Poirier & Levesque, 2013) and a continued failure by many Northern trade unions to embrace more radical forms of unionism in the South. Organisational biases in favour of the politics and priorities of Northern unions are determined by their far greater contribution to the funding of global union federations than unions in the South, as well as by their greater industrial strength and influence in the global organisational sphere (Bank Muñoz, 2017; Dufour-Poirier & Levesque, 2013; Hennebert & Bourque, 2013; Young & Sierra Becerra, 2014). As a result, Armbruster-Sandoval (2005) and Seidman (2007) argue that there is a tendency for Northern trade unionists to frame Southern trade unionists as passive victims of transnational capital, which the authors view as unconducive to the kinds of strong, collaborative relationships needed for effective internationalism. Nostovski (2016) advocates instead for what she terms 'worker-to-worker' international solidarity – of the kind advocated by the IDC – to counteract these tendencies.

Networks of workers organising autonomously within the Global South may also provide an effective counter-current to these tendencies. Participation in international labour networks by informal workers from the Global South, for example, 'enables organisers, leaders, and active members to learn about and exchange information on strategies, successes, and failures as well as to glean important information on the context for their work and its future direction.' (Bonner & Carré, 2013: 5) In addition, 'Practical assistance may include access to research, education resources, and other means for capacity building.' (Bonner & Carré, 2013: 5) SIGTUR, the Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights, draws on a wide tactical repertoire in proffering solidarity among affiliates, such as 'staging marches or delivering petitions . . . inflict[ing] material damage by supporting strikes or boycotts against corporations . . . bearing witness by highlighting the plight of imprisoned unionists and mounting campaigns for their release.' (O'Brien, 2019: 170) At the same time, however, workers in the Global South face many challenges in building global unionism:

> All have to overcome the barriers posed by differences in language, culture, politics, and organising traditions. Resources are almost always scarce: global organising is expensive and electronic communication has not (yet) replaced the need for meetings, congresses, and so on. In addition, all global worker networks have to ensure they are relevant for and link to grassroots members that are facing the more immediate local and national struggles. (Bonner & Carré, 2013: 22)

The extensive literature on SIGTUR (Dubrosin, 2014; Lambert & Webster, 2001; O'Brien, 2019; Webster et al., 2008), as well as Frank's (2005) research on the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros Y Agroindustriales (COLSIBA), the transnational Latin American banana worker labour federation, suggest that practices of radical democracy have been crucial in sustaining and developing these networks despite the many challenges they face.

The International Dockworkers Council (IDC) is one of only a handful of global trade union organisations standing outside the umbrella of the mainstream International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). In contrast to the 'tree' model of the mainstream global union federations (Figure 1), characterised by hierarchy, centralisation and bureaucracy, the IDC has endured for two decades as a 'rhizomic' network composed almost entirely of volunteer rank-and-file dockers, characterised by horizontality, minimal bureaucracy and shared responsibility for making and enacting decisions. According to Evans (2010: 360–1), within the world of global unionism:

> 'Tree' structures offer the reach and simplicity of hierarchical coordination . . . Multiple levels with those located at each level in charge of multiple subordinates enable such organisations to coordinate the actions of large numbers through a simple 'chain of command' . . . Rhizomes are network structures in which nodes (individuals or organisations) have multiple connections and are not 'under the command' of other nodes. Rhizomic networks are seen as more agile and flexible, more immediately responsive to new circumstances, trading overall coordination for the ability of individual nodes or subparts of the network to take timely initiatives.

As explored in this article, the divergent conditions shaping trade unionism in the Global North and the Global South have led to some organisational adaptations as the IDC has expanded its global reach, with denser networks and a greater degree of horizontality in the European region (the 'rhizomic model' in Figure 2) and less dense networks and a greater reliance on the regional coordinator in the Latin American region (the 'hub and spoke model' in Figure 3). While the 'hub and spoke model' retains the rhizomic network's feature of 'multiple connections . . . not "under the command" of other nodes,' the Latin American network is more dependent upon a central figure with ultimate responsibility for communication and coordination. In addition, rapid global expansion has led to internal conflict at the global level of the organisation over issues of bureaucratisation and oligarchy, raising questions about whether the IDC will be able to resist the pull towards 'tree' organisational structures as it continues to grow.

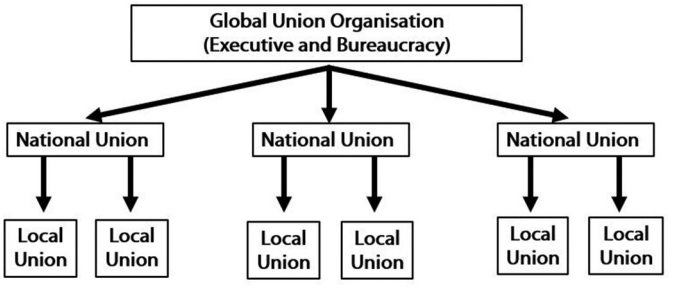

Figure 1. Mainstream Global Union Federations: Tree-like Model (Hierarchical)

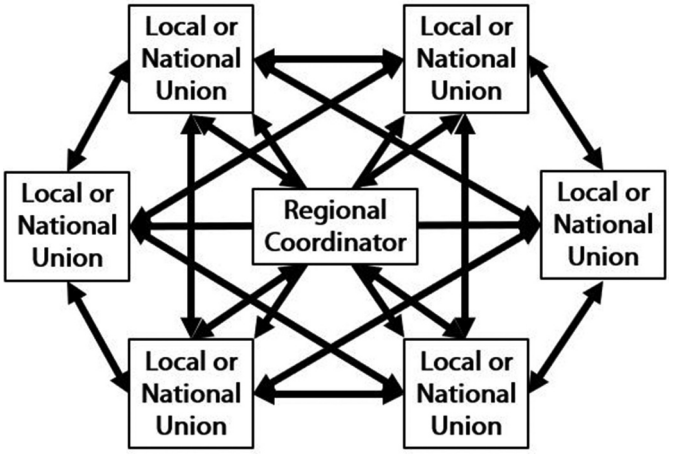

Figure 2. International Dockworkers Council Europe: Rhizomic Model (Networked)

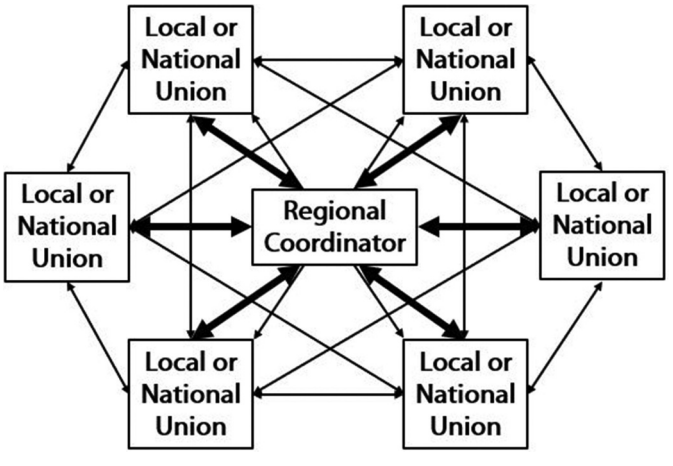

Figure 3. International Dockworkers Council Latin America: Hub and Spoke Model (Networked)

Research design

The research project was designed as a multi-sited global organisational ethnography, moving between and across various 'levels' (local, national, European, Latin American, global) of trade union infrastructure, which enabled both cross-national and cross-regional comparisons, as well as a 'birds eye view' of the global organisation. Studies of labour regionalism, the primary focus of this paper, provide a promising entry point for studying the potential of labour internationalism more broadly. Regions stand as intermediary points between the national and the global and may allow for greater ease of international collaboration as a result of proximity and similarities of history and culture. Within the Global South, aside from the Arab world, perhaps no region shares greater commonalities of language, culture and political history than Latin America, which has a long history of trade unionism, internationalism and class-based politics. In addition, though the climate for trade

unionism within Latin America is adverse in comparison with Europe, at the regional level, and particularly within the Southern Cone, it is still far more favourable for workers than in other regions of the Global South.

In addition, dockworkers as an occupational group have long been known for their strongly internationalist tendencies, both on behalf of struggling dockworkers in other countries and on behalf of broader emancipatory political movements (Ahlquist & Levi, 2013; Brookes, 2019; Cole, 2018; Mah, 2014). The nature of their work brings dockworkers from around the world into remote contact with one another through the information networks that facilitate the movement of cargo. Because of the high risks to life and limb involved in the work itself, the safe loading and unloading of cargo is a paramount and shared concern across the maritime supply chain. Above all, dockworkers collaborate across borders because it is effective to do so: the tremendous potential leverage they possess through refusing to work ships the size of mega-warehouses operating on 'just-in-time' schedules has proven time and time again to be an effective mechanism to bring the disputes of dockworker allies in other ports to a rapid and successful conclusion. More recently, the consolidation of the global shipping industry in the wake of the global financial crisis (UNCTAD Policy Brief No. 69, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2018) has provided an additional logic of transnational collaboration as dockers around the world share common employers, albeit with highly divergent conditions of employment. The expansion of a global union organisation in a region and industry with a strong propensity for internationalism therefore presents a 'best case' scenario for the study of international trade union cooperation in the Global South and beyond. An examination of the IDC's historical development in Europe allows for a comparison of organisational structures across regions, as well as an assessment of the impact of rapid expansion in the Global South on the global organisation as a whole.

Methodologically, the paper draws on in-depth interviews conducted by the author at more than thirty local worksites with eighty IDC activists from Europe, Latin America and the United States between 2012–2021, as well as participant observation conducted at seventeen international meetings between 2013–2019.[1] Participant observation at international meetings, coupled with field visits to conduct interviews with participants at their home ports over a nine year period – nearly half the organisation's existence – resulted in a high degree of ethnographic 'embeddedness' (Lewis & Russell, 2011).

Finally, an archive of more than 1100 documents, including press releases, website content, campaign updates, and newsletters, stretching back to 2012, was created through the research process and drawn upon for this article. Documentary evidence allowed for timelines of events in the organisation's development to be established and for data gathered through interviews to be cross-referenced. Hypotheses were generated and tested iteratively in conversation with research participants and as new participant-observation and text-based data emerged through a grounded theory approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007). Data were organised thematically and case studies, interview quotations and ethnographic anecdotes were selected to illustrate key themes emerging from the analysis.

My prior experiences as a trade union organiser, representative and leader, as well as experience living and working in Chile, helped me to reflect on my positionality as an academic labour researcher from the Global North and to bridge differences of gender, education and national origin with participants. As a socially-engaged labour researcher committed to the project of critical-public labour sociology (Burawoy, 2008), I took a position of critical solidarity, seeking to understand how the IDC could best achieve its aims of developing and maintaining effective and egalitarian organisational practices. I provided various forms of assistance to the IDC and its affiliated trade unions over the course of my field work. As one of the few people associated with organisation who was both fully fluent in Spanish and English and had developed in-person relationships through field visits across a wide range of sites, I was in a unique position to assist participants in making connections across countries and regions (for example, in the case of disputes with shared employers) and, more prosaically, in providing translation on an ad-hoc basis both inside and outside of

meetings to facilitate the building of closer ties. Altogether, my prior experiences in the trade union movement and the forms of support and assistance I was able to offer during the research process enabled me to develop a strong rapport as a 'trusted outsider' (Bucerius, 2013).

Origins and founding of the IDC: the European model of coordination

Antecedents to the IDC in the 1970's and 1980's

The IDC's unique 'rhizomic' organisational structure was not formed overnight but emerged gradually and organically across several decades of organising cross-border solidarity actions, stretching back to the 1970's, by an informal network of left-wing dockworker union activists in Europe. Between 1979 and 1986, European dockworkers held a series of approximately nine international meetings in locations across Europe (Waterman, 1998: 95–96). More than mere talk shops, the activists in the network organised effective solidarity actions to support one another's struggles, developing a tactical repertoire that has continued into the present, including 'protest messages to employers or states; supporting ones to the dockers themselves; the supply of information about working conditions and rights, or about ship movements during strikes; the sending of delegates to or from striking ports; the provision of publicity about strikes abroad; collections of money; go-slows and boycott actions.' (Waterman, 1998: 97)

The network was united, in part, through a shared criticism of the primary global union federation active in the sector, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), which, despite its radical roots in the London docks strike of 1889, later played an active role during the Cold War in undermining communist-aligned trade unions in the transportation sector (Lewis, 2003; Waterman, 1998: 88–89; Gentile, 2016: 118). The ITF was criticised as well for its bureaucratic approach to internationalism: not only were national affiliates able to block affiliation of new members with opposing political leanings but they also repeatedly blocked international support for local strike action that had failed to receive the support of national parent organisations – for example, during unofficial strikes in the Netherlands (1979 and 1987) and Denmark (1982; Waterman, 1998: 89–90). In addition, activists shared the perception that power was concentrated in the hands of unelected professional staff at the upper echelons of the ITF, along with the heads of the wealthiest national unions affiliated to the organisation. In other words, the ITF as an organisation exemplified the 'iron law of oligarchy'.

Given the years of experience they had built up together in the 1970's and 1980's, the informal network of European dockworkers was in a good position to respond to the Liverpool dockworkers dispute from 1995–1998. This dispute, though ultimately unsuccessful, would lead directly to the formation of the IDC in 2000 (Interview with Bjorn Borg, first European coordinator of the IDC, Stockholm, June 2013). International support for the Liverpool conflict, and the conflict at the Port of Charleston that followed soon after (Erem & Durrenberger, 2008), set a template for the IDC's approach to supporting affiliates in dispute that has endured across two decades of work since its founding.

The dispute in Liverpool began as a wildcat strike of casualised dockers labouring 'on inferior contracts and on lower wages' as employees of the Torside employment agency and ultimately led to the sacking of the entire workforce at the port as union members refused to cross the picket line (Brookes, 2019: 43–4). Because the initial action that had led to the dispute was a wildcat strike, followed by secondary action – both by then unlawful in Britain – the dockers national parent organisation, the Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU), refused to support the Liverpool strikers. In fact, they 'also worked against it, cutting off financial and logistical support from the ITF and undertaking closed-door negotiations with the employer without the consent of the rank-and-file dockers.' (Brookes, 2019: 41) As a result, the Liverpool dockers worked around the ITF's 'tree' structure, 'going global' with their campaign through the existing informal international 'rhizomic'

network of dockers they were part of and the then quite innovative use of the internet, which has remained an important tool for rank-and-file dockworker internationalism ever since (Brookes, 2019: 46).

Through decentralised and collaborative planning among rank-and-file dockworker union activists across ports and countries, the campaign ramped up in January 1997 with a global day of action comprising 'a series of legal and illegal work stoppages at 105 ports and cities in twenty-seven countries', including a twenty-four hour work stoppage by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) on the West Coast of the United States (Brookes, 2019: 50). Later that year, in September, perhaps the most celebrated series of actions in the global campaign took place with the targeting of the Neptune Jade container ship. After dockworkers from ILWU Local 10 in Oakland, California refused to handle the ship, it began what the BBC termed its 'route to nowhere', attempting to stop first in Vancouver and then in Yokohama and Kobe, with dockworkers in each port following Oakland's lead. Ultimately, the ship's owners were forced to sell the vessel in Taiwan and the ship's name was changed to avoid further boycott action (BBC News, 1997)).

Taken as a whole, the global campaign for the Liverpool dockers demonstrated in dramatic fashion that it was possible for a decentralised and horizontally organised network of rank-and-file trade unionists to strategise, coordinate and take action together in support of one another's struggles without the need for bureaucratic intermediaries. Ultimately, the Liverpool dockers ended their strike in failure in 1998 as global action failed to overcome the lack of support from their national union and the difficult climate for trade unionism that workers faced in the UK more generally in the wake of the Thatcher era. Nevertheless, the dockworker network that had helped to sustain them carried on. To this day, the Liverpool campaign remains at the core of the IDC's self-image as an organisation of militant rank-and-file dockers committed to the principle that 'We will never walk alone again.'

IDC founding principles

The ITF's top-down efforts to dissuade its affiliates from supporting the Liverpool campaign ultimately served to bolster support for the creation of an alternative bottom-up global organisation for dockers. The IDC's founding convention was held in June 2000 in Tenerife with delegates from eighty-five ports in thirteen countries (Erem & Durrenberger, 2008: 83, 108).From the outset, IDC activists made it clear that they were interested in developing an organisation that could redress the deficits created by what activists saw as the overly bureaucratic character of the ITF (Interview, former IDC European coordinator Peter Shaw, Helsingborg, Sweden, 2013), challenging the 'iron law of oligarchy' through the institutionalisation of a set of structures and practices that differed substantially from the mainstream global union federations.

In recognition of the barriers that the ITF's national-affiliation only and incumbent-union blocking structure had created for international solidarity during the Liverpool dispute, membership was open not just to national unions but to locals and even individual dockworkers. Organisationally, the IDC was closely modelled on the Spanish dockworkers' union La Coordinadora, which had in turn drawn on the legacy of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism (Interview, first IDC General Coordinator Julian Garcia, Barcelona, Spain 2012). Activists sought to build an organisation 'not with heavy and unreal structures, and not with structures of people and economic power, but with measured structures, small, but very powerful, very agile in decision-making' (Interview, Julian Garcia, Barcelona, Spain 2012) Like La Coordinadora, the IDC's annual assemblies would be the highest decision-making body and open to all rank-and-file members; the organisation would be divided into geographically-defined organising zones; and the General Coordinator would be an unpaid part-time officer elected bi-annually who would remain embedded in their local union (Interview, Julian Garcia, Barcelona, Spain 2012). The IDC adopted the principle that all participants must be working dockworkers and well into its second decade,

the organisation had only employed a single full-time staff member to assist in coordination because 'we also didn't need an army of people that end up in charge, because they're the ones that hold the reigns'. (Interview, Julian Garcia, Barcelona, Spain 2012)

The Campaign against the ports packages and establishment of the European working group

The IDC's next major campaign in Europe shifted the organisational focus from solidarity with affiliates engaged in local disputes to the European level, with a campaign aimed at defeating proposed European directives in 2001 and 2004 that would have allowed shipping companies to load and unload cargo with ship's crews rather than dockworkers (Turnbull, 2007: 119) – 'part of an attempt by employers to expand the offshore deregulated space in which maritime work can take place' (Lillie, 2006: 82). The powerful campaign, characterised by a tense though effective division of labour between the ITF/ETF and the IDC (Turnbull, 2006, 2010), resulted in a definitive victory for the dockers in the first 'ports package' campaign through a combination of lobbying efforts in Brussels, symbolic actions, industrial action and militant protests in Strasbourg. However, this was soon followed up in 2004 with a second proposed European Directive on ports which raised many of the same concerns from the dockworkers' side. Remarkably, at the time the second ports package was defeated, 'Only two other directives, out of a running total of more than a thousand put forward by the Commission since 1999, have been rejected by the European Parliament' (Turnbull, 2007: 135).

The result of the successful campaigns to defeat the ports packages was the establishment of a sectoral European Social Dialogue on ports, with both the IDC and the ITF represented on the trade union side. Though the IDC took a dim view of the possibility of winning anything positive through Social Dialogue, participation required closer engagement with Brussels' technocracy, necessitating changes in the IDC's organisation, in particular, the establishment of a permanent 'European working group' in 2012 that would meet regularly, with participants serving as liaisons from each affiliate union to discuss and prepare for meetings with 'social partners'. Over time, the working group's role evolved further as several affiliates entered into disputes, particularly as a result of actions taken by governments and the 'troika' of lending institutions in response to the European sovereign debt crises (Fox-Hodess, 2017).

The establishment of the working group represented a significant step towards formalisation of the de facto activist grouping that had met regularly in the 2000's, yet the IDC took care to ensure that formalisation would not be equivalent to bureaucratisation and oligarchy. As a coordinating body, the working group was not vested with independent authority. Instead, participants would come to meetings with mandates from their unions or return with proposals from the working group which would then be debated and voted on by their unions, ensuring that rank-and-file decision-making at the local level would continue to take precedence. In line with the IDC's guiding principles of rank-and-file participation and horizontality, members of the working group would be local-level trade union officials who would continue to work on the docks, forming a de facto international stewards' council within Europe which has significantly enriched already strong horizontal networks among activists in the region and increased working capacity (Fox-Hodess, 2020).

Expansion in the Global South: the Latin American model of coordination

The IDC's 'rhizomic' organisational structure, shaped through many years of experience among dockworker activists in Europe, underwent modifications as the organisation expanded its reach in the Global South in the 2010's. Weaker density of ties within the much newer Latin American region, and the greater challenges than in Europe of holding frequent face-to-face meetings, led the organisation to rely more heavily on the work of the regional coordinator to provide coherence to the activist group as a whole. Nevertheless, the 'hub-and-spoke' model that developed proved

capable of effective organising, as the examples below from Chile, Paraguay and Peru attest, while mitigating against the pull towards oligarchy within the region. At the same time, however, the Latin American organisational model has created a greater potential for information bottlenecks across regions, suggesting that more work is needed to fully integrate activists from the Global South into decision-making at the global level of the organisation. Furthermore, transformations at the global level of the organisation that have resulted from expansion in the Global South have generated tensions around issues of bureaucratisation and oligarchy.

The move to the South

The year 2008 marked two important changes in the IDC's then eight-year-long history. Julian Garcia, the Barcelona-based General Coordinator of both La Coordinadora and the IDC since its founding, stepped down from his position. He was succeeded in both organisations by Antolin Goya, a dockworker leader from Tenerife in the Canary Islands. At the same time, the advent of the global economic crisis, and the sovereign debt crises that followed in Southern Europe, hitting many of the countries of the IDC's core base of support hardest, created an enormous set of challenges for the organisation. As La Coordinadora struggled with its own difficulties, it was eventually decided at the 2014 IDC General Assembly that Jordi Aragunde, a young dockworker activist from Barcelona heavily involved in the IDC, would succeed Goya as General Coordinator so that Goya could focus his attention on the challenges La Coordinadora was facing.

Aragunde had become involved in the IDC as a Spanish representative on the European Working Group. Unencumbered by the responsibilities of leading a national trade union and with an ambitious vision for organising, Aragunde led the IDC through its greatest period of growth yet, particularly in the Global South, continuing an expansion that had begun during Goya's period as general secretary with a major investment of resources subsidised by funds from the Global North (General Secretary's report, 2014 General Assembly, Tenerife). In Latin America, an energetic and committed zone coordinator, Mauricio Zarzuelo, from the Port of Buenos Aires, similarly unencumbered by national trade union responsibilities and able to dedicate substantial time to the IDC, brought in affiliates from across the region while Pierre Guighrehi, a dockworker from the Port of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, significantly expanded the organisation's reach in French-speaking West Africa. By 2016, the number of dockworker members in Africa (19,000) and Latin America (29,000) had substantially outpaced the membership in Europe (18,000), with Latin America nearly catching up to North America (29,500 affiliates) (General Secretary's report, IDC 2016 General Assembly, Miami). By 2019, the number of Latin American dockworkers in the organisation had reached 50,000, by far the largest region in the IDC (General Secretary's report, 2019 General Assembly, Lisbon).

Nevertheless, despite the rapid addition of new affiliates, organisational infrastructure in the growing regions has lagged behind that of Europe, where dockworkers have many decades of experience of networked collaboration, predating the IDC, as detailed above. On the one hand, Latin American activists have met most years for an annual assembly (Manaus, Brazil 2013; Tenerife, Spain 2014; Guayaquil, Ecuador 2015; Miami, United States 2016; Ushuaia, Argentina 2018; Lisbon, Portugal 2019) in addition to conferences on women and port work (La Valleja, Uruguay 2016) and health and safety (Santos, Brazil 2018). Yet, the greater costs and difficulties of travel *within* the Global South relative to the Global North, coupled with greater resource constraints, have posed significant barriers to strengthening intraregional relationships within the network in between annual assemblies. As Zarzuelo put it (Phone interview, 2012),

> Europe isn't the same as Latin America. For me to travel to the Dominican Republic [from Buenos Aires] takes 15 hours . . . for us, it's impossible. First, the costs, and second, it's a major journey. In Europe, you take the subway, and you're there in no time . . . Once a year, it costs us a ton of money . . . to have meetings of delegates . . .

While activists have maintained communication with one another directly through the use of group messaging apps, the issue of uneven participation or non-responsiveness by some affiliates has been raised recurrently both by regional coordinators and in regional assemblies, as well as the need for more effective means of continuous communication, suggesting that the relative lack of face-to-face relationships has made remote relationships more difficult to sustain and develop. As a result, though network density has increased over time, it continues to lag behind Europe and intra-regional coordination in Latin America has tended to rely more heavily than in Europe on the regional coordinator, both in terms of day-to-day contact and face-to-face visits. The regional coordinator then participates in regular meetings at the global level with regional counterparts and maintains close contact with the General Coordinator. More recently, however, as a result of the move to online meetings precipitated by the COVID crisis, activists in the Latin American region have begun to have more frequent contact, albeit not in person, through the use of video conferencing. Whether the use of online meetings will have a substantial long-term impact on the development of stronger networked ties among participants remains to be seen, but at a minimum, they have increased the potential for greater frequency and ease of communication among activists not only within Latin America but also between regions.

2014-2015 as turning point in Latin America

The sharp increase in the number of affiliates in the Latin American region in the 2010's raised expectations about the IDC's ability to deliver results. As Latin America coordinator Mauricio Zarzuelo put it in a letter to affiliates in March 2013 in relation to a dispute in Brazil, 'after various years of building our global trade union instrument IDC we have for the first time … passed from mere declarations to concrete actions.' A ramping up of campaigning activities in 2014 and 2015 suggested that this was an important turning point for the regional organisation. The Unión Portuaria de Chile, which brings together dozens of sub-enterprise level dockworker unions from across the country, organised national weeks-long strikes in 2013 and 2014 as part of an offensive struggle to win respect for the legally mandated lunch hour and backpay for the years in which the dockworkers had been denied this right (Fox-Hodess, 2019; Fox-Hodess & Santibañez Rebolledo, 2020). In 2014, with national negotiations nearing an impasse, the IDC took action, making a very public announcement to blockade ships coming from the non- Unión Portuaria controlled ports. The threatened blockade made national news headlines for several days running (Peña, 2014)) and a favourable agreement for the dockers was reached soon thereafter. The agreement, covering both permanent and casual workers, was significant not only in delivering on the demands regarding the lunch hour and backpay but in that it established a de facto precedent for tripartite sectoral level collective bargaining for the first time since before the Pinochet dictatorship, all in spite of the law (Fox-Hodess 2019). The Chilean success story was widely cited by Latin American interview participants when asked what they hoped the IDC would achieve in the region.

The most extensive IDC campaign in Latin America in this period, however, was organised the following year in support of a group of dockworkers from the Liga de Obreros Marítimos del Paraguay (LOMP) in Asuncíon who faced heavy-handed state repression after protesting job losses and the state's unwillingness to engage in negotiations on this issue. The workers had attempted to block a vessel on the Paraguay River from leaving the terminal by surrounding it in small boats. The state responded with force during the protest and eleven workers subsequently faced house arrest and serious charges that could have resulted in prison time (Press Release, IDC Latin American Zone, 14 November 2014). Downriver, Uruguayan dockworkers organised a blockade of ships from Paraguay, though the lack of participation from dockworker unions in adjacent ITF-affiliated ports in Argentina undercut the Uruguayans' effectiveness as ships were simply diverted, underlining the need for a more cohesive strategy of action in the region (Interview with former Latin America regional coordinator and Uruguayan dockworker leader Ricardo Suárez, Montevideo, 2015).

By the beginning of 2015, the IDC Zone Coordinators had 'resolved to place special emphasis on the conflict in Paraguay … and launch a global IDC campaign' ('IDC Global Campaign – Freedom for the 11 Detainees of the LOMP – Paraguay', 23 January 2015). Affiliates were asked to send letters to Paraguayan embassies and photo messages of support to the IDC. The next month, an international delegation composed of General Coordinator Jordi Aragunde, Latin American Coordinator Mauricio Zarzuelo, US and Canada East Coast Coordinator Kenneth Riley, as well as IDC activists from France and Spain, joined the LOMP leadership in Paraguay for a march and intensive negotiations with the government and employers (Press Release, IDC and Latin American Zone, 5 February 2015). The implicit threat of an international blockade by powerful unions in major trading partners in the Global North, coupled with the spotlight cast on the Paraguayan government by the march and international delegation, resulted in a promise to establish a collective bargaining agreement, reinstate the laid off workers and free the eleven detainees. Though the LOMP and the IDC faced significant barriers to enforcing the agreement in the following years, the campaign's initial success, combining explicit and implicit blockade threats with a campaign of normative pressure framed in terms of human rights, provided a significant boost to the IDC's efforts to build a strong regional organisation in Latin America.

IDC support for striking dockworkers in the Port of El Callao, the largest in Perú, that same year exemplified an additional dimension of solidarity and support in Latin America, characterised by in-person accompaniment by the regional coordinator (also evident in the Chilean and Paraguayan cases discussed above) and the provision of technical advice and expertise during disputes with transnational employers and states. In April 2015, dockworkers from the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Marítimos y Portuarios del Puerto del Callao (SUTRAMPORCPC) began an indefinite strike after reaching impasse in bargaining with two transnational terminal operators, the Dutch company APM and the Dubai-based company DPWorld. In response, the IDC called on the companies to respect national and international law on decent working conditions and to negotiate in good faith, threatening to take 'measures of international solidarity in an active form' ('IDC apoya a los trabajadores portuarios del Callao en huelga indefinida desde ayer', 14 May 2015). The conflict escalated soon after when the Peruvian navy was called in to facilitate the movement of cargo through the port ('Armada peruana ingresa a El Callao para movilizar carga de comercio exterior,' 22 May 2015) and APM began laying off striking workers ('NP SUTRAMPORPC: APM comienza despidos masivos de trabajadores en huelga en Callao', 2 June 2015). In response, the IDC issued a second threat to 'carry out all legal actions within our reach to mediate in the conflict' ('Solidarity with SUTRAMPORPC in Callao as APM is laying off striking dockers', 3 June 2015).

IDC support for the dockworkers in El Callao stemmed in part from a perception that the ITF was not doing enough to support their Peruvian dockworker members at a time when they were not yet affiliated to the IDC. In fact, the emphasis on the day-to-day work of building meaningful relationships that go beyond the bounds of bureaucratic expectations – including with non-affiliates – has been key to the IDC's successful expansion in Latin America, just as it has been in Europe. Regional coordinator Mauricio Zarzuelo was in contact with the union during the dispute on a daily basis and visited in person, despite the fact that the union was not yet affiliated. A Peruvian dockworker activist, interviewed in El Callao in January 2019, explained that though the ITF had provided some advice and emails of support during the strike,

> 'I also believe, and all of my comrades believe, that they could have done more, there could have been more willingness … I think they could have called, for example, some kind of press conference, they could have called sometimes, they could have come to Peru to support, they could have sometimes sent a letter putting a little more pressure.'

In contrast, the IDC 'offered us international support, tangible support … usable support, in the sense of blocking cargo in Chile, in Uruguay, the cargo that would leave from El Callao, the cargo that would arrive.'

The position of the Latin American region in the IDC as a whole

Though the IDC's rhizomic model has been adapted to a hub-and-spoke model as a result of numerous practical challenges within the region, the IDC in Latin America has been successful in autonomously defining its own priorities and receiving necessary support from the global organisation – whether financial,[2] technical or industrial – to carry these out. In other words, research revealed little evidence either of bureaucratisation within Latin America, as the work of the organisation continues to be defined and carried out by local-level dockworker activists, or of the imposition of priorities from wealthier affiliates in the Global North. Yet, while the Latin American region has grown at a rate far outpacing other regions, the balance sheet in terms of activists' integration into, and centrality in terms of decision-making, within the global organisation is more mixed. In addition, rapid expansion in the Global South has raised issues of bureaucratisation and oligarchy at the global level.

At the same time as the IDC's Latin American region was undergoing rapid growth and increased activity, many IDC activists in Europe and North America were becoming increasingly concerned by a growing trend in the industry: automation. As a result, the IDC sought to build a closer relationship with the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), the union representing dockworkers on the East Coast of the United States, which had taken a hard-line stance opposing automation. Increased interest in automation was evident in a 2016 conference for IDC-Europe members on the subject held at Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) headquarters in Paris, and in the IDC general assembly, hosted later that year by the ILA in Miami, which dedicated significant time to the issue. Before 2012, ILA participation in the IDC had been limited to the Port of Charleston, which the IDC had supported during a major dispute in 2000 in which the local union, headed up by Kenneth Riley, had found themselves at odds with the national leadership. Leadership changes over time, including Riley's entry into a national level position, however, opened up the possibility for a closer relationship with the national union. By 2018, the ILA had negotiated a landmark agreement preventing the adoption of automation in East Coast ports for six years, boycotting the ITF Congress later that year out of a belief that the ITF had taken an overly conciliatory position on the issue (International Longshoremen's Association, (8 October 2018)). In fact, the IDC had long hoped for a closer relationship with the ILA to further develop its strong organisational base around the Atlantic, particularly in the North American markets that play such an important role in the global economy. At the same time, the West Coast North American dockworkers union, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which had been a founding member of the IDC, had in recent years grown closer to the ITF and had significantly decreased its participation in the IDC, creating the need for new North American partner.

In 2019, the relationship between the ILA and the IDC would become even closer as ILA Executive Vice President Dennis Daggett was elected General Coordinator at the IDC's biannual general assembly in Lisbon. While IDC delegates had arrived at the general assembly expecting to re-elect popular General Coordinator Jordi Aragunde, the loss of support of Aragunde's local union in Barcelona had created an organisational crisis preventing him from running again. Daggett, a close associate of Aragunde's, was put forward instead as a last-minute candidate, with supporters emphasising the ILA's record on automation. Some supporters proposed to retain Aragunde as a full-time paid international labour coordinator – the first time such a role would exist in the IDC. The surprise proposal to elect Daggett on the floor of the general assembly, and discussion about what role, if any, Aragunde would play in the organisation in future, generated a flurry of caucusing by European delegates, with opposition voiced in particular by some French and Spanish delegates concerned about democratic process, bureaucratisation and the more conservative politics of the

ILA.[3] Over the next two years, as COVID made in-person meetings all but impossible, the organisation struggled to find a successful resolution to the growing discontent within its European section regarding the change of leadership at the global level, the hiring of Aragunde as international labour coordinator and the questions of democratic process, bureaucratisation and transparency that these issues had raised, raising the troubling question of whether the 'iron law of oligarchy' had finally caught up with the IDC.

Latin American delegates generally voiced support for Daggett and Aragunde on the basis of the ILA and Aragunde's strong support for organising in the region, for example, in the Paraguayan dispute detailed above. Yet, participant observation suggested that delegates were not caucusing across regions, limiting opportunities to explore opposing viewpoints. As a result, Latin American delegates were advised on the situation by the current and former regional coordinators, suggesting that the hub-and-spoke model within Latin America had created an information bottleneck. In fact, the relative lack of meaningful networking across regions in the only forum where that is possible – the biannual general assemblies – was evident from participant-observation at the 2014 and 2016 meetings as well, indicating a more persistent issue of rank-and-file communication between activists in the Global North and the Global South. While the general coordinator reported at the 2016 General Assembly that over the past two years he had attended meetings and visits in 16 countries, clocking up 120,000 miles of travel, and while regional coordinators travel frequently for global meetings as well, rank-and-file activists have few opportunities to build relationships with counterparts outside of their regions. An organisational model in which the role of relationship-building with new affiliates is dependent on a single global coordinator and a small number of regional coordinators, in other words, creates the strong potential for information bottlenecks across regions. Finally, some delegates from the Latin American region criticised the lack of time for meaningful discussion and debate in the general assemblies more generally and shared their sense that contentious issues were being determined through side conversations or prior discussions to which they were not privy.

While leading IDC activists from Europe, North America and Australia have viewed automation as a key organisational priority over the past five years, dockworkers from Latin America and Africa emphasised a different set of issues in reports to the General Assembly of the IDC in 2014, 2016 and 2019, reflecting the contrasting realities that they face. Automation has become a primary concern for dockworkers in North America, Europe and Australia as a result of employer attempts to implement it as both a cost-saving measure and a means to get around the industrial leverage of powerful unions operating in key chokepoints in the global economy. Yet, outside of East Asia and the Middle East, port terminal automation in the Global South has been limited.[4] As African Zone coordinator Pierre Guigrehi reported to the 2019 General Assembly in Lisbon, 'We are discovering automation through the IDC reports but we are not facing this'.

In Latin America, dockworkers have instead tended to highlight the political situation in their countries as the primary issue of concern, whether that relates to the legal infrastructure for trade union recognition and collective bargaining, state efforts to privatise or deregulate ports, the prevalence of state repression and extra-state violence (often linked to narcotrafficking), as well as more general attacks on workers and the left by right-wing governments. As with the African region, the issues of low wages, precarity, lack of training and very poor workplace infrastructure for health and safety in many countries have been key as well. While it is clear that all IDC dockworkers would be disadvantaged by automation in the Global North because this would decrease opportunities for powerful and wealthy unions from the countries of major trading partners to take effective solidarity actions and provide funding to the organisation, the emphasis on a very different set of issues by delegates from Latin America and Africa suggests the need to prioritise the development of global campaigns speaking more directly to the set of issues facing dockworkers in the Global South. Such campaigns could, for example, focus on pushing for global standards on health and safety, wages and terms and conditions through pressure campaigns on states and employers.

At the same time, despite the far greater challenges that dockworkers in Latin America face relative to Europe, interviews with participants made clear that the Latin American region has much to offer the organisation as a whole, in particular, a more politically-inclined approach to trade unionism, perhaps because the more adverse conditions for trade unionism in the region often make dockworkers' struggles inherently political in more obvious ways than in Europe and North America. Latin American activists within the IDC have consistently pushed the organisation as a whole to take positions and action on key political issues of the day, providing implicit and explicit critiques of the perceived trade union mentality of their counterparts in the Global North and the need to go beyond this. As Zarzuelo put it, 'what is our position, beyond dockworker issues? … it's the life that we're living today as dockworkers in whatever part of the world … we have to take a position on sexual freedom, like abortion, we also have to take positions on war … all aspects of life.' (Interview, Buenos Aires, 2015) Zarzuelo is particularly passionate about the issue of Palestinian liberation, which he has agitated around repeatedly in the organisation. In contrast, he argued that

> the [European dockworkers] are fighters for their economic interests, but not for ideological issues, for who has to be in charge of the ports, for what the ports signify for the state. Do we want to unionise private ports or national ports? That discussion that is ideological does not happen … To debate who the ports should belong to, just like we debate who should own the telephones, communications, petroleum, and all the rest … (Interview, Buenos Aires 2015)

Zarzuelo's successor as IDC Latin America coordinator, Ricardo Suárez, made a similar argument

> more than being dockworkers, we have to debate state politics, we have to debate education issues, we have to debate health issues, we have to debate housing issues … if you ask "Juan" if the union in Europe is steeped in problems of education, they don't have a position … if they are concerned with health, it's more and more restrictive … if they are worried about the hunger that exists in the world … (Interview, Montevideo, 2015)

In addition, dockworkers in Latin America are keenly aware that global inequalities in their terms and conditions of employment – despite being employed by the same transnational terminal operators to load and unload the same ships – stem not just from decisions by capital but from the relations between states within the global system, calling attention to the need for dockworkers in the Global North to confront the role of their own governments in reproducing the global distribution of rights and resources. In other words, far from being passive victims of transnational capital (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005; Seidman, 2011), trade unionists in the Global South may be the key to pointing the IDC and the global trade union movement more generally in the direction of deeper engagement with the nature of the global capitalist system and how it might be challenged to build a better world for workers.

Conclusion

The IDC's rapid expansion in the Global South over the past decade provides important lessons to the global trade union movement on the possibilities of resisting both the 'iron law of oligarchy' and the tendency for inequalities among trade unions in different locations in the global political economy to be reinscribed through transnational collaboration. Most positively, the IDC case demonstrates that contrary to the hierarchical model of organisation found in the mainstream global union federations (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2019, 2020), it is possible to develop effective 'bottom up' regional structures for trade unionists in the Global South within the broader framework of a global union organisation. By building a regional organising network within Latin America, organised along a model of rank-and-file unpaid, part-time activism, with autonomy to pursue priorities generated by its affiliates, the IDC in Latin America has demonstrated that expansion into the Global South need not be accompanied by bureaucratisation and oligarchy. Nevertheless, the very different material conditions for trade unionism in the region – including the realities of poor resourcing, smaller and weaker unions and longer distances of travel – have

pushed the IDC towards organisational adaptations. In particular, the IDC has faced much greater challenges in developing a fully horizontal, networked model within Latin America relative to Europe and has instead worked through a hub-and-spoke model with greater dependence on the regional coordinator, allowing network density to increase over time.

At the same time, however, the organisational balance sheet with regards to the relative weight of 'worker voice' from different parts of the world in shaping decisions at the global level remains mixed, suggesting that despite its more participatory organisational model, the IDC, like the mainstream global union federations, has not been entirely successful in overcoming inequalities among affiliates from the Global North and the Global South (Bank Muñoz, 2017; Nostovski, 2021). On the positive side, the IDC has succeeded in developing regional structures that enable the autonomous definition of priorities and organisation of campaigns by affiliates in the Global South. Activities in the Global South are financed from the general fund, to which affiliates in the Global North contribute the lion's share – in other words, the financing model is highly redistributive with flows from North to South – while regional decision-making authority remains embedded in the South. Yet, participant-observation and interviews at global meetings suggest that many affiliates from the Global South share a perception that they remain somewhat peripheral to key decisions taken at the global level, relative to the role played by affiliates from the Global North. This is due in part to the weak ties between activists in the Global North and Global South and the concomitant development of information bottlenecks staffed by the regional coordinators and the general coordinator. As the IDC's organisational growth in the Global South races ahead while the locus of trade union strength and resourcing remains in the Global North, it remains to be seen whether and to what extent global organisational priorities and structures will shift to reflect this new reality. Addressing these issues is likely to require both cultural changes and organisational adaptations to more centrally incorporate activists from the Global South into key decision-making processes at the global level.

In addition, organisational changes at the global level have raised concerns about bureaucratisation and oligarchy, particularly since 2019 when a change in leadership at the top and the decision to hire the former General Secretary as a full-time international labour coordinator brought these issues to the fore. As membership numbers and geographic reach expanded at a rapid rate over a short period of time, as reported at the 2016 General Assembly, the organisation struggled to adapt, relying heavily on the work of a single global official – General Coordinator Jordi Aragunde – and a single global staff member to manage the incorporation of new affiliates. The result was a lack of development of strong horizontal ties across regions and the formation of information bottlenecks, as detailed above. In short, the organisation has found less success in managing its vertical expansion, which was undertaken as a result of the pressures of horizontal expansion. These developments, in turn, threaten to erode the IDC's key strength as a rank-and-file network of trusted allies engaged in collaborative horizontal decision-making.

With global expansion, some degree of bureaucratisation is likely to occur, so transparent collective discussion is needed to curb bureaucracy's oligarchical pull, mitigating against the tendency over time for smaller numbers of activists from the most powerful unions to play a far more central role than others in shaping the most important decisions. The global pandemic and the challenges this has created for building and repairing relationships among activists has certainly contributed to this tendency as well. Overall, the issues thrown up since 2019 at the global level suggest that the IDC has reached a critical juncture in its development.

An inclusive, collective discussion about the organisation's current and future needs – and whether its long-standing organisational structure is capable of meeting those needs – is urgently required. Such a discussion could usefully serve to develop a collective framework for maintaining the central organisational values of rank-and-file democracy and horizontal decision-making, while recognising the organisation's increasing complexity and limited capacity at the global level relative to its size. In addition, the simmering internal conflict since 2019 suggests that as the organisation grows in scale, reliance on informal processes and strong interpersonal (and often friendship-based)

ties may be insufficient (Polletta, 2002), calling attention to the need to develop mechanisms of conflict resolution better suited to a larger organisation in which the trust built through strong person-to-person relationships may inevitably need to be supplemented with trust in collectively agreed formal policies and procedures. Across each of these issues, care must be taken to guard against the strong tendency within global union organisations for the 'real' decisions to be taken by a small group behind closed doors, and for the priorities of wealthy affiliates from the Global North to take precedence.

The IDC experience up to the present has demonstrated that it is possible to build strong, effective and enduring regional union networks on the basis of rank-and-file democracy in both the Global North and the Global South. Yet, the organisation's ability to deal effectively with the issues that have emerged at the global level through this expansion remains in question. Are bureaucratisation, oligarchy and the hardening of North/South power dynamics an inevitability? Only time will tell. What is clear, however, is that the resolution – or lack thereof – of each of these issues in the coming years will certainly be of great interest to trade union movement practitioners and labour scholars interested in the possibilities for developing more democratic and egalitarian forms of global unionism.

Notes

1. Ethics approval to conduct research interviews and participant observation with human subjects was received from the University of California, Berkeley (CPHS# 2013–06-5419) and the University of Sheffield (reference number 023973). Prior to conducting interviews, research participants were provided with an information sheet and asked to sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in interviews. Participants were given the option in the consent form to be identified by name or in a semi-anonymised form in any publications or presentations emanating from the research. For participant observation, prior approval was obtained from the organisation to attend meetings and visit local worksites and I introduced myself and my research to those present.
2. As of the 2016 General Assembly, dockworker unions in Europe were contributing ten times more per member to the organisation than dockworker unions in Latin America and twenty times more per member than dockworker unions in Africa.
3. Historically, the ILA leadership had close ties to the mafia, resulting in oversight by the US federal government's New York Harbor Waterfront Commission since 1953; in addition, the union has struggled to integrate racially segregated locals (Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor,). During the Cold War and since, the ILA has maintained a stridently anti-Communist stance. While the left-wing West Coast ILWU took boycott action for a wide range of domestic and international left-wing causes during the Cold War and since, the ILA's most famous international solidarity actions were taken against the Soviet Union (Cole, 2018).
4. The first semi-automated terminal in Latin America, located in the Port of Lázaro Cardenas in Mexico, was established in 2017 (Gayá, 2018), while the first semi-automated terminal in Africa, located in the Port of Tangiers in Morocco, was established in 2019 (World Maritime News, 2019).

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Notes on contributor

Dr. Katy Fox-Hodess is a lecturer in Employment Relations and a member of the Centre for Decent Work at the University of Sheffield in England. She studies contemporary international solidarity among trade unions in the port sector.

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