4 Transformative resistance

The role of labour and trade unions in alternatives to privatisation

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Proponents of privatisation have presumed that there are no actors within the public sector able to drive improvement or change. The idea that public sector workers and their trade unions might be amongst the instigators of public service reform is quite beyond contemporary political orthodoxy. In the past decade, however, resistance to privatisation has produced extensive evidence of public sector workers, and their unions, leading changes that make services more responsive to the needs of those who use them. Across the world, there are trade union organisations reacting to privatisation as service users as well as providers, as workers, and as citizens. They use their distinctive organising capacities and the detailed knowledge of their members to improve the quality of the service they deliver to their fellow citizens, as a necessary part of defending its public character. In the process, trade unions have worked alongside civic organisations, farmers and rural movements, and sometimes public sector managers and politicians.

One trade union leader of an exemplary struggle of this kind – Luis Isarra from the Federation of Unions of Water Workers of Peru (FENTAP) in the Peruvian city of Huancayo – summed up the civic-driven process of reform born out of resistance to privatisation as "modernization without privatization" (Terhorst 2008, Spronk 2009). Recently these developments have produced new kinds of partnerships across public institutions in different countries (public-public partnerships), sharing expertise and obtaining the finance to more than match the private sector from the perspective of public benefit (Hall et al., 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is to describe some of the dynamics involved in unions taking on a reforming role; to identify the distinctive contributions they make; and to explore the conditions that explain or make these dynamics possible (as well as the difficulties they face). This chapter thus explores a few cases in depth – Brazil, Uruguay, and South Africa. It also draws on other experiences in the course of suggesting some generalisations and posing questions that could be the basis for further research. A wider mapping of labour or trade union involvement in the improvement of public services has yet to be done, although the reports of the Public

Services International (PSI) Research Unit (www.psiru.org) from 1998 onwards provide details of many union campaigns around alternatives to privatisation. The examples in this chapter concern the water sector, where there is a wide range of experiences of the role of trade unions in such campaigns – involving both successes and limits. Such a focus enables us to develop hypotheses on the role of labour and trade unions that can be explored more widely, including in health care and electricity, where there are considerable similarities in the role of labour in the struggle to create alternatives to privatisation.

Examples of trade union-driven or co-driven reform of public services are still the exception to the ways in which trade unions tend to respond to privatisation, however. More typically, public sector trade unions attempt to negotiate for the transfer of the same or similar wages, pensions, and employment conditions to the new privatised regime (Terry 2000). Alternatively, unions fight to defend the status quo of public provision. Examples here include the successful defensive campaign against water privatisation in Nigeria (Hall et al., 2005), the unsuccessful trade union-led campaign against Margaret Thatcher's early privatisation of water in the UK (Ogden 1991), and the successful defence of publicly owned railways in India. There are also experiences of a third kind, in the form of a worker cooperative, frequently independent of the state and striving to be economically viable without state subsidies, although the exact relations with the state vary (Hall et al., 2005).

The examples of "transformative resistance" that are the focus of this chapter are distinctive because they include a practical (and sometimes theoretical) vision of state-owned public services that are often very different than the status quo, involving, for example, new forms of worker and citizen participation. They are also under-reported and under-analysed. Their future is uncertain too: they face the obstacles of hostile neoliberal policies (see Chapter 3, this volume), the structural conservatism of many trade union institutions (Patroni and Poitras 2002, Spronk 2009), and the weakness or absence of party political voices for the kind of social transformations they envisage.

In my analysis of these developments, I will suggest a conceptual framework to answer two main sets of questions. First, when trade unions become involved in developing alternative plans to privatisation, they are defending members' jobs, but they are also moving beyond the conventional trade union focus on collective bargaining over wages and conditions and taking responsibility for the wider public benefit and, indeed, the very purpose of their members' labour. This involves, amongst other strategies, a radical widening of the agenda of collective bargaining. How do we understand and explain this move towards society-wide goals of day-to-day trade union activity? Are there any general points to be made about what is involved when unions self-consciously develop strategies that move significantly beyond their everyday routines and take responsibility, with others, for the future of the service?

The second set of questions stems from the fact that virtually all of the labour struggles for "transformative resistance" to privatisation involve social movements beyond the workplace (see Chapter 6, this volume). What, if any, is the distinctive role of labour and of trade unions in these alliances? There is a further variation on this question: what is distinctive about trade unions – flowing from the nature of labour under capitalism – as compared to the political parties with which they are or have been associated? It is noticeable that parties associated with labour – in both the North and in parts of the South – have driven privatisation or more or less acquiesced in the drive to privatise. Yet, in some – not all – circumstances, the unions historically allied with these parties have resisted, responding to the pressures of their members rather than the demands of party loyalty. What are the distinctive features of labour and trade unionism in such circumstances, and how do these dynamics feed into struggles for alternatives to privatisation?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I focus my discussion on the efforts of trade unionists in Brazil, Uruguay, and South Africa to transform, as well as to defend, the public provision of water in creative, if sometimes tense, relations with a variety of social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and political parties. These are not necessarily representative of labour in the global South, but they are indicative of the kinds of challenges and successes that unions have met.

TRANSFORMATIVE LABOUR ACTION IN PRACTICE

Brazil: A multiscalar campaign

In Brazil, the story of labour's transformative resistance to privatisation starts in 1996 with the attempt of the Cardoso government (1995–2003) to sell off the National Sanitation Company and to move responsibility for the management of water from a municipal to a regional level. This was part of a wider process of reorganising public water companies to make them more attractive to private investors (de Oliveira Filho 2002). The move to regional responsibility would have meant the break-up of the well-established and frequently successful public companies in many municipalities where the political left was relatively strong (Hall et al., 2005).

From the mid-1990s, this attempt to make state and municipal water and sanitation companies more attractive to private investors had already meant large-scale layoffs. Resistance to these policies had been restricted to the isolated struggles of particular groups of workers. As preparations to privatise public companies accelerated, "the workers began to confront 'the war' more politically", reports Abelardo de Oliveira Filho, then Sanitation and Environment Secretary of the urban workers' union *Federação Nacional dos Urbanitários* (FNU), an affiliate of the trade union federation

Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT; Keck 1992). He explains how "it became necessary to expand the struggle beyond the unions and make society as a whole aware of the importance of defending such essential services; in other words, to become the Citizens' Union" (de Oliveira Filho 2002, 7).

This approach led the unions, notably FNU and CUT, to reach out to and help bring together all those with a shared commitment to the public management of sanitation and water as a public good and basic human right. The result was the founding of the *Frente Nacional pelo Saneamento Ambiental* (FNSA) in 1997. With 17 co-founding organisations, it was a powerful alliance of consumer organisations, NGOs involved in urban reform, public managers, the church, and social movements. Especially important was the participation of the National Association of Municipal Water and Sanitation Services (ASSEMAE). This organisation of water managers played a key role both in the technical arguments against the government and – with workers and consumers – in plans for improving the management and delivery of municipal water companies, thereby making these public companies less vulnerable to the pressures to privatise. Several public water and sanitation companies joined the FNSA, including the Departments of Municipal Water and Sanitation in Porto Alegre and Santo Andre, near São Paulo. Both these cities were then under the leadership of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT, Workers' Party), which had pioneered the participatory principles of budget making and public management more generally.

FNU/CUT provided the organisational resources for coordinating the FNSA, including the executive secretary. Logistical help was also provided by the *Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional* (*Fase*), a radical Brazil-wide NGO with a long history of popular education, campaigning, and research with popular movements for human rights, democracy, and environmental justice. FNSA was located at the Commission for Urban Development of the Chamber of Deputies in Brasilia. The combination of such core sources of support indicates the broad base of the alliance. It chose its name "National Front" to indicate this breadth and that it was not dominated by any one social group whether it be trade union, NGO, faith organisation, or social movement.

A particular contribution of the trade unions was to provide well-organised and informed networks of politically conscious activists, experienced in organising in their communities, right across Brazil's hugely differing regions. CUT had been a central organising force in the struggle against the dictatorship less than 15 years earlier. It had established a strong legitimacy as a hub for the coordination of different autonomous movements with shared goals. For example, in 1983 CUT had created ANAMPOS (*Articulação Nacional dos Movimentos Populares e Sindicais*) as a means of coordinating social movements and trade unions when the need arose. In the struggle against the dictatorship, just over a decade earlier than the struggles over water privatisation, a culture of

mutual respect (although not without tensions) was nurtured among different kinds of movements, urban and rural, industrial and social, and religious and secular (author interview with Kjeld Jacobsen, past International Secretary of CUT, October 2010).

The FNSA's framework of principles "for the universal guarantee of sanitation and water services to all citizens regardless of their economic and social condition" acted as the basis for a massive process of participation (quoted in de Oliveira Filho 2002, 4). Each constituent organisation worked separately and together to develop proposals and strategies to resolve the still dire state of water supply in Brazil, to overcome endemic corruption, and to come up with coherent alternatives to privatisation. It sought to generalise and apply the principles of participatory democracy developed in practice by the Brazilian left. This participatory process was combined with strategic and high-profile interventions in the parliamentary and judicial process. Interventions in Brasilia, for example, would always be accompanied by mass activities, demonstrations, or other high-impact events.

The international dimension to the campaign contributed to these high-profile interventions. At a key moment in the government's attempt to get its privatisation proposals passed, the FNSA organised a well-publicised seminar in the Chamber of Deputies with speakers from South Africa, Canada, and the PSI trade union confederation. This documented the social and environmental costs of the corporations leading the process of privatisation in Brazil and elsewhere and showcased alternative models of public improvement. "International help and exchange has been essential in our struggle," affirmed de Oliveira Filho (2002, 18). By 2000, this multi-level campaign had successfully challenged the constitutional legitimacy of shifting responsibility for the management of water from the municipal to the regional level and had defeated the government's proposal for the sale of the National Sanitation Company.

Following Lula's election in 2002, the success of the campaign was symbolised by de Oliveira Filho's appointment as minister of water. The proposal for wholesale privatisation was dropped, but the government bowed to demands from international capital to enable public-private partnerships (PPPs) in public services, including water. Several municipalities also submitted to pressures from national capital for privatisation of their water services (author telephone and e-mail interview with Sergio Baierle, coordinator of the Porto Alegre NGO *Cidade*, March 2011).

Uruguay: The trade union vertebrae of a popular movement

In Uruguay, the story began in 2002 with a newspaper leaking a letter of intent between the Colorado government of Jorge Batlle (2000–2005) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which set out a timetable for the privatisation of Uruguay's national water company, *Obras Sanitarias del Estado* (OSE). It was the publication of this letter that led to the formation

of a popular and effective alliance in defence of water as the source of life, the *Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (CNDAV; Taks 2008). CNDAV had its roots in an alliance involving the water workers' union, the Federation of State Employees of OSE (FFOSE), to resist initial moves towards privatisation in the Maldonaldo region.

FFOSE was part of the trade union federation *Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional de Trabajadores* (PIT-CNT) which, like the Brazilian CUT, had played a key role in supporting resistance to the dictatorship (between 1973 and 1985) and thus had a high degree of popular legitimacy. The water workers had been part of that resistance too. In the struggle for water as a human right and a common good – widely seen as a continuation of the struggle for democracy – the union continued to play a central, supportive role. An activist describes the role of FFOSE as providing the "spinal vertebrae" of the CNDAV (author e-mail and phone interview with Carmen Sosa, a FFOSE organiser and representative on the CNDAV, July 2010).

FFOSE's initial concern, like that of the water workers in Brazil, was the interests of its members as jobs were frozen and their workload increased. But following a similar logic to the Brazilian FNV, FFOSE members' concerns soon went beyond their jobs. As staff of the national water company, which from the late 1990s had been threatened with break-up and privatisation, they also felt a strong connection with the farmers and rural population whose livelihoods were dependent on the supply of water. "For us", explained Adriana Marquisio, president of FFOSE between 2004 and 2010, "the problems of water shortage in rural areas is very sensitive. There are staff of the public water company (OSE) in even the smallest rural towns. They grew up there, they live there, and they are part of the affected population. Water is too vital for the task of providing it to be carried out as just any other job" (author e-mail and phone interview with Adriana Marquisio, July 2010).

FFOSE and its partners in CNDAV believed that the strongest institutional defence against the IMF would be a constitutional one. They had to find a political route that outflanked the existing government. A previous success against privatisation provided a solution. In 1992, 72% of the electorate voted against a law that would have opened up virtually all state enterprises to privatisation (Chavez 2008). CNDAV, with FFOSE, followed this example and made the most of a clause in the constitution enabling citizens to call for a referendum if they could win the support of at least 300 000 people (more than 10% of registered voters). The referendum would be over an amendment to the constitution to include a reference to "access to water and...sanitation as constituting fundamental human rights" and to such a public good being provided "solely and directly by state legal persons" (Chavez 2008, 38). Within a year, the CNDAV gained the 300 000 signatures necessary for a referendum.

In Montevideo, NGOs and urban movements played a major role in CNDAV. Outside the capital it was mainly FFOSE, working with rural organisations, that pushed the reform of the constitution. One FFOSE organiser describes how: "In 2004, the general secretary of FFOSE (with other *compañeros*) went round the country on horseback for 23 days, from village to village, to talk to people about the need for constitutional reform" (author e-mail interview with Carmen Sosa, July 2010). FFOSE also used its membership in PSI to organise international support. This included research and arguments – drawing especially on the international experience of privatisation – that FFOSE could use to build support for the amendment.

The other side of FFOSE's commitment to water as a common good and its delivery as a public service has been its concern to make OSE an organisation that is properly accountable for public money. The FFOSE members played a leading role in 2002 in ridding the Uruguayan water company of corruption and participating with management in its transformation into a model public utility. An important element of this model was a formal requirement, after the success of the referendum, that citizens and staff have an effective role in the running of the company. The process of making this a reality is still under way, but the level of citizen and NGO participation in CNDAV has prepared the way. "Citizens insisted on it," remembers Maria Selva Ortiz from REDES, "and as a result of the role citizens played in the campaign, we could not be refused" (author personal interview with Maria Selva Ortiz, November 2010).

South Africa: Blocked attempts at restructuring for public benefit

The South African experience, although not as "successful" as the ones above, is an important one because it demonstrates that public ownership is not a sufficient condition for the creation of "public services". I focus here on the experience of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu). Following the 1994 election of the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party adopted neoliberal macroeconomic policies (Satgar 2008). In response, and to address the specific problems of dismantling the apartheid state, Samwu mobilised the skills and commitment of its members to develop a public capacity for restructuring public services without privatisation to meet the needs of all. There were several other trade union-led attempts at similar democratic restructuring, variable in the extent of their success.

Samwu's initiatives have been part of an often divided but at times very militant opposition to privatisation, as well as the corporatisation, of public water and electricity utilities. Corporatisation effectively means organising a public utility as a separate financial entity and managing it as a market-oriented private enterprise. It confronts workers and service users with a common problem of an organisation that is structurally oriented to reducing and recovering costs on a commercial model (Hall et al., 2002,

McDonald and Smith 2002). Opposition to corporatisation has come from well-organised community movements as well as from the trade unions. But there have been tensions in the relationship. A good example of both a common front of resistance and of the tensions produced by the different immediate interests of the staff and of the service users is provided by the experience of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) in 2000.

The APF brought together community groups defending themselves against rises in service charges, cut-offs, eviction, and the other consequences of cost recovery with students and unions, especially Samwu, to resist two of the government's flagships of corporatisation: the Igoli 2002 plan for the services of Johannesburg and the corporatisation of Witwatersrand University (Van de Walt et al., 2001, Ngwane 2010). The tensions in the alliance arose from the fact that the unions won some concessions regarding the terms of Igoli 2000, and this helped to protect their members' jobs. Many community activists saw this as moving away from opposition, to negotiating simply around the terms on which it was to be introduced (author e-mail interview with Trevor Ngwane, one of the community leaders of the APF, and with Roger Ronnie, Samwu's General Secretary 1995–1999 and 2000–2007, December 2010). These, and other widespread resistance, have impeded the momentum of corporatisation and privatisation but have not halted it.

Samwu's post-apartheid strategy was to pursue a double track of "stopping the privatisation of municipal services (in whatever form)", and "contributing to the transformation of the municipal services to allow for effective, accountable and equitable service delivery" (Samwu 2002). In other words, Samwu, like several other unions – most notably the transport union, Satawu (which faced the privatisation of the railways and the ports) – engaged with restructuring with the aim of developing and demonstrating the public sector's capacity for a reorganisation of state services on the basis of the social rights entrenched in South Africa's democratic constitution.

In 1997, after a national campaign of demonstrations and extensive public argument, Samwu won agreement with the South Africa Local Government Association (Salga) on a protocol for how restructuring would take place. The key commitment, as far as the unions were concerned, was that the public sector would be the preferred option. Samwu made the most of the space this legal agreement provided for municipal workers and managers to develop alternatives with a chance of implementation. At every level its members initiated both emergency and longer-term plans for public reconstruction – from union members mending water pipes for their own communities in their own time to working with sympathetic municipal managers on overcoming the institutional legacy of apartheid.

One exemplary initiative over a two-year period beginning in 1996 was in the Hillstar area of Cape Town, where the union brought together staff and managers across townships to integrate what had been a fragmented

water department. They massively improved the infrastructure so that water was piped to people's homes, valves opened up or reconstructed, and the poor received the 50 litres of free water per person per day as the ANC had originally promised in the Reconstruction and Development Plan of 1994 (RDP 1994). The Hillstar experience became a template for other larger-scale attempts to reconstruct water services as well as being widely drawn on in Samwu's education programme for shop stewards.

Major attempts at union and community-led reconstruction, however, came up against the wider political context of the political party that led the struggle against apartheid (the ANC) becoming the same political party driving through privatisation and neoliberal restrictions on public sector investment and local government finance (Bond 2002, Samwu 2002, Satgar 2008, von Holdt 2010). Efforts to develop the Hillstar model on a provincial level demonstrated that Samwu could not carry through plans for reconstruction on its own, in the face of the combined forces of water multinationals like Biwater, the government, and teams of largely US-trained consultants (Van Niekerk 1998).

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) – to which Samwu is affiliated – was the union's natural ally. In the early days of privatisation, however, when Samwu passed a resolution at its 1995 Congress asserting that it would "implacably oppose the government's privatisation policies, whatever they may be called", Cosatu argued for a case-by-case approach – although in all its statements and campaigning, it became highly critical of the government's neoliberal economics (Bayliss 2001). Even when its opposition to privatisation has been most militant though, this powerful federation has been less concerted in its support for alternative, public restructuring (author telephone interviews with Roger Ronnie and Karl von Holdt, who had worked for National Labour, Economic and Development Institute [NALEDI], the strategic research and policy organisation created by Cosatu, December 2010).

Common features?

For the purpose of this chapter, these experiences, with all their limitations, constitute exemplary initiatives whose distinctive features are the product of particular histories but have a wider importance. Understanding their innovations, the conditions that make them possible, and those that block their full realisation might contribute to the development of hybrid models of state services that ameliorate the most negative aspects of capture by private capital while ensuring a more sustainable, equitable, and democratic form of services for all.

What do these experiences have in common that illustrates the potentially transformative role of labour in response to the challenge of privatisation? I will group these common features into two categories. First, there are those that concern the consciousness of workers and their organisations regarding

the *nature and purpose of labour.* As I have already stressed, all three experiences involve trade unions self-consciously moving beyond the defence of jobs and working conditions to taking responsibility, with citizens organisations, for both defending a public utility and changing the way it is managed. There is a common commitment across all cases to fully utilising the skills of public service staff to identify the failings of the public sector as it is and to propose an alternative way of organising the service on the basis of principles of equity, the creativity of labour, responsiveness to the community, and full accountability and transparency for public resources.

Related to this, all the trade unions involved were influenced by cultural and organisational traditions that understand workers not simply as wage earners but as knowing subjects. Whether coming from the commitment to participatory democracy characteristic of the Brazilian labour movement (Keck 1992), the syndicalism influential in the formation of Samwu (Mawbey 2007), or the radical social democratic traditions of civil and intellectual society in Uruguay, these trade unions are conscious of themselves as collective actors for social justice society-wide. From this understanding of their members as citizens as well as workers, followed the logic of building popular alliances to defend and develop what belongs to the people. With varying degrees of success, they were involved in creating sustained relationships or "deep coalitions" (Tattersall 2005, Spronk 2009) with services users and citizens more generally, rather than merely tactical and instrumental alliances.

These alliances and relationships had a dual purpose. On the one hand, they brought together sources of expertise – practical, expert, investigative – that were vital to transforming the organisation of the service, its accessibility and its quality. The local and regional assemblies that developed alternatives in the Brazilian campaign, the plans for transforming the organisation of the OSE, and the way the Hillstar process depended on the knowledge of local communities all illustrate this process of building a counter-knowledge. So too does the international collaboration, whether through the PSI or through direct transborder, sometimes regional, collaboration, lead to a sharing of information and strategic understanding otherwise not available on a national basis. On the other hand, the success of these alliances – in countering the pressures of global corporate and financial power and acquiescence of the political system – depended on their ability to use a variety of sources of power and influence to win legitimacy and build political support for the public option.

This brings us to the second innovative feature that these experiences have in common, if not all the same success: the development of strategies and forms of organisation to challenge the *power of capital beyond the workplace* and in the new circumstances of the globalisation of the capitalist market. This includes the expanded power of finance, including its power over nation states, the role of international financial institutions (IFIs), the growth of globally dominant corporations, and the importance

of the public sector in the emerging form of neoliberal capitalism, privatisation, and marketisation (Huws 2011).

In all three experiences, the trade unions were part of wider class and popular alliances or initiatives that sought to respond to the changing nature of capitalist power. None could depend on political parties to address these wider political issues. The ambitious initiatives of CNDAV in Uruguay and FNSA in Brazil to mobilise popular power over the political process were calculated to counter their governments' willing submission to pressures of the IFIs. The attempts by Samwu, through Cosatu and in direct interventions in the political process and in negotiations with the local government association, were similar, although generally unsuccessful, attempts to loosen the grip that IFIs and elite private interests had gained over the reconstruction of the South African political economy after apartheid. The new priority that the trade unions in these campaigns gave to close international collaboration was, in effect, part of this same attempt to build forms of international power and knowledge with which to counter and, if possible, pre-empt corporate capital's attempts to commodify public services (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

A less apparent feature of the wider significance of alliances like CNDAV concerns the relation between community and work. These alliances cannot accurately be understood in terms of connections between "work" and "community", as if they were separate worlds in the way that might have been true, especially in urban areas in the North, 20 years ago. These movements are now, in part, about building new forms of collectivity in the face of the disintegrative forces of the neoliberal economy – in particular, the casualisation and precariousness of work and the erosion of traditional forms of trade union solidarity. Under these conditions the workplace is often the home or the streets and issues of community, family, education, and health become inseparable from those of work – and lack of it.

A final point about these alliances is their relative autonomy from political parties, including those for which their members probably vote. It is an autonomy of perspective and knowledge as well as organisation, underpinned by the independent resources and institutional capacity of the unions. On the basis of this independence, they establish strategic relationships with political parties, as we saw, for example, with the FNSA's interventions in the House of Deputies. At least this is the theory. In practice, relations with political parties have been complex and uneven depending, for example, on the timing of the electoral cycle.

THE DUAL NATURE OF LABOUR

To understand, and possibly generalise, from these examples of how trade union strategy changed priorities in response to the threat of privatisation, it helps to draw on Karl Marx's understanding of the dual nature of labour

under capitalism. On the one hand, argues Marx, labour is abstract labour, involved in producing commodities for the market, objectified as value, expressed in the exchange of commodities for money, from which capital extracts profit. On the other hand, labour is also involved in the production of use value, concrete labour, both individual and social. Under capitalism, the two forms of labour are, he argued, in constant tension with each other: creative, purposeful activity is subordinated to labour disciplined for the maximisation of profits. Potentially, this tension is one of self-determining activity versus alienated labour (Elson 1979). In this tension lie a source of agency and the transformative potential of labour.

This distinction is very helpful for analysing the shift we have observed to be triggered by the threat of privatisation, from conventional defensive trade unionism to strategies based on taking responsibility for the use value of public sector labour. Before the pervasive spread of privatisation, the taken-for-granted routines of trade unionism in the public sector generally appeared to be based on those of trade unionism in the private sector, with governments as the employer rather than capital (Terry 2000).

To be more specific, while public sector unions often deploy sources of bargaining power specific to the institutionally political nature of their members' employment contracts – mobilising public opinion, using party union links, and so on – it has been exceptional for these unions to make the nature, organisation and future of the service as such central to the content of their activities. Trade union strategies focusing on developing or radically reforming public services, usually in close alliance with fellow citizens, began to appear in both Southern and Northern hemispheres in response to privatisation and other forms of commodifying what had been out of, or partially out of, the capitalist market.

In contexts in which trade unions develop these strategies of radical reform, we observe a dynamic in which the struggle against privatisation is not only about public versus private ownership but also about democratic control over the labour process and the purposes of labour, including the accessibility and quality of the service. In practice, this takes many different forms: a common one is that the need to justify opposition to privatisation in a context in which the public utility is patently inefficient and/or corrupt in its management of public money leads unions to investigate why it is inefficient and use their combined knowledge as service providers to develop alternatives.

In the cases studied here, the unions effectively used their everyday organising capacity to gather their collective knowledge of the production process in exactly this way, illustrating in practice a definition of public efficiency.

The focus on the dual nature of labour might seem a bit abstract, but I would suggest that it helps us to understand trade union involvements in alternatives to privatisation: they have extended their priority to struggling over use value, not just exchange value. It also helps to highlight the dis-

tinctive contribution of organised workers and knowledgeable producers in shaping, achieving, and sustaining these alternatives.

A full elaboration of the role of workers in developing and achieving alternatives is beyond the scope of this essay. The basic argument, however, is this: public services and utilities as non-market institutions created for social and political purposes are governed by an economic logic distinct from that of market-driven organisations (although in capitalist economies, the public sphere has also been subject to pressures and constraints set by capitalist markets and the priority of profit). For the past 40 years or so, North and South, movements and struggles of many kinds have tried to make this public economics more responsive to public needs and expectations. From the student, feminist, and urban movements of the 1960s and 1970s through to the experiments in participatory democracy in the 1980s and the environmental justice movements of the 21st century, there has been a growing pressure to make the actual, living, specific public – especially the poor and the subordinate parts of the public – a powerful presence in public decision making. But these movements rarely focused on the role of labour in the process of democratisation. Understanding the struggle against privatisation as potentially a struggle over use value helps us overcome this strategic limitation and draws attention to the potential importance of labour in this struggle for democracy.

Structurally at least, the partially decommodified nature of the public sphere opens up distinct possibilities for the struggle against alienated labour. In particular, it opens up the possibility for public service workers to express themselves through their labour, in the delivery of services to fellow citizens, as knowing, feeling people, rather than simply as workers selling their labour power or, in abstract terms, alienating their creativity as if it were a commodity. Of course, many workers in private, profit-maximising enterprises try to do the same, but the partially decommodified sphere of public services enables this to take place and be struggled for on a more systematic basis.

As we have already implied, this possibility would always have been a struggle. Few, if any, public sector institutions were designed to realise the creativity of labour in the process of serving their fellow citizens. But when trade unions struggle over privatisation, this is exactly the possibility that comes to the fore. It is the workers' commitment to the purpose, the potential use of their labour, that underpins the move from a struggle simply to defend workers' livelihoods to a struggle over a service that should be for the benefit of all.

This points to a need to deepen models of participatory democracy to involve the worker as citizen in influencing the nature of the decisions about the use of their labour. Such participatory governance is therefore not only about the allocation of public money, it is also about the ways of managing to realise the creativity of service workers for the benefit of, and

in collaboration with, their fellow citizens. Furthermore, the fundamental importance for high-quality services of valuing the creativity of labour, and working within a framework of goals set by extensive citizen participation, points to a notion of the division of labour and of discipline that is based on collaboration and motivation rather than a bureaucratic version of the discipline and divisions of the capitalist market.

As a development coming out of not only the unacceptability of privatisation, but also the failure of the command state – social democratic as well as Soviet – these pioneering struggles of labour could be useful sources of insight for a logic of "socially efficient" public services (Spronk 2010). We will return to this in the conclusion as an issue for future research. First, however, let's catch at least a glimpse of how such a *democratised public benefit economics* is emerging in practice, including the difficulties and dilemmas it faces.

CAPITALIST POWER BEYOND THE WORKPLACE

Historically, in Europe in particular, the recognition of the power of capital beyond the workplace – in the appropriation and distribution as well as the production of surplus and the character of capital accumulation – has been a driving force behind the participation of trade unions in the creation of political parties of labour, social democratic, and communist persuasions (Sassoon 1996, Eley 2002). For most of the 20th century, the goal of social control, or overthrow of the power of capital, was, in practice, understood by the dominant political traditions of the left in primarily national terms. Capture of national state institutions was seen as not only necessary but more or less sufficient for this purpose. The consequence of this model – the British Labour Party being the most classic example – has been a process, or indeed an institutional habit, of delegating political matters beyond the narrow agenda of industrial collective bargaining to the party and electoral politics (Miliband 1961).

In the countries that figure in this chapter, the institutions of liberal democratic nation states that underpinned this separation were never established for a significant length of time. By the time dictatorships, including apartheid, had been overthrown (1985 in Brazil and Uruguay; 1994 in South Africa), the unrestrained movement of capital had already begun to produce a new, multiscalar geography of capitalist power – in which state institutions at different levels played active, shaping roles but in which there was a significant denationalising of state systems, upwards and downwards (Sassen 2006).

We have seen in Uruguay and Brazil how the traditions formed during the struggles against dictatorship, of alliance building with a wide variety of social movements and the acute awareness of the limits of liberal political institutions, were clearly carried over into the struggles for alternatives to privatisation. These unions retained a significant autonomy from the

parties they helped to create to lead the political struggle for democracy – the PT and Frente Amplio. They saw themselves, amongst their other roles, as guarantors, along with (and often in active alliance with) other social movements, of a radical democracy accountable to strong civil societies.

In South Africa, there was a similar tradition of alliance building across social sectors in the struggle against apartheid. However, Cosatu's position in the alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), their shared belief in the necessity of a stage of national liberation (bourgeois revolution) before any further radical transformation, and the depth of the ANC's legitimacy as the party of the post-apartheid nation (Satgar 2008) meant that Cosatu's (and thereby to some extent Samwu's) position vis-à-vis the ANC was ambiguous, as we have seen, despite its official position of autonomy in relation to its alliance partners (author personal interview with Devan Pillay, January 2011).

To understand the particular role of trade unions in creating or trying to create alternatives to privatisation, it is important to recognise the specific and ambiguous position of the trade unions. They cannot be understood in the same way as the (erstwhile) left-of-centre parties with which they have been in alliance. In general, trade unions are in a different structural position from political parties vis-à-vis their membership on the one hand and the institutions of the state on the other. Generally, the very existence of unions is rooted in workers' day-to-day antagonism to capital, which limits the extent of their integration into the neoliberal consensus. The conflict with capital is not necessarily explosive or political, but if unions abandon the daily battlefield over wages and conditions, and the struggle for and defence of the social wage, members will protest and, depending on the degree of union democracy, this will put pressure on the leadership and, if that fails, membership will fall away (Anderson 1967).

Generally, unions depend on their members to an extent that parties do not. Parties are often integrated into state structures, receiving state funding or high salaries for elected representatives and their staff. Parties are also reliant on the media and have a highly mediated relation to the people (Mair 2006). At the same time as unions across the world are under more effective pressure to resist the transnational powers of capital, their strength and capacity is undermined by the deregulation of national labour markets. Increasingly, the majority of the economically active population is either unemployed, their work is casualised, or they are hired through labour brokers. The unions simply do not reach these precarious workers, other than through innovative social movement-influenced networks increasingly organising in the informal sector.

At this stage, the shape of an alternative kind of relationship between trade unions and wider political and economic change is unformed, but certain features recur in the struggle for alternatives to privatisation, as in the broader struggle against privatisation. The approach developed by Novelli and Ferus-Comelo (2010) through reflecting on a wide range of case studies of struggles involving labour and other social movements resisting different

aspects of neoliberal globalisation provides a useful framework for identifying underlying tendencies in these struggles. They understand these strategies, and the forms of organisation produced through, for and out of these struggles, as being an embedded process of learning and of producing counter-knowledge. This could also be put in terms of the development or renewal of new forms of capacity in the face of capital's contemporary forms of power. An important dimension of this is a growing knowledge of how to operate at different geographic levels: "transborderism".

TRANSFORMATIVE TRADE UNIONISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

A distinctive feature of the way trade unions struggle with others for alternatives to privatisation is the emphasis on developing their shared knowledge and capacity for collaborative self-determination. This is understood as vital to effective strategy and is evident in a strong emphasis on, and demands for, worker education and professional training. This is a feature of all the unions mentioned in this chapter.

It is also evident in their international collaboration. For example, when water workers' leader Abelardo de Oliveira Filho says, "International help and exchange has been essential in our struggle", he is referring, amongst other work, to the investigations initiated by PSI in carrying out the mandate their members gave them to resist the privatisation of water, to look into "how the privateers worked" (author interview with David Boys of PSI, June 2010). This, in turn, led to the creation of a dedicated Research Unit, the PSIRU, whose method – in line with the PSI's philosophy – brought together different forms of knowledge of activists, researchers, and civic organisations. As the movement against water privatisation became increasingly global and radicalised by its encounters face to face with the privateers at the Global Water Forum, the PSI, the Transnational Institute (TNI), and others created a space, the Reclaiming Public Water (RPW) network, specifically for knowledge exchange, production, and dissemination on alternatives to privatisation. The work of the RPW network, its books and seminars bringing together trade unions and civic organisations from 41 countries with a common commitment to alternatives to privatisation to share experience as a resource for practice, is exemplary of the counter-knowledge about which Novelli and Ferus-Comelo (2010) write.

Central to the alternatives promoted by both PSI and the RPW network, and sometimes driven by trade unions on the frontline of resistance to privatisation, are collaborations between public authorities. The impetus to improve public benefit and capacity has led to over 130 such public-public partnerships (PuPs) being forged in 70 different countries. Through these partnerships, public organisations are able to keep up the process of improvement, learning new technologies, gaining greater access to finance, and practising better forms of management and training (Hall et al., 2009).

Many of them are transnational or transborder partnerships, usually skipping the national level, and instead directly linking utility to utility. In Latin America, there is a concerted attempt by trade unions working on alternatives to privatisation to develop PuPs across the continent on the basis of the principles of accountability and participation that they have developed locally. The important role of trade unions in pushing PuPs is an illustration of the multilevel character of emerging trade union strategies. At the same time, the process of working at this transnational level presents a serious challenge to unions whose strength in working for alternatives lies with the active support and evolving capacity of their members.

FFOSE from Uruguay had been one of the unions at the forefront of developing PuPs in Latin America. Adriana Marquisio reflects on how the unions bridge the local level of membership involvement and the often international level at which PuPs are negotiated: "PUPs are a distant issue from the day-to-day lives of the workers, so we have discussed this topic in our union structures, and we run workshops and conferences with the aim of incorporating this process into our organization." She's optimistic though: "In FFOSE today, we have a new generation that has taken up the issue with great interest" (as cited in Terhorst 2011, 3).

Here, then, are two distinct but related dynamics evident when labour and the trade unions have been involved in alternatives to privatisation: on the one hand, a struggle to transform the management and labour process in the public sector to maximise public benefit and create mechanisms of accountability; and on the other hand, strategies to build counter-power to the macroeconomic pressures exerted by capitalist power. They are distinct and not always in sync. The experiences observed here, corroborated by a wider range of experiences (Hall et al., 2005, von Holdt and Maserumule 2005, Terhorst 2008, Yesmin-Mannan 2009, Novelli 2010); indicate that both dynamics are necessary to successful alternatives but not sufficient on their own.

The importance of labour in reforming the management of public companies requires further elaboration. An investigation into the challenges facing the internal democratisation of public water companies in two cities celebrated for their struggles over democratic control over water, Cochabamba and Porto Alegre, warns against overgeneralising from the experiences of transformative resistance on the part of public sector trade unions and the conditions required for democratic public management.

LESSONS IN LABOUR: REFORMING PUBLIC COMPANIES

Cochabamba: Inside the company

Paradoxically, a negative example of the role of unions in the reform of public services emerges in the context of the historic victory of the citizens of Cochabamba, Bolivia, in ousting private water company Bechtel from

taking over the public water company (Travis 2008). For in Cochabamba, the aim of transforming the newly secured public company into a company genuinely serving the city's citizens was effectively blocked by the water workers' union, which remained entrenched in a self-interested relationship with management, defending the status quo against popular pressure for change.

"Cochabamba" rightly evokes victory, the first victory in the war of those fighting for water as a commons against the multinationals driving the modern movement for enclosure (Tapia 2008). This struggle met every condition for success: a powerful local campaign, including a citywide strike and other popular protests; national and international collaboration to block the water multinationals; and, finally, a vision of democratic control, which could answer the attempt to use the inefficiency of the public water company SEMAPA to bolster the arguments for privatising it. Oscar Olivera, one of the spokespeople from the Bolivian water justice movement and a leader of the local trade union movement (that included all unions *except* the water workers), summed it up thus: "The true opposite to privatization is the social re-appropriation of wealth by working-class society itself – self-organized in communal structures of management, in neighbourhood associations, in unions, and in the rank and file" (as quoted in Spronk 2009, 27).

Yet, a decade after the success, which could have been the basis for turning that vision into reality, SEMAPA as a public company is still refusing to put the necessary resources into providing every resident with running water and is facing serious problems due to the continuing incompetence in which the union leadership seems to have been complicit. A struggle for reform within the unions is under way, however, led by activists radicalised by their participation in the *Coordinadora* (the community-labour coalition that defeated privatisation).

The SEMAPA water workers joined in the coalition to defeat Bechtel, but they opposed attempts to democratise the running of SEMAPA. This was not just a loss of a powerful ally. It was more specific than that. Without an internal dynamic of reforms, gathering inside knowledge through the workers about the working of the company across the traditional division of labour and petty departmental empires and collaborating with the community to work out practical alternatives, attempts to transform the company would invariably falter.

The hidden dimension of the struggle for alternatives

This Bolivian experience points negatively to a vital, often hidden, dimension of the struggle to create alternatives to privatisation: the empowerment or self-empowerment of public sector workers as citizens to realise their capacity to contribute to the public benefit. The "empowerment" of communities is widely discussed. Sometimes, however, it is described as if the actors are simply "the citizens" and "the state" and as if the state

were simply a "structure" or an "institution". Human relations – including the relations of particular labour processes and particular organisations of labour – are effectively absent from the frame. Similarly, to open up what it means to realise the capacities of public service workers, it becomes important to understand state/public institutions as involving relationships, which can be more or less favourable to democratic control. The relations of management and the organisation of labour "internal" to the state are a part of this complex of relationships, and are decisive to the flows of information, knowledge, and problem solving among staff and between staff and users. Ultimately, the combination is vital to achieving the goals, the measurements and the dynamics of a different kind of economic logic.

The experiences of the water company DMAE in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and of OSE in Uruguay illustrate forms of empowerment and self-empowerment through which labour for the state can be a (co)transformative actor, coming nearer to Olivera's vision of a "true opposite of privatisation". In both cases, the trade unions have had a broadly positive commitment to popular control over the decisions of the public water company. And, in both cases, processes of genuine citizen power and collaboration with workers and managers have, in different ways, been vital to the relative success of these public companies as alternatives to privatisation. The role of the trade unions in DMAE was completely different from their role in OSE. In DMAE, the water workers' union *qua* union had a minimal direct involvement in the processes of management and purpose of the work. In OSE, the union, with citizens' organisations and REDES, took the initiative to restructure the company, to "modernise without privatisation".

Different political histories, however, have produced quite distinct kinds of relationships between organised labour and citizens' power. The preliminary exploration of these differences opens up a rich seam of questions about the possible role and character of labour in the feasible utopia of democratic public services.

Porto Alegre: Labour and participatory budgeting

In Porto Alegre, the process of democratising the public water company, DMAE, was well established by the time that the threat of privatisation loomed – hence DMAE's leading role in the national movement against privatisation in the late 1990s both in mobilising the constituency of water technicians and in demonstrating a model of public competence (Maltz 2005). The driving force for this process was political, but through the participatory political culture of the PT, not through the institutions of exclusively representative politics.

The content, culture, and processes of the PT were initially a product of the radical and participatory movements that led the fight against the dictatorship. The radical independent trade unions, which were federated through the CUT, were central to the process. The distinctive emphasis

of the PT on participatory democracy – especially at a municipal level – stems from these origins in the movements. Indeed, some argue that this open, participatory approach to public finances was significantly influenced by the participatory forms of democracy through which CUT members, in local and regional assemblies, decided on the priorities of the whole organisation.

The first decade and a half of the PT's history (it was founded in 1980) has involved a kind of relay process with the radical unions and other movements, beginning with the party incorporating, at least partially, organising principles from the movements, then in office going back to the movements and opening up the process of governing on the basis of these same participatory principles. The mayor of Santo Andre and early adviser to Lula was quite explicit: "When we won electoral victories, we went back to the movements from whence we came" (Selso Daniel, author interview, 1997). Thus, in a certain sense, labour didn't see itself as requiring a specific role in the participatory processes of PT municipalities. Possibly, they assumed that as citizens they were already part of the process.

To understand the consequences of this for the role of labour and the trade unions in DMAE, or any model of alternative to privatisation based on it, we need to distinguish between the time when the PT was in office and participatory budgeting was at its most powerful as an autonomous source of democratic power (albeit not without problems; Chavez 2006) and the period from 2004 after the PT was defeated and the participatory budget was steadily marginalised.

In the earlier period, with the PT in government, the management of DMAE initiated an internal participatory budget process for determining how the company should carry out the projects that had been decided, in part, by the citywide participatory budget exercise. Carlos Todeschini, the general manager of DMAE in that earlier period described how it worked:

> Management made a radical shift from a budget being drawn up by one man, behind closed doors, to a situation which started at the bottom with workers in every department discussing what could be done to improve the quality of their work, what equipment, what reorganization and so on. This was then discussed at other levels and decisions were made in which everyone had a say. It was all done through a deliberative, problem-solving way. It was very transparent. There was a general feeling of being part of the process, being heard, having your opinion and your work count for the common goal of improving DMAE's service. (author e-mail and telephone interview, February 2011)

Since the defeat of the PT in 2004, a coalition (re-elected under a new leadership in 2010) has governed, which is explicitly hostile to the PT. It has been unable to dismantle the participatory budgeting, but it has weakened its power. In the DMAE, the open budgeting process has stopped. As to

the role of the union, the general municipal union SIMPA welcomed the opening up of the budget. Its members became involved, but SIMPA, as a union, did not. Now that the process is being dismantled, the union is not in a strong enough position to defend it.

Judging by the rise in public complaints in the media, the consequence has been a decline in efficiency and in DMAE's position as an exemplary alternative to privatisation. Nevertheless, its history illustrates the possibilities of combining effective citizen participation with workplace democracy.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is a preliminary mapping of issues related to the role of labour and trade unions in the development of "alternatives to privatisation". My conclusions are therefore intended as catalysts for further thought and research.

Labour as an agent of radical democratic reform

This essay has focused on a particular strategic phenomenon within the broader sphere of labour resistance to privatisation: that is, instances where the defence of a public service has involved a refusal to accept the status quo and where labour, mainly through the trade unions and in alliance with others, has turned itself into an agent of radical reform. We are faced with an unusual phenomenon of public sector trade unionists – in an extraordinarily wide range, and in many dimensions contrasting contexts, of public companies in Brazil, Uruguay, and South Africa; in cities such as Cali in Colombia, Newcastle in the UK, Huancayo in Peru, and in municipalities across Norway, and many other locations that have not yet been studied – pursuing very similar strategies of resistance and reform. I have looked only at experiences from the water sector, but I am aware that there are other examples in which trade unions have played a similar reforming role in health care, transport, electricity, and municipal services. Can we identify common or similar motor forces behind this new global phenomenon other than the pressures of capitalist globalisation and the threat of privatisation?

I would suggest, on the basis of the case studies presented here and research I have carried out in northern Europe (Wainwright 2009, Wainwright and Little 2009), that what these experiences have in common is a leadership formed or greatly influenced by powerful struggles for radical democracy. Whether it was the participatory democracy of movements against the dictatorships in Latin America, the emphasis on workers' control and civic power in the grassroots resistance to apartheid in South Africa, or the refusal of alienated labour and the emancipatory social struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s in Europe, formative influences on these leaderships were democratic political traditions that went beyond liberalism and the

limits of representative democracy. In one sense, it is not surprising that the unions with such roots and influences are those involved in the practice of public service reform, which is, after all, essentially a process of deepening democratic control over public institutions, including the labour process.

But what explains why and how this democratising impetus came to the fore? How significant is the nature and extent of union democracy? For example, are these same unions characterised by a high level of control by members who are embedded in the work of the public service as distinct from unions more dominated by full-time officials? How important is loyalty and identification with place and the association of the particular public body with the locality, region, or nation? How important are expanded levels of mass education, breaking subordinate cultures and raising expectations about workers' rights to be involved?

The democratisation of the labour process

Participatory democracy, as a means of deepening democracy and overcoming the limits of representative democracy in the face of the pressures of mobile global capital, is in crisis. There are strong tendencies – whether in Latin America, South Africa, Europe, the US, or in the World Bank – towards a "participation lite" (Chavez 2006), in which participation is reduced to consultation or various forms of decentralisation that legitimate or disguise the dismantling of public services. It is revealing that in the increasingly global discourse of these weak forms of participation references to labour are rare. When they do appear, it is only as "the vested interests of the trade unions". Civil society is evoked, but the organisations of labour are rarely referred to as part of civil society.

In retrospect, it is arguable that radical advocates and leaders of participatory democracy have paid insufficient attention to the role of labour. It could be argued, for example, that a lesson from Porto Alegre is that the weakening of participatory democracy was a result not only of political change but also of the minimal involvement of the unions. This meant that democracy was not embedded in the municipality's internal administration. This has often been reinforced by a lack of interest on the part of public sector trade unions. The reforming initiatives of trade unions in response to privatisation point to an important opportunity for a strategic convergence between radical policies for citizens' participation and efforts to democratise public sector labour processes.

Corrupt vested interests or servants of the public?

Public managers figure in this chapter as either villains or fairy godmothers. We have not had the opportunity to study their varying roles and the conditions under which they could be allies of democratisation and with what implications. This would help present a more subtle analysis. On the

one hand, there are the managers of the public water company SEMAPA who on several occasions had to be removed due to corruption. On the other hand, there are the managers organised through the ASSEMAE in Brazil who played a central role in the campaign against privatisation, the managers at DMAE in Porto Alegre who opened up the internal budget as part of the citywide participatory budget, and the middle-level managers in South Africa who collaborated with Samwu in trying to reorganise the country's apartheid-riven institutions to create public services for all.

Clearly, the role of public service managers depends on the context, including the moral and institutional strength of the processes that set their priorities and make them accountable. But what about their relation to unions? In a capitalist, profit-maximising enterprise, management and labour are in a relationship of structural conflict over the share of value, while at the same time being required by the nature of production to be day-to-day cooperators. In theory, the goals of the public sector could mean a different, more fundamentally collaborative relationship even as unions maintain autonomy and the right to disengage when they feel the interests of their members as workers are threatened. Is workplace democracy backed by strong and autonomous unions a complementary means of holding management true to their public service mission? This, in turn, raises the question of how unions maintain their capacity and right to take militant industrial action, at the same time as working with management on reform. Their ability to hold management to account in this way – unique to trade unions – depends on exactly this capacity.

Changes in the nature of trade unions

From the research that has been done so far (Novelli 2004, Terhorst 2008, Spronk 2009), there are signs that, especially at a local or regional level, trade unions involved in resisting privatisations with campaigns for public service reform are themselves reforming. Several processes can be identified descriptively but need further research. First, unions taking the initiative in public service reform have recognised the importance of building lasting collaborative relationships with service users and communities. They have had to work hard to do so. In a context of high unemployment, public sector workers appear privileged and are often regarded with suspicion, seen to be interested only in their own welfare however much they may claim otherwise. Unions have had to prove that they are committed to serving the wider public, rather than simply seeking instrumental alliances to save their own jobs.

Although research is developing on trade union-community alliances in general (Tattersall 2005), there is as little done specifically on struggles over public service reform, with some notable exceptions (Novelli 2004). Tattersall uses case studies of community-trade union coalitions in Canada and Australia to draw up a list of conditions for success. One of these is that

the trade union does not seek to control the alliance it enters. She describes the willingness to enter into an alliance with community and other civic organisations without being in control as representing a significant change for many unions.

Ferus-Camelo and Novelli (2009) document ways in which unions are learning new ways of participating in alliances with other kinds of organisations, whether social movements, NGOs, or initiatives and networks, and experimenting with new forms of communication and new ways of organising and making decisions. The experiences described here, especially in Brazil and Uruguay, show these unions acting more as resource for a variety of organisations, rather than asserting themselves as a singular leader or centre. Recent developments in Cosatu, as we have seen, indicate a similar trend is under way in South Africa.

The limits and potentials of trade unions

Privatisation involves a seemingly systematic process of depoliticisation of the questions and decisions about how public services should be delivered. The significance of the role of the trade unions co-organising alliances defending water as a commons and access to it as human right has given voice to underlying beliefs, albeit vague, that otherwise have little organised political expression. They provide a set of counter-arguments that give confidence and a language to describe the instinctive recognition that water should not be treated as a commodity.

The campaigns we have described for alternatives to privatisation all move issues – of ownership, sources of finance, the nature of contracting, measurements of efficiency, and so on – from being neutral, technical, and opaque, if not entirely hidden by veils of commercial confidentiality, into the open, albeit conflictive, world of values, power, and debates over different goals and interests. In this sense, unions play a vital role in a process of *democratic politicisation* of the means of service provision and delivery.

Most of the distinctive features of trade unions are ambivalent with regard to the distinctive contribution of unions to alternatives to privatisation. Their consequences clearly depend on particular histories and contexts. Take, for example, their large, due-paying membership, providing regular revenue. Formally at any rate, unions have a popular reach unparalleled by political parties today. Only organised religion is still a serious competitor in this regard.

The question of dues should be separated from the question of mass membership. The regular dues come from large numbers of members who are mainly passive members and pay dues through a check-off system negotiated by the union with the employer. Nevertheless, if the union is a campaigning, activist union its potential popular reach is significant. It is *potentially* a source of unique practical and expert knowledge that through the organisational capacities of the union can be socialised and used as a basis for improving the social efficiency of services. This would draw on workers' dual

role as citizens and public servants, activating the public service values that latently underpin their work. Its mass base can be a source of bargaining power too, including for a bargaining agenda, which concerns the quality or protection of service provision. Through the regular dues that members provide, unions can also be a material base for critical institutions of education, communication, research, and other ways of deploying resources or combining with other sources of an alternative hegemony – as we saw in Brazil and Uruguay and also internationally through the PSI in relation to water. Further, institutional stability, along with material or physical resources, can enable unions to be what FFOSE's Carmen Sosa described as the spinal cord of campaigns made up of more precarious, scattered civic forces.

On the other hand, these factors can all be the basis of quite opposite dynamics. A mass membership and institutional longevity can be a source of cautiousness, of a union leadership putting protection of the institution or a short-term view of members' interests before a more transformative, but perhaps riskier, approach.

Similarly, links with political parties can enable unions, from the autonomous political base of a campaigning alliance around alternatives to privatisation, to exert political bargaining power to counter private elite pressures on political parties and require political institutions to open up to the alternatives – as we saw in Brazil and Uruguay. On the other hand, close links with political parties can be the basis for passiveness amongst union members once the party, which the union has spent time and money supporting, wins office. The widespread assumption then is that protecting, expanding, and improving public services can be left to the government. This has been a major problem in South Africa, for example, where unions originally invested much in the ANC government.

Given that the potential of trade union capacities and resources for democratic social change are so ambivalent, the challenge of privatisation poses major questions for the future of public sector unions. Uruguay and Brazil illustrate the possibilities for unions as co-drivers of democratisation, but the unions in those countries had a very particular history of struggle: producing a highly political and participatory kind of trade unionism. And even in those countries, it requires concerted organisation and education to sustain these traditions over the generations. These positive experiences must be balanced by the hostile balance of forces faced by Samwu in the mid- to late 1990s, as the ANC submitted to the pressure of the global market. Samwu's predicament led Roger Ronnie to warn of the limits of trade unions as organisations always involved in negotiations as well as in militancy. "Sometimes." he said, reflecting on experiences working with militant community organisations, "too many hopes were projected onto Samwu, as if it could provide solutions to problems that were more political than even a radical trade union could resolve" (author interview with Roger Ronnie, August 2010).

A useful focus for future work, then, would be to look at those collaborations between trade unions and others that have proven effective, to identify the complementarities between varied movements and different kinds

of organisations, and to explore how the collaboration took account of the strengths and limits of each. It would also be important to recognise that increasingly we are not talking just about campaigning organisations but organisations that are also bringing about changes in the present, trying to remedy immediate problems and prefigure a desirable future.

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INTERVIEWS

Adriana Marquisio, President of FFOSE, 2004–2010

Carmen Sosa, FFOSE organiser and representative on the CNDAV

Carlos Todeschini, General Manager DMAE and City Counsellor, Porto Alegre, Brazil

David Boys, Utilities Officer at PSI

Devan Pillay, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Dan Gillin, Chair of the Global Labour Institute and past General Secretary of the International Union of Food Workers, 1968–1997

Guatam Moby, Coordinator, New Trade Union Initiative, Delhi, India

Joao Avamileno, founder member of CUT and former PT Vice Mayor of Santo Andre

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Kjeld Jacobsen, Former International Secretary of CUT

Maria Selva Ortiz, REDES, Friends of the Earth Uruguay

Pat Horne, Coordinator Streetnet, South Africa

Roger Ronnie, General Secretary, Samwu, 1995–1997, 2000–2007

The late Selso Daniel, PT Mayor of Santo Andre, Brazil

Sergio Baierle, Coordinator *Cidade*, Porto Alegre, Brazil

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