

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF METALLURGICAL WORKERS AT MERCEDES-BENZ BRAZIL: PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL-GLOBAL COUNTER-HEGEMONY

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ABSTRACT

The present case study analyzes international trade union's organization experience based on the workers of Mercedes-Benz do Brasil, in the city of São Bernardo do Campo. I underline "based on" because the own nature of the process led to a global connection with workers located at Mercedes-Benz factories in other countries. An issue regarding adopted practices, though still in an incipient stage, is if they are a future alternative to the hegemonic model. Another issue is if current international trade union perspective could account for keeping worker's achievements or generate other new for them. It has been proven that positive answers to above issues are appearing; therefore suggesting this is an essential strategy for workers.

Keywords: International trade unionism – Networks – World Workers Committees.

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Introduction²

The reason of choosing international organization of metallurgical workers at Mercedes-Benz Brasil in São Bernardo do Campo occurs because of current stage of consolidation of this experience. This reflection may also be used as a reference or analytic example to other categories of workers. The reason why I chose period from 1984 until decade of 2000 is the systematic beginning of the already mentioned international organization of metallurgical workers at Mercedes-Benz Brasil. During this period, in the years of 2002 and 2006, two International framework agreements were signed between workers and *Daimler's* world management. My general question is: could international trade union movement become a counter-hegemonic force in current network globalized society? To that end, I have studied the path of international organization of workers taking as starting point Mercedes-Benz do Brasil in São Bernardo do Campo along three decades - 1980, 1990 and 2000 – based in counter-hegemony concept within the overall context and network. Grounded in theoretical conceptions of Boaventura de Sousa Santos regarding (counter) hegemony and globalization, besides Manuel Castells definition of networking logic, I tried to answer if MBB workers organizational practices may be considered an example of global embryo against counter-hegemonic network. This because I try to understand importance of the connection between local demand and global network, to show need of expanding it not only inside sector metallurgical sector, but also for all other trans-nationalized sectors.

In the first chapter I will develop a brief overview of current international trade union structure, and tell about main historical aspects. The objective is to stand experience of MBB workers. In the second part, I will detail meaning of three theoretical concepts and state their relation with world economic facts and global trade union. Finally, in the third part, I will write more deeply about the long international organization walk along three decades, of MBB workers from SBC.

Origin and brief overview of current international trade union movement

The international trade union movement was born during the second stage of Industrial Revolution, when also appeared first world trade unions. In the years of 1920, therefore soon after Russian Revolution of 1917 and up to the end of Cold War with the fall of the Soviet empire and fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, international trade union movement was deeply influenced by the ideological dispute between United States capitalism and the USSR socialist

2. When referring to local workers international organization, I mean the one taking place in Brazilian plants at Campinas, Juiz de Fora and SBC, and associate it to the experience at MBB during global discussions in decades of 1980 and 1990. For the years 2000, when I talk about WEC foundation, I refer to the company with the name Daimler or Daimler Group, including all companies in the world. Therefore also to Mercedes-Benz.

proposal. A third ideological element was also always present in international trade union principles since its foundation: the social democratic thought. In Europe, the SPD³ was and keeps being main player of this alternative. Therefore social democracy is another possibility, besides capitalist point of view and socialism or communism. The historical origins of what would become international trade union go back to 1864, in London, when IWA was founded. Karl Marx played a decisive role in the First International – IWA, which may be considered the first international trade union. Nevertheless it has to be mentioned that in this entity coexisted not only trade unions, but also political parties and other political groups. Thus and strictly speaking, the very first international trade union entity is IMF - International Metalworkers' Federation (FITIM in Portuguese) founded in 1893. First global trade union has German hegemony (with great influence of DGB⁴ and SPD) and at least until 2012, was the oldest international trade union, when merged with the International Federation of chemical and textile workers union, creating the *Industrial Global Union*.

Due to the impact of Russian Revolution of 1917, in 1919 was created the Red International of Labor Unions, linked to the Second Socialist International. Also in the same year was founded The Amsterdam International, with trade unions from Germany, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, England and United States, with a social democrat philosophy ideological profile. The following year CISC⁵ was created by initiative of Belgian Young workers. This is briefly the first stage of international trade union movement and goes up to 1945: CEDI (Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information) 1991, Section 2. Second stage goes from 1945 until the end of Cold War. In this period two WTUCs were created, and it was a period strongly characterized by ideological dispute between United States and the ex-USSR (former Soviet Union). The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CIOSL in Portuguese) was related to the – at the time - super capitalist power and the World Federation of Trade Unions (FSM in Portuguese) associated to soviets. At the end of Cold War begins the third stage of the international trade union movement, continuing up to current days. In that period, with the dismantling of USSR, the WFTU and IFTU somehow to it bound (usually it was an ideological link) suffered a big negative impact, because they lost a very important political and economic allied. Nowadays, the international trade union movement is composed basically by three different structures: WTUC, IFTU and WWC or networks. In short, WTUC are two: ITUC and WFTU. They oversee all world workers, doesn't matter what economic sector it is. In a second level, also global, there are the IFTUs. They gather workers, at a global level, of different economic sectors. It means that

3. The SPD (German Social Democratic Party) was officially founded in 1875. At the beginning its political philosophy was based in Marxism. With the years, it changed.

4. German trade union central: Confederation of German Trade Unions

5. CISC was founded in 1920 under Christian principles. In 1968 changed name into WCL (CMT in Portuguese) in 1968. Then again in 2006 when merged to CIOSL, and now the name is ITUC (CSI in Portuguese). For information on CMT, see CEDI (1991, Section 1).

there is a specific IFTU for professors, bank employees, civil servants and so on. These are the oldest international trade unions. First of them, as I already mentioned, is the former International Metalworkers' Federation. In *company* level there are WCLs, also identified as *trade union networks*. They are global trade union organizations existing and acting in the same level than transnational companies. First WCL appeared due to the initiative of some IFTU, among them already mentioned IMF and WFTU with several objectives, including expansion of solidarity among most weak trade unions in different parts of the world. The 1990s was a decade where huge transnational corporations speed up their merging processes, establishing even larger corporations, thus increasing asymmetry related trade unions. Among its advantages, WCL have a great potential of achievements due to its compact nature, its specificity (global focus in only one company), besides the fact of being a space already recognized. They also make possible workers having access to a set of strategic information of the TN where they work, something vital for the local and the global organization. Among WCL tools, also used by IFTU, we can mention International Framework Agreements - IFA. Currently, they are perhaps most significant instruments for workers when fighting for their concrete rights, be at local or global level. They are instruments built by the own international trade union movements, to be used by workers and not depending from government actions. When an IFA is signed between world executives of a TN and certain international trade union organization (it may be an IFTU or a WCL, or both) clauses must be fulfilled, even if local laws do not grant any of these foreseen rights in the IFA. For example in the case of *Daimler Group*, outsourced workers and MB global network workers, namely every worker bound to company's chain production. Currently there are 85 IFA's signed all over the world, being first one *Danone1s* in 1988⁶.

2. Global (counter)-hegemony in network, capitalist economy and trade unions

Both the functioning of international trade structure and its relation with huge TN power⁷ may be understood through the study of network logic. Regarding global trade union movement, in retreat in most worlds' countries, network logic provides a chance to re-establish and strengthen strategies. To ease understanding of the network logic, I enhance the *network* concept fundamentally based in Manuel Castells⁸ works. It is necessary to make a change in international trade union movement since TN and other multilateral global actors (World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund)

6. A list including most of these AMI in full may be found at site: <http://www.global-unions.org/framework-agreements.html?lang=en>. Accessed December 12, 2012.

7. According to Vitali (2011), 147 international conglomerates dominate 40% of global corporate economy.

8. Castells (1999a and 2009).

have a network organization and they execute network global strategies. If they don't, trade unions will not be able to defend its rights with only local/national or verticalized strategies. I will demonstrate that as of the Mercedes-Benz case, an international agreement made viable the local-global network connection, and it was that connection who made possible the attainment and continuity of workers' rights. It is relevant to reproduce an important excerpt of Castells (2009) discussing this issue:

[...]Large factories and industrial corporations vertically organized were the material base for development, of both corporate capital and trade union movement. In the same way, today the computers' network world is material base [...] for global financial markets and for [...] global civil society and social movements, all organized in networks struggling for a better world. Present-day conflicts arise from network organized social actors searching to accomplish their objectives through multimedia communication networks. In network societies, power has not disappeared but redefined. Domination and resistance to domination has changed its nature [...].

The international trade union movement, whereas social actor could get stronger in case it will adopt network logic typical organization elements. I believe that if international trade unionism includes such dynamics, this would be a fundamental move not only to become more efficient in the counter-hegemonic struggle, but also even to survive as a relevant social actor. According to Castells (2009 and 1999a) network logic has a completely different structure from vertical logic (also used by Taylorist & Ford system of production). He states that network organization is played by a set of actors (us) horizontally bound among themselves, with common interests and values. Their bounding is possible through the so called connectors. In the socio economic area, there are many types of connections. In our case, mainly telecom systems and internet, but also roads, railways, waterways etc. and other individual and collective transport systems, energy transmission systems, basic resources etc. This configuration allows not using a center, or a center in its traditional sense - a hub - since the network is composed by "us", even if with different levels of importance and power. Besides this, a network complex, due to its own nature, is more flexible and agile, thus creating a greater possibility of cooperation among them and of competing with other systems being or not a part of a network. In this way its survival capacity is increased, and it may contract or expand so far as there is not only one center but many of them. Or in other words, any network cluster may be considered a center.

On the other side, globalization, according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002) is a multifaceted phenomenon: it cannot be understood only as from an aspect because this would be minimizing its real dimension. Besides the economic expression, perhaps the most evident one, globalization is made up of an overview of political, social, cultural, legal and religious variables. The-

re are also several other points of view that may be added (sports, education, media etc.) but in most part of cases these are sub-items bound to each one of the already mentioned six dimensions: Sousa Santos (2002).

[...]We are confronted with a multifaceted phenomenon of economic, social, political, cultural, religious and legal dimensions, all interconnected in a complex way. For this reason the monocausal explanations and monolithic interpretations of this phenomenon seem to be scarcely adequate. [...].

Great challenge for anti-globalization groups is to take effective counter-hegemonic actions. For that, one of main achievements will be the organizational adoption of network logic as already mentioned. Briefly, this is the focus of present study, in the specific case of international trade union movement, particularly regarding *Daimler* group workers. In conclusion, the analysis of Boaventura de Sousa Santos concerning current globalized capitalist society allows us understanding that, essentially and in spite of hegemony practiced by major financial capitals, there is no full and absolute domination. The Portuguese sociologist states that we do not live in a totally homogeneous and linear society. There are possibilities not only of differentiation and also of counter-opposition to *status quo*. In other words: workers may have counter-hegemonic chances, because Boaventura declares that globalization is not territorially uniform: in some regions is more present than in others. Hence collective counter-hegemonic practices are feasible. Hegemonic globalization ideas state as being natural the way itself expresses at present; this is not an absolute truth but obviously the result of hegemonic globalized capital point of view. In the same sense, spread "prescriptions" about how politics and economy, culture, social issues, etc. must be conducted, yes or no; they also are not supreme truths. The postulate of World Social Forum edition is: another world is possible. Therefore, transnational trade union practices are feasible, nevertheless shaped hegemonic picture. If counter-hegemonic global resistance network in international trade unions could consolidate, this would be an option. This in view of the fact of workers experience at Mercedes-Benz along past three decades, as I will analyze to follow.

3. From local-global resistance to global-local institutional hiring: the track of international trade unionism at MBB and Daimler Group

Elucidate above title will disclose to us basic sense of route traveled by the international workers organization as from MBB in SBC. Over the last three decades (years 1980, 1990 and 2000) international workers organization has basically been formed by three everlasting present elements: a counter-hegemonic resistance imprint, the trinomial localization- globalization-localization and network logic. To follow I will mention essential aspects of that track, se-

arching to understand its sense and consequently enhance its importance for both the academy and trade union movement.

3.1 Local-global resistance in the 1980's and establishment of the international relation

The spirit of solidarity and international resistance of the 1980's was the starting pistol for workers counter-hegemonic global practice network at MBB, because workers simply refused to accept passively Mercedes-Benz capital strategies. Global network became fundamental for resisting when Brazilian workers trade union representation realized the need of having an international horizontalized understanding with peers of other nationalities. They also understood in a quite consolidated way that the company already acted in global network. The start of international workers exchange began between September and October 1984, when a group of Brazilians went to Germany. The group not only consisted of MBB workers, but also from *General Motors* and *Volkswagens*. At that time, trade union leader Vicente Paulo da Silva "Vicentinho"⁹, Paraná and Palma¹⁰ represented the Brazilians workers at MBB. This first visit was mediated by the "Ecumenical working group in support of International Solidarity" set up by members of Pastoral workers of Brazil and German Lutheran Church. In Brazil, main Catholic leaders driving the exchange organization were Frei Beto and Dom Frei Cláudio Hummes, both Dominican Friars. Not only for this visit, but for the exchange continuity, Transnational's Information Exchange - TIE¹¹ - had a key role in organizing and encouraging this task. Another vital issue is that the beginning of the international understanding was not through the institutional way with IgMetall, but with a group opposed to the official board. In following years, part of the opposition group joined the German trade union. This was because they realized some of their ideas could be discussed and put into practice, fact that would not be possible if they stayed away of situational framework. This experience that began in 1984 was new for both workers and the company in Germany. As a consequence, during visits to Mercedes-Benz German plants, difficulties aroused: "(...) *The company did not permit us to have long talks with workers when they were working. Every each time we went, somebody took us out (...) in the company dialogue was not a habit...*"¹².

One of the objectives of Brazilian delegation was that the Board would recognize and approve the Factory Committee at MBB. First international support came from political help of German trade unions to the consolidation of Factory Committee in SBC, besides own political pressure that Brazilian board

9. Currently Federal Deputy of Workers Party (PT).

10. Deceased.

11. TIE is a global network, founded in 1978 by trade unionists of many countries. Its main objective is the awareness and international cooperation among workers and their organizations all over the world. Access through the link http://www.tie-germany.org/who_we_are/index.html.

12. According to Palma, already identified.

was suffering. They would remain in an uncomfortable situation in case they would not agree with something that the Company had already negotiated a long time ago in main plants of the group. Brazilian union leaders who went in the exchange said that in Mercedes-Benz plants in Germany, workers already had a strong representation system in every each plant of the vehicle manufacturer. All the plants had not only a Factory Committee but also the necessary structure allowing development of its work. During the period of visit to Germany, there was a strike of three days at MBB, and one of main demands “coincidentally” was the fight to obtain Factory Committee’s recognition and approval. The support and example of German workers contributed as international policy to confirm the Factory Committee at MBB in the year of 1984, *even if it was not, by obvious, the only cause and not even the main one*. In counterparty, German workers were in search of international contacts for strengthening the general fight. That was a clear way of resistance of local workers at the company in SBC when they started counter-hegemonic global union with workers of other plants at MB in Germany. Since then, many trips followed in 1985, 1986, 1988 and 1989 of trade union representatives’ - men and women of both countries: Brazil and Germany. Exchange of experiences occurred through visits to MBB plants; meetings with popular movements; celebrations; individual visits; supporting strikes etc. Therefore it is evident that trade unionists at MBB took this decision in view of the importance of resisting in a global level and through agreements with its peers in a network; an objective that would strengthen the counter-hegemonic perspective. Or in other words, search for rights against the hegemonic action of the company.

3.2 Decade of 1990: the understanding of local-global production process and local hiring

[...] Understanding the production process was crucial for workers organization strategy, and this is a big differential [] the group here in Brazil (MBB) was focused in understanding local and global production process. But the international one was the spearhead that called our attention [...].”

Above statement of Tarcisio Secoli¹³ shows the relation between international workers organization at MBB and intellectual control by trade union leaderships of production process logic and management in local-global levels at Mercedes-Benz as from Brazil. Valter Sanches¹⁴ reaffirms this idea:

[...] we suggested knowing the Toyota experience that Mercedes-Benz wanted to implement at São Bernardo. Information we had said it was a tragedy, after

13. Former worker at MBB in SBC and currently Municipal Secretary of Urban Services at São Bernardo do Campo.<?>

14. Worker at MBB in SBC and currently executive director of SMABC - Metallurgical workers’ trade union of Sao Bernardo do Campo.

seeing what has done in United States [...]. However the company always mentioned this was good [...]. If it as good as you said, then show us, we said. And the company accepted to do it. This allowed us to deepen knowledge regarding German trade union and its factory committees [...].

This fact also contributed for deepening the international trade union relation during the 1990's, besides being one of the elements that allowed knowing the production process, mainly regarding what the company proposed for the SBC plant. As already mentioned, to do a good negotiation, particularly during a productive restructuration process, it is necessary to know the production plan. For that it is essential to understand the relation between local and global network levels. Tarcisio Secoli states:

[...] during a strike at MBB at the beginning of the 90's, we stopped working in a sector while others kept working [...] we used to choose small sectors that were essential. For example, chassis assembling. Only 150 people worked on that sector [...]. We stopped work in this area, and collected money from all other workers of the company to pay striking workers salary, while others 'continued working' [...].

Therefore this clearly shows effectiveness of trade union actions (in the sense of *explicit resistance*¹⁵) and knowledge of production process. And Secoli adds: "(...) *Better than immediate results during three or four years of that kind of strike, is the fact that it allowed us to understand the production task (...)*".

To understand the production task and make us aware of such comprehension is essential in its local-global connections to trade union action. According to Secoli, this was what happened:

[...] We began a heavy work in all the production process. For example, Sérgio Nobre¹⁶ and Moisés Selerges¹⁷ came with their areas to have debates. For instance; we said here we produce axles, Germany doesn't, in other countries they also don't etc. Then we began to learn from our international relation how things happened, and how Mercedes managed the internationalization of production. [...].

Secoli continues:

The company decided to manufacture part of engine production at SBC and another part in Germany. The engine block was bought, cast and initially machined in Brazil. Then was sent to Germany where machining was concluded.

15. Bresciani (1994).

16. Worker at MBB in SBC, and currently General Secretary of National CUT.

17. Moisés Selerges, Worker at MBB in SBC, and currently executive director of SMABC.

Instead of having a furnace here and there, thermal treatment is done there and parts are exported to Brazil without being assembled.

Therefore, without understanding the above - functioning of local-global production process - it doesn't seem possible to develop successfully trade union actions, because production would not be completely comprehended, leading workers to elaborate wrong or incomplete strategies. That basically happened during the 1990's, regarding the counter-hegemonic global network strategy of resistance: workers went against company's hegemony (PR proposal) and had political contacts with the German trade union representation (network logic) being aware of local-global understanding of production process and the MBB management.

Secoli: "(...) *Understand the production process (...) this allows understanding fragilities of the model. If in a place there is only one equipment, next equipment to stop will be this one! This is why German production will stop. (...)*"

Within the scope of such logic, and to continue with reasoning and historical evolution of MBB international workers organization, we will briefly analyze PR proposal made by the company at the beginning of the 1990's. "(...) *At the beginning of the 90's, when president Collor took office, there was an opening of imports. It was then when MBB began using modern management techniques. The plant here in Brazil had a Ford-Taylor traditional policy until 1990*¹⁸.

The proposal of the company was presented when MBB trade union leaders had already started an international agreement process in the 1980's. This helped forwarding of a demand they had locally received through the global network connection. Negotiations along decade of 1990 had as one support that perception of trade union representation. According to Secoli: "(...) *The PR participation was fundamental. That fact made MBB to be the company negotiated the most and proportionally less workers lost in the process. (...)*"

Or in other words, impact of negotiating with higher knowledge of the production process would bring a very positive contribution. As per Dieese sub-section data of SMABC, MBB was the vehicle manufacturer in the region that proportionally less workers lost between previous moment of a PR strong process, concentrated between the 1990's and the consolidation of the movement at the beginning of decade of 2000.

TABLE 1
Rates of reduction in labor supply

Vehicle manufacturer	Total of workers		Rates of reduction in labor supply (%)
	1989	2001	
MBB	15.306	10.280	48
Scania	3.660	2.239	63
Volkswagen	27.933	15.726	77
Ford	9.672	4.581	111

Source: DIEESE subsection at SMABC. Elaborated by the author.

18. According to Tarcisio Secoli's statement.

International organization this is not the only issue, as Tarcisio Secoli states that may be considered as origin of several achievements of MBB workers attained during decade of 1990. Among them we can mention organization in the workplace. In the meantime, the value of international organization and its contribution exist, and are not reduced.

[...] All mentioned achievements were only possible because those who did not participate in the process may have not understood it, but I repeat that all achievements were only possible because we, workers were in a process of internationalization. This helped us to understand what was done in Germany, how was done and what rights German workers had, to see how we could demand it here. The rest is organization in the workplace. All was a thought strategy [...] of what to understand about production process, what happens in the rest of the world, how the company works, and be able to claim in a better way for our rights. [...].

Still quoting Secoli:

[...] The production process¹⁹ was a negotiated transition. The negotiation that became a symbol of this, the most complicated one, took us two and a half years and two trips to Germany. We were dealing work in semi autonomous groups, later it was kan-ban, Just-in-time²⁰ etc. Practice became to be a negotiation: are you going to outsource? You have to inform us what company will come in, what will happen with our colleague workers, how will be the assessment, how will salary progression be, etc. [...].

3.3 Years 2000: WEC, IFAs and meaning of global-local hiring

Next step in the international organization process was the creation of **WEC** - *Daimler* World Workers Committee, during the meeting held July 17, 2002 in Stuttgart, Germany. However before surging of this committee, there was an international group working since 2000, and considered as the world committee. It was the *IAWG*²¹. The WEC assumes, since then, a political and administrative structure that had until that moment. Another main important event was the signature in September of the same year of first International

19. Productive restructuration.

20. At the beginning of the 90's MBB at SBC proposed the already mentioned RP plan through the Project "Factory 2000" and workers replied with the proposal "Working quality of life at Mercedes-Benz do Brasil". Achievements obtained in local hiring process between 1994 and 1999 were: outsourcing, working cells, kaizen, work in group and reduction of working time. Also during the 90's, like in the 80's, there was an intense exchange of Brazilian and German workers, including financial support, supply of information, joint seminars, publishing of first international journal between Brazil and Germany, etc. Again: the effective comprehension of local production process was a substantial part of conditions for establishing a most advantageous local hiring for our workers.

21. Even before IAWG (International Auto Working Group) there was the Labor Committee: an organization created by workers representatives of Germany, United States and Canada after the merger of Daimler-Chrysler (1998 to 2006). LC meetings were held in the same period than the company's Board of Auditors. The LC expired when IAWG was created.

Framework Agreement, to be analyzed more in details. The global nature of the Committee can be seen in its own composition: 13 members (5 German trade union leaders, 3 from United States, 1 from Canada, 1 from Brazil, 1 from South Africa, 1 from Spain and 1 from Japan²²) named or elected trade union organizations from each city/country²³, representing *Daimler* Group workers and their respective trade unions. According to Erich Klemm, first and current WEC president, one of its advantages is access to key information that workers representatives may obtain at *Daimler* world management, and also a forum of international discussion and solidarity for workers, where they can find how to establish global standards of rights and working conditions. WEC or other similar forums in other transnational companies are not committees or management boards of the company. Repeating: they are instances where workers representatives may access vital company information, and also question abuses and demand rights and, in that sense, resist. All this performed in global level, with direct and significant impact on local level (national). WECs and IFAs become formal global hiring models of counter-hegemonic resistance for workers, as far as the company (the hegemonic actor) has to explain what did, does and intends to do, besides hearing and take into consideration (negotiate) workers demands from places where they come from.

According to WEC by-laws²⁴ the objective is:

[...] allow workers representation forums all over the world to share information and opinions among them, besides promoting dialogue with company boards [...] in a global level [...] combining [...] economic and social aspects to be the base of future corporate and human resources policies”.

Therefore, I assume that WEC is inserted:

[...] within the area of global capitalist practices [...] in a counter-hegemonic way, since its actions consist in [...] globalization of fights making possible a democratic distribution of wealth [...] transnationally implemented [...]”²⁵.

Another advance, stated in WEC minutes of annual ordinary meetings, refers to permanent exchange of information among trade unions representatives. This illustrates one of its functions: international solidarity among *Daimler* Group workers. Signature of IFAs is also important, as well as it’s monitoring. The IFAs strengthen chances of global connections by proposing guarantees of a series of working rights that should be applied to every worker of *Daimler* Group of companies, including indirect workers, - the outsourced ones -, the

22. Japan’s trade union representative joined WEC in 2005 annual ordinary meeting.

23. According to article 3 of WEC by-laws.

24. Article 1 of by-laws.

25. Sousa Santos (2002, p. 75).

huge suppliers production chain²⁶ and resellers of all company products. I emphasize that such search is a way of resisting global capital hegemonic propositions. Dimitri Stevis (2009), a scholar specialized in WEC founding process and also of the two IFAs, underlines that in spite of a need of advances and challenges, workers will get advantages of these initiatives²⁷, as is the case of an incentive to cooperation among workers and making dialogue easier with corporate managers. There are also another two important issues regarding Stevis statements. The first one refers to the fact that, independently of the existence and fundamental importance of IFAs, they cannot deal about matters that may be discussed by WEC, for example, PR processes. Moreover, considering that forums and international agreements do not have the same legal force than national/local agreements, WEC normatives based in German laws allow this entity to have a certain institutionalizing *status* of actions more consolidated than if it would only be recognized by the parts. In this way, WEC and both two IFAs, in the years 2000, are institutionalized forms of resistance against the global-local counter-hegemonic network (because they generate local results) or global hiring ways. Differently from decade of 1990 when main achievement was local hiring (agreements that workers obtained when disputing PR proposal of MBB of SBC) this is a result of global agreements. In the 1980's there was no local hiring (in the same sense than in the 1990's) and no global-local institutionalization, but only regarding the international aspect, resistance through solidarity and mutual knowledge. It is: during decade of 1980 and 1990 the sense of direction is local-global and in year's 2000 global-local.

3.3.1 WEC, IFAs and main network data

WEC has a network profile, a workers network of same transnational company - TN - oriented to fight for more rights in global level. Among one example of achievements, there is following, told by Valter Sanches:

[...] In a certain year Mercedes wanted to shutdown three factories: one in Germany, other in Canada and the third one in Juiz de Fora, Brazil. We, members of the world committee said that no one would shutdown, let's resist and find alternatives. [...] That was around 2006, [...]. And factories did not shutdown. [...].

This fact is a global counter-hegemonic resistance in network with clear local results. Resistance, since workers did not accept a very important unilateral company decision and therefore becoming a counter-hegemonic action. Global because involved much more than just one country and had been taken from the world entity: Mercedes-Benz. The network logic characteristic arises because it was an agreement focused to national (local) groups of workers pre-

26. Globally the Daimler Group has approximately 24.000 suppliers.

27. Stevis (2009, p. 10).

sent at WEC. Therefore it represents a global initiative global turning out positive results for workers of specific places (countries).

The WEC doesn't have a Center in itself, or at least not in the verticalized sense of the Fordist logic. It is multi centered. Formed by many actors, "us" and each one of them represent a center. Therefore, or there is not just one center, or many of them. The "us" are units, local (national) trade unions and that *a priori*, (supposedly) don't need another one to survive. However they found that for better existing, to improve achievements and performance, network connection with other units, or other trade union entities, in short with other "us" this is fundamental in the global level. This does not mean in any case that some centers may be more or less important. WEC is composed by many "centers" or many "us", being part of a power relationship, a correlation of political forces. In this sense, it is formed by actors ("us") of higher or lower importance. German trade unionists represent a "knot" with a higher power than all other "knots" in WEC network. Even a higher power than "knots" from Brazil, South Africa, United States, Canada, Spain and Japan; this due to a relative German hegemony within WEC. But this does not mean that German "knot" in the multi center network may do without other "knots" or even be more powerful than all others together. Especially if we consider that trait of a network requires the association among many actors, the "us": there is no network without multiple "us". Politically, German "knot" needs the others and vice versa. It is precisely this fact what makes network viable. In a network "the Power" does not exist. A network is also formed by common interests among the "us". Nevertheless conflicting interests may also exist, and they usually do, but they are less significant than common interests and values, which add. If it would be the opposite, then network could not exist. In these situations differences may arise, as for example, regarding investments proposed by the Board of the company, creating a certain "competition" for the place where it will be applied. But it is solidarity which always prevails. Common interests and values of a network form the program that will develop line functioning of a network. A WEC network program includes defense, conquest and maintenance of interests, rights and values of the working class in a global level, as from many places. Such propositions make up the operating system to be executed by its programmers, by their "knots", or local trade union entities being part of WEC. Another capital factor of the network, also visible in this case, is the connection or communication among actors that are "knots" of the network. Without this, we simply would not have a network. The connection is made through switchers. WEC network connectors are: media, exchange events and other actors, even those not in the strict sense trade unions that enabled – especially during the constitution stage of network – the connection among trade union "knots". I am particularly referring to the Pastoral of the Workers, TIE (Transnational Information Exchange) and the German Lutheran Church. WEC network also cooperates with other networks, for example, world committees of other companies, be them metallurgical or not. This is a proof of cooperation not only among the in-

ternal “knots” of the own WEC network, but also between WEC and other world workers networks. On the other hand, competition is another side of networks when there are different and even opposed values. Main “competitor” of WEC network, obviously is the Mercedes-Benz²⁸ network. But this necessarily does not mean impossibility of negotiations satisfying more or less both networks. Agreements are result of disputes in a first moment. Or a competition between WEC and Mercedes-Benz networks. Incidentally, along international trajectory since the 1980’s that was the main mark: stand taken by company, workers resistance (that later became “preventive” when international agreements did not stop), negotiation, agreements and so successively, all in global environment. This is due to the own network WEC making possible its flexibility. If one determined “knot” leaves the network, it will not stop existing. Eventually, it could suffer, or not, some Power. If, for example, the German “knot” would leave the network, then there would be an important loss of power, but it is not certain than would cease existing. In the same line of thinking, if any “knot” (trade union entity) would modify its values and interests in a way that would be too discordant of the network, the natural solution would be to exclude it. Honestly, the network would not lose any power because if the “knot” would remain with a different “program”, network could have threatened its main programming. Such flexibility is much more feasible in a network horizontalized structure, making a difference to Fordist logic: workers down in the hierarchy will have their existence in a delicate situation if his/her superior would have any problem. If the most important unit of a group or system, under the vertical logic, had its existence disrupted, then the whole system also will have it. TNs saw it a long time ago and tried to alter both external and internal logics of structure. Same thing happens when trade union movement tries to follow a new way. Then, when conjuncture is favorable, “knots” of a network strengthen, and even increase the number of actors being part of the group, helping to expand the network. On the contrary, in unfavorable times, network may not only stop including new “knots”, but even lose part of them, without the risk of stop existing. I think that logic in a global network is a promising possibility for the future of trade union movement in a more and more globalized network society. The hegemonic system, represented by capital, has greatly adopted it. Workers, or counter-hegemony, seem to be awakening into it.

3.3.2 Some WEC challenges

Among current WEC challenges, we can mention need of increasing trade union representation in this forum and improve communication, what to disclose and spread, particularly in IFAs, to upgrade its own monitoring. Regarding this, Sanches states:

28. It is possibly the most important among 14 marks of the Daimler Group. Its five world units (cars, trucks, vans, buses and financial services); 24.000 suppliers; sales in almost all countries over the world; plants in 17 countries and offices in 26 countries; 271.000 workers (2011); and an hegemonic and complex global network.

[...] It would be interesting WEC having a site, but this would have to be conducted by German fellows (...) it demands resources, somebody to keep and take care of the site, translate it into many languages... [...] it would be great if any worker all over the world could access it and see IFAs, practices reported and underway, spread information from plants.

About increase of representativeness and WEC “transparency or territorial democratization” Sanches states:

[...] Regarding Mercedes-Benz here in Brazil, we could have two representatives so we could send somebody from Juiz de Fora. Another idea is to make, as Volkswagen does, an itinerant meeting. Every year, the world committee meeting is held in a different country. This is important for the trade union venue of the meeting, so workers of the country where meeting will be held feel they are backed. We from Brazil did a lot of times this discussion of WEC meetings, backed by Canada and South Africa; but never could make the idea to be accepted, because Germans think it is very important getting together with world management of the company, and it is. Germans say it would be too difficult to take whole global Daimler management to do a meeting in other country than Germany. This is a very strong argument, but you don't have to send the whole company management; just one or two would be enough to inform all the rest. [...].

Currently 6 countries participate at WEC. But *Daimler* has plants in 17 countries and offices in another 26, besides having sales in more than countries. So, as we see, there is a clear political representation *deficit* in the committee. Valter Sanches comments:

[...] For instance, two countries with a large number of workers are not represented: Mexico and Turkey. But in both of them, trade unions are atomized. Another one is Indonesia. We fight for a representative from Indonesia, but for the time being, the Germans think that being only around 2.000 workers in two plants, Indonesian number of workers is too small. However it is growing, and there trade union is well organized [...].

The problem of a representation at WEC also comes from the fact that, as negotiated with the company's Board, maximum of trade union representatives is 15. And for the time being, Daimler, doesn't want to change it. To increase number of countries, in principle it would be necessary to reduce number of those having more than one trade union leader. Main one is Germany, with five. They and no other country would like to reduce its quota. Stevis (2009) has also same ideas regarding representation, nevertheless he agrees with the creation of WEC. According to him, *Daimler* world management was more interested in having as members of the world committee, persons being more

familiarized with the company and committed with its success while workers representatives had as main criteria “(...) a composition reflecting workers distribution (...) in accord and along its production chain. The result was a minor WEC than what it would be correct, when compared to others. (...)”

3.3.3 The IFAs: global hiring, local complaints

Among world vehicle manufacturers, *Daimler* was the second one that signed an IFA²⁹. This was not only the result of WEC political effort, but also of IgMetal³⁰ General Factory Workers Commission at *Daimler* Europe.

The WEC receives complaints of workers related to *Daimler* all over the world and forwards them to be solved. Complaints also come from countries still not having a WEC trade union representation. Among several cases, there are some linked to Mercedes-Benz car dealerships, where – except in Germany³¹, workers are outsourced. This is the case of Brazil³², Costa Rica, Chile etc. Sanches also observes that *Daimler*³³ IFAs have been more useful for outsourced workers be them suppliers or resellers, than direct workers:

[...] I think that IFAs are more used by suppliers than by the own company, [...]. The problem is who they hire, [...] be it in the beginning or end of production chain [...]. Most of complaints come from suppliers, [...]. Many of them have already been disqualified by Mercedes-Benz. [...].

Stavis also states EFA coverage of workers at *Daimler*, such as in 2002, when they include those being in TNs production chains “(...) *Daimler*’s supports and encourages its suppliers to introduce and establish *Daimler* principles in its own companies’ (...)”.

The scholar also enhances that in April 2008 the EFA of 2002 was revised to make clear that this EFA should have to be also applied to workers at reselling channels. Such alter is significant since *Daimler* practically has sales all over the world. About the monitoring issue, besides own WEC difficulties, it also happens in some of local/national trade unions having plants or workers connected to Mercedes-Benz. Sanches also says:

[...] Doesn’t matter we people of WEC have made an effort to inform colleagues of other countries [...] we also did it in meetings of ex International Me-

29. First vehicle manufacturer to sign a IFA was German Volkswagen at the beginning of 2002, a few months before *Daimler* signed its first, September 27, 2002.

30. Stavis (2009).

31. In this country, nearly 70% of reselling network belongs to Mercedes-Benz. In Brazil, a law prohibits the manufacturer to be also a reseller.

32. In Brazil there is one Mercedes-Benz reseller that was disqualified for not complying with rights foreseen in EFAs monitored by WEC.

33. According to Stavis (2009), the OSHA IFA, signed in 2006, does not refer to production chain workers, but only those at *Daimler* facilities, be them outsourced or not. Besides, the scholar enhances as something positive, the fact that workers have the right to refuse doing tasks they judge representing some risk to health and safety.

talworkers' Federation, with Daimler workers coming from Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela among other countries. We told that here in Brazil we have a seat at WEC and that our duty is to forward violations and claims. But as far as I know [...] except a case from Chile, we never received a violation of rights case from Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina. They have problems there, but they don't consider doing this as something useful. [...].

In ordinary meeting 2010, WEC made a balance of all claims received and established that up to that moment they had analyzed and forwarded 23 accusations of EFAs unfulfillment. Most of them, according to the minutes of referred meeting, had been solved. One case not solved was from a United States supplier that illegally obstructed the campaign of the trade union organization. I underline that most part of cases refer to Mercedes-Benz outsourced production chain companies. Among major sources of problems/claims are resellers, suppliers and outsourced workers in such countries as Turkey, Costa Rica, Brazil, South Africa, Argentina and United States. Main complaints regard: discriminatory practices against trade unions and dismissals.

3.3.4 Other challenges for *Daimler* EFAs

As Stevis³⁴ states, independently of *Daimler* IFAs clauses of 2002 and 2006 being in conformity or covering items usually related to global agreements such as rights foreseen in ILO conventions and the *Global Compact*, there are important gaps. Among other reasons, because of "loose formulation of principles" contained in these documents. As challenges, Stevis mentions social responsibility as something to be obtained in the long run; absence of details regarding ILO conventions in which principles of both IFAs are based; the need of deepening collective negotiation issues, because they are vague and not detailed; doubts in deciding what legislation must be considered; national – from each country – or international laws, besides not including production chain worker, as the IFA 2006. Nevertheless, the existing gaps regarding need of higher WEC representativeness and communication and gaps in both IFAs, it is notorious the excellence of positive results achieved. Hundreds of thousands of workers now have a global forum where they can talk about their problems and rights that have not been guaranteed in their respective working places. Also they have now a set of norms – both two IFAs – that might and have been used to their favor, especially for workers that are in the production chain. Here is a clear example of counter-hegemonic global logic in network: workers spread in many places (countries), getting connected and having agreements in network, having global communication, being opposed to capital hegemony, refusing the absolute and unilateral application of TN global strategies: in short, of a determined hegemony.

Final Considerations

The objective of present study was to analyze, based in international trade union practices of workers from MBB, its evolution and also the sense of such trajectory.

It was verified that during three decades, there was an advance and a substantial strengthening of the experience, starting from a spirit of solidarity, going through formal hiring up to the institutionalization at global level. The survey also tried to identify particularities of journey covered. Among enhanced characteristics are local-global perspectives in counter-hegemonic network.

I stress that independently of the studied successful journey, it did not yet become a standard practice. It is therefore a possible model, viable and even urgent for local trade union movement: globalizing to be able to contrast, every each time more in equality position, to the hegemonic actors of globalized capitalism.

This case study as from MBB, and the analysis of its broad scope for *Daimler* Group, allows us observing that in first place, there is an evident *global network connection* of production system functioning and the *Daimler* Group management. The transnational corporations are globalized *localizations*, representing a way of globalization. They are local initiatives that became universal by fixing in many other places. The *Daimler* group in Germany, based in *Stuttgart*, expanded for many other places, becoming global. MBB from SBC, following the same logic, is the local result of a global strategy. In other words, a way of *localized globalism*: its concrete existence is the local expression or materialization of a global strategy. We arrive to a form of *globalized localism and localized globalism* – the local-global game, under hegemonic capital perspective. Such hegemonic perspective of capital also presents network organization as a characteristic and then following the configuration of neural and horizontalized logic. It is not then another one verticalized company in the classic sense Fordist Taylorist, but a Toyotist one. Mercedes-Benz units are linked in a network with a set of other companies of the own *Daimler* Group, and an immense global chain of companies composed by suppliers, resellers and representation offices. Production was internally horizontalized by eliminating intermediary functions, among them many managerial. This reduced verticalization. Also in production some workers were dismissed when cellular production and outsourced operations arrived, in spite of having been among ABC vehicle manufacturers, the one that lost less workers during the intense process of RP in the 1990's.

At the same time, workers also started to organize themselves in local-global levels, establishing through own political initiative, international network connections. Trade unions became stronger while having a counter-hegemonic importance, because of a unilateral proposition against transnational corporate strategies.

International workers organization initiatives, as from MBB in SBC, in the 1980's and following decade, are localism that globalized (or *cosmopolitan ways as* prefers Boaventura de Sousa Santos). They were initiative coming from each place, connecting ones to others until founding global agreements that had a local impacts.

Workers' *globalized localisms* are *counter-hegemonic in network*, but they are still far away from becoming hegemonic, really incipient; nevertheless a possibility. Its logic may serve as a reference to analyze the relation between work and capital in other transnationalized sectors of the economy, not only the metallurgical one. In the years 2000, WEC – according to Boaventura de Souza Santos point of view, may be seen as a *globalism localized* (also *cosmopolitism*). It provides results, insertions and local effects; incidentally it exists to interfere directly and effectively in the place, but starts from the global level, from globalism.

Regarding workers strategies, during years 1980, 1990 and 2000, agreements also show a characteristic in network, according to the vision of sociologist Manuel Castells that I am using here. However, inclusion of network logic made a much higher progress in what regards capital. Anyway, there are international trade union experiences already acting in the same level and sense than capital, placing its counter-hegemonic position in a global level and in network. The workers experience, as from MBB, is one of them and may be also considered as a model for international trade unionism. Then, I think that present research allows showing the need and possibility of internationalization of workers organization, due to economy's globalized conjuncture in network and consequently of TNs, hegemonic actors.

We also must emphasize especial features of international trade union movement developed through world workers committees - WWC. In spite of some difficulties, challenges or flaws faced by WTUCs and IFTUs usually are not present, or when they are they take a lower degree than in WWCs; the example is WEC. I underline, especially in the case of WEC, less verticalization and bureaucracy, more decentralization and higher local-global appeal. The specific nature of WWCs, in the case of WEC, makes viable a higher efficiency, see application of IFAs with clear and direct local effects. Another consideration refers to the relation between workers rights in a determined place, including maintaining jobs, and its restriction at a national level. Local achievements guarantee is not necessarily limited to the national level. On the contrary, we have seen that especially in workers international trade union organization as from MBB in SBC during decade of 1990, protecting workers interests demanded a global agreement. Understanding of global level production allowed making trade union strategies impossible to be built only having as cope the local/national level.

In spite of challenges that WEC and IFA will face, both of them are currently fundamental tools for making viable local-global dynamic of the international trade union fight. The first one, even having to increase representativeness

and communication is an instrument that has already shown its essential importance in the counter-hegemonic game. In the same sense, workers IFAs at *Daimler* are global resources to establish formal agreements in different places, independently from its gaps. This is why this study strongly suggests that in a society with an economy intensely globalized, workers strategy be exclusively centered in local/national level will very probably be incomplete. This could lead to produce insufficient trade union policies or even inadequate. The experience as from MBB workers shows the feasibility and need of such counter-hegemonic global perspective in network.

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