



SERIES SOCIO-ECONOMY OF SOLIDARITY

# Work, employment and economic activity

PROPOSAL PAPERS FOR THE XXI<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY - CHARLES LEOPOLD MAYER ÉDITIONS

# Proposal papers for the 21<sup>th</sup> century

*The proposal papers are a collection of short books on each decisive area of our future, which assemble those proposals that appear the most capable of bringing about the changes and transformations needed for the construction of a more just and sustainable 20<sup>th</sup> century. They aim to inspire debate over these issues at both local and global levels.*

The term 'globalisation' corresponds to major transformations that represent both opportunities for progress and risks of aggravating social disparities and ecological imbalances. It is important that those with political and economic power do not alone have control over these transformations as, trapped within their own short-term logic, they can only lead us to a permanent global crisis, all too apparent since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the United States.

This is why the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World (see appendix) initiated, in 2000-2001, a process of assembling and pinpointing proposals from different movements and organisations, different actors in society and regions around the world. This process began with electronic forums, followed by a series of international workshops and meetings, and resulted in some sixty proposal texts, presented at the World Citizen Assembly held in Lille (France) in December 2001.

These texts, some of which have been completed and updated, are now in the process of being published by a network of associative and institutional publishers in 6 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic and Chinese) in 7 countries (Peru, Brazil, Zimbabwe, France, Lebanon, India, China). These publishers work together in order to adapt the texts to their different cultural and geopolitical contexts. The aim is that the proposal papers stimulate the largest possible debate in each of these regions of the world and that they reach their target publics whether they be decision-makers, journalists, young people or social movements.

# **Presentation of the Paper « Work, employment and economic activity »**

This work is the result of various areas of thought and exchange:

- The electronic forum of the “Work, Employment” workshop;
- Synthesis Congress, carried out in Florianopolis/Brazil, from 27th to 29th April 2001;
- Congress of the 15 PSES workshops, in Findhorn, from 9th to 15th June 2001.

Besides its own specific theme, at the end of the text our workshop will also deal with the theme of syndicalism, related to the problem of city management.

Transformations in the world of work



# **Work, employment and economic activity**

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# 1. Observations and diagnoses

We are experiencing an extensive social transformation which is characterised by its civilising nature. One of the main components of this “civilising mutation” is the current technological and organisational revolution, which directly affects the many production forms. However, this is accompanied by other structural dimensions with which it is interrelated: just as it moulds the others, it is moulded by them. Profound and accelerated changes are taking place which, on the one hand, reinforce and broaden the power of the capitalist logic, but on the other hand, get to the bottom of serious obstacles making new contradictions emerge that, paradoxically, favour transcendence of the same modern-industrial-urban mode of life. There is no uniform direction, although there are many tendencies, some of which are contradictory. However, capitalism, undoubtedly, dominated the third technological revolution (even though seeds of other modes of life were also sown there), generating great euphoria amongst its supporters.

Within this complex civilising transition, the world of work is confused in a chaotic mess of frenetic transformations. In a reality where “everything solid falls apart”, where the concept of work itself is undergoing great changes, where it is becoming difficult to characterise even the weakened working class, what can be distinguished?, what can be affirmed? Even though it is possible to identify common structural lines, they unequally affect a heterogeneous capitalist social formation, in which different modes of production always co-existed, synthesised in different historical rhythms. Thus, it is important to perceive various differentiated and combined “worlds of work”.

In recent years, we have also experienced a paradigmatic transition that is greatly affecting our dual and Manichaean western vision of the universe. Many believe that it is no longer fitting to insist on the absolute and totalising polarisation between capital and work, that the latter is the determinant antagonist of all societies. This is a positivist way of observing reality, which, nevertheless, does not imply that there are no classes and conflicts between classes, but that the former understanding of society divided between the middle class and workers is becoming more and more inadequate for describing the complex society where the profound division of work increases the heterogeneousness of the working class, leading to unavoidable dissociation within the same. The wage-earning class does not have a tendency towards homogenisation. The most qualified workers, although they sell their work to capital and belong to the wage-earning class, are more like capitalist-workers and have great affinities with the owners of the means of production. What unites intellectual wage-earners bearers of scientific knowledge that are innovators in the production process, housekeepers, civil servants, unskilled workers, administrative workers, freelance workers and the unemployed? There is not just one set of goals amongst those that do not belong to the middle class, apart from other aspects that also divide us (subjectivity, generations, gender, race).

Capital, even though it shows a high degree of polarisation and a strong antagonism, necessarily incorporates workers in its assessment logic, because it is a social link. Despite the high degree of division of work and generalised consumerism, it can not be denied that a large part of the working classes

incorporated the logic of utilitarian productivism in its subjectivity. This incorporation can also be seen in the fact that the working process requires workers to be more and more creative and enterprising. Apart from that, some specialised workers are real Schumpeterian entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it can not be ignored that the pulverisation of the ownership of capital greatly restructures class relationships: what about workers' pension funds and the fact that they play a more and more important role in controlling large capitalist companies?

Recognising this, however, does not mean that civil society organisations should accept all kinds of alliance, as they can still be guided by human emancipation without abandoning ethical principles such as intransigence with regard to corruption and violence. Despite the ambiguity of the great transformations occurring at present, capitalism still exists and its tendency to despoil and alienate is becoming more acute. However, platonic dualism and former mechanistic and cartesian metaphors are not enough to understand the qualitatively new parameters (growing syncretism and multiculturalism, the presence of cooperative games where everyone wins) with which old confrontations appear. We must always be suspicious of abstract totalities or universalisms.

Generally speaking, Taylorism-Fordism is being replaced by flexible production processes (commonly called Toyotism or simply post-Fordism). New organisational logics in the form of company networks arrange production lines, surpassing the model of vertically integrated companies, for their greater capacity to respond more quickly to market demands. The current technological revolution makes it possible to control more and more vast business structures, imposing the company-network format on conglomerates. Recurrent outsourcing creates opportunities for the association of micro and small companies, although subordinately, in the global economy.

New technologies make it possible to reach a new level in the development of production forces: production becomes universal, dividing itself over various countries. In general, the term "globalisation" characterises this new stage of intensifying the internationalisation of capital. The growth of intra-company business demonstrates this strategy in large global corporations. Extraterritoriality, historically an element central to capitalism, has become more important.

Although in globalised economy financial capital flows freely through virtual circuits, the workforce remains local. Meanwhile, this does not prevent its connection with the globalised value circuit: through Internet, qualified workers all over the planet provide services directly to large capitalist companies without having to leave their cities of origin. Electronic- and computer-based economy reduces the States' ability to control the overall economic flow, wearing away labour market frontiers.

When examining new occupational structures, we see that there are significant and even contradictory variations between countries. However, generally speaking, the individualisation and diversification of work relationships is increasing, as is the massive incorporation of women into the paid workforce. Thus, as occurred formerly with farmers, the industrial proletariat is decreasing, corroborating the now classic thesis of Gorz in *Farewell to the Proletariat*.

Meanwhile, there is a general pattern of disarticulation of industrial employment towards a greater importance of the service sector. Four different models of this transition can be identified in G-7 countries: i) the economy of services model (USA, United Kingdom and Canada), which emphasises services related to the management of capital, ii) the industrial production model (Japan and Germany) where industrial employment is still maintained at a high level, despite its reduction, with a greater presence of services linked to production (industrial services), iii) an intermediate position (France) which combines an economy of services with a relatively strong industrial base, iv) and the model of economy based on networks of small- and middle-sized companies with a great presence of freelance employment (Italy).

However, in all countries a de-waging process is taking place, putting the wage-earning society in crisis - a society based on paid work governed by long-term contracts, which developed safety mechanisms linked to employment. A dual labour market has been created with the growth of a "diffuse sector", between employment and unemployment, a process that many call Latinamericanisation or Brazilianisation of the economy. The immensely privileged "islands" amidst a sea of misery and despair, which are typical characteristics of the living conditions of the "third world", are spreading to wealthier countries. Despite the fact that the majority of the workforce is wage-earning, advanced economies have the tendency to move closer to that which characterised the third world, where on average hardly a third of the workforce formed part of the official labour market.

In general, the generic description of the labour market at the end of the eighties is distinguished in the majority of countries. The centre is made up of "electronic craftsmen" that, enjoying a greater autonomy, have more employment security and are fully integrated into the production process. There are two groups of workers on the periphery: skill-bearers that easily find work on the market, who, carrying out full-time activities, are marked by employment rotation and by having few career opportunities; the second group includes part-time, casual workers, subjected to an even greater insecurity. The basic tendency is for a flexible workforce to be used more and more, reducing the number of "central" workers.

Reorganisation of the international division of work followed by the contemporary identification of global economic flows and production restructuring, widens inequalities, bringing with it a new pattern in production relationships: capital prefers more and more to exploit human labour by purchasing services and not contracting workforce, as in this way its ability to generate income increases. The spatial relocation of production activities redesigns urban and rural spaces, affecting not only working relationships but also social behaviours with the multiplication of work at a distance and at home.

The contemporary globalisation process, on affirming the centralisation of the world market, has not only required national companies to open their internal markets to international competition, but also State reform (privatisation), reducing the State's role to regulator and executor of socially compensatory policies. *Lean production* leads to deregulation and dismantlement of social protection laws, wearing away social integration structures brought about by Keynesianism-Fordism, but not replacing them with other equivalent ones from

another viewpoint, which approaches the most industrialised countries of the Southern countries, that already have a precarious social protection system.

The greater mobility of capital causes trade union movements to back down, forcing the most organised sectors of workers to accept the deterioration of working conditions (increasing labour insecurity). Capitalism, whilst renewing, keeps its essence. The blackmailing power of large firms has never been so overwhelming, drastically restricting trade union action. 50% of companies in the United States use the threat of moving their production to other places to put pressure on trade unions.

In this context of new oppression and exclusion conditions, the challenge for trade unionism is to build a wider arch of solidarity, suited to these conditions. It must go beyond institutionalised action focused on the claims of workers in trade unions. Trade unions are prisoners of limited corporate positions "when the interests of those to whom the good or service is directed are considered to be less important than those which arise directly in production. A corporate spirit exists when each claim made by workers joins another, or rather, all claims express the same principle, which is that of justice for workers, thus renouncing a common project for society which is no more than the mere sum of small projects". Escaping from the trap of corporate spirit is a great challenge: although we can not deny the existence and importance of corporations, trade union political practice can not be reduced to corporations' private interests, but must form part of a global vision of labour socio-economy.

Today, paradoxically, we are living in a working society without "work". Today's society is a working society because it is built around the work ethic and work is the fundamental and organising principle of life - we live to work. People acquire social identity for carrying out a profession. However, the situation is increasingly becoming that of a society of workers without work, as the labour market is decreasing as a result of the reduction in the quantity of socially necessary work, a phenomenon which originates both from the emergence of new production organisation patterns - outsourcing, flexibilisation, with the consequent precariousness of working relationships, and from the arrival of new technologies. Work has not exactly disappeared, but rather changed. In truth, there is a lot more work, but the relationships between companies and workers have undergone a great metamorphosis.

This is not a new phenomenon, as capitalism never generated full employment and always lead to "relative overpopulation" (the "army reserve", causing the emigration of millions). What is new is its generality and potency, accentuating exclusion tendencies.

Neither did work (especially in developing countries) function as a source of citizenship for workers or as a means of social integration. However, there is no doubt that, increasingly, stable employment is seen to be a privilege belonging to a minority. In other words: today unskilled workers realise that there is something worse than slavery. With the current industrial restructuring, some discover the misfortune that it is worse not to be exploited at all than to be exploited by capitalists, that abandonment and exclusion are worse than dependence. And will whoever remains outside the world of work and flexible work be lost for the economy? Condemned to misery?

In not including hardly any competitive segments in its accumulation space, the Darwinist globalisation and production restructuring process has not been successful in providing the growing population with paid work, deepening the planet's now characteristic social polarisation and worsening the situation of our peripheral societies. The disorganization of Fordist forms of work has given rise to a precariousness in working classes and a growth in socio-economic duality and social fragmentation tendencies, making already highly heterogeneous societies even more complex. Apparently, the economic system needs an increasingly lower number of people, thus people loose their place and have no prospects of being absorbed by the production system. It is a cruel truth that the majority of poor people are on the streets to die.

In this context of transformations and redefinition and revaluation of work, how can the Trade Union Movement (TUM) contribute to bringing about solidarity, whether within the company or in society in general? What is the Trade Union's role in the creation of a new world? Could the TUM be an important support point for SE networks and in the development of local economy solidarity platforms?

Transformations in the world of work and in life also cause us to deeply rethink the trade union movement. From what perspective? From that of growing trade unionism in society; a social trade unionism of greater solidarity, integrating citizenship, both in factories and in cities. A trade union which is organic but also citizen, that represents workers and is a social movement, that deals with the challenges of capitalism as a mode of production and a civilising process. Uniting work and environment, work and education, work and feminism, work and culture, work and welfare, work and youth, work and the elderly.

This new trade unionism requires the conscience of workers to be joined to the conscience of citizenship. Citizenship outside the world of work summons the trade union movement to extend itself to new social forces and movements situated outside the production process. Just as democracy should enter the workplace, trade unionism should include citizenship, the democratic and popular public place. Formerly, the privileged place of trade unionism was in companies and professions (the trade union and the federation). Nowadays, the geographical aspect at a local level tends to assume a greater area. At a local level, trade unionism must participate in the democratic debate, city management, in other words, have a more active presence in local life.

## 2. Visions and a new paradigm

Continuity between the development of production forces and emancipation can not be more presupposed. It is no longer right to think that a highly industrialised society barely enables the liberation of human potentialities. The return of the problematic relationship between economy and culture has decisively contributed to the erosion of faith in Illuminism in an integrating modernisation that emanates from the ascending progress of history. Giddens and Inglehart, amongst others, have pointed out the significant role of the exchange of values in causing this erosion in the wealthiest countries. In these countries, especially, a greater income does not necessarily contribute to greater welfare.

There are many proposals concerning how to overcome this crisis through the emancipation of majorities: from redistributing the offer of employment according to the formula “work less so that we all work”, socialising the free time potential generated by new technologies, to proposals involving a right to lifelong income combined with the recognition of community activities; this concerns the “third sector of social economy” which would benefit, through voluntary work, the large range of services necessary for the reproduction of social life that were formerly provided by the family and that state institutions have not been effective in generating. The grant-school programme is a Brazilian innovation worth highlighting. However, overcoming the contemporary crisis along the lines of a more human world (establishing the new social pact necessary for the transferral of productivity profits from corporations to society) will not happen without organised social actors and political struggle (if not we will barely be saying farewell to work and the proletariat, whilst the power of conglomerates strengthens), and without the creation another social imaginary (in other words, we are not reducing the subject’s problems to the analysis of classes. The creation of political subjects is also the creation of a counter-hegemony, of a culture).

### 3. Initiatives and innovations

Many see, in the present crisis, an opportunity to broaden the notion of work, freeing it from its industrialist-productivist and alienating content. As work forms part of life (and not the other way round), differentiating work from employment enables us to perceive how work, covering a wider field than employment, not only exists as regards the production of goods but also as regards the reproduction of life, involving social and nature reproduction tasks. The solution for unemployment would not be employment, but work emancipated in its diverse forms. There is a need to break the link between work and income (understood here as each person's right of access to the flow of wealth that is being produced). It is not possible to make the citizen's income depend on the quantity of work that the economy needs. Looking for employment (and a wage) can not continue to be the only objective that gives meaning to our lives.

Let's reaffirm what was established in the Latin Congress on Culture and Socio-economy of Solidarity (Porto Alegre, 1998): "... we reject human work being reduced simply to activities paid by the market, demarcated by a timetable and limited in commitments, normally identified as employment, and recognise the need to recover the historical origin of the meaning of work and its humanising dimension. Let's understand work to be the transforming, creative, liberating processes and actions, directed at the development of oneself, others and a human, personal and socially responsible society, in order words integrating oneself with others, society and nature".

Meanwhile, the debate about the disorder of work reveals an interesting recovery of the meaning of work for human beings, making it possible to break the seducing charm of the free time discourse (which undoubtedly deserves serious consideration). Criticisms of universal assistance, in particular, apart from pointing out that the minimum income guarantee may perpetuate the dual society, also argue that working prevents the feeling of uselessness and enables human beings to connect themselves with the world and others, affording citizenship. By building the world, we create ourselves. Work is not a value in extinction: it has an anthropological dimension as a constitutive element of the human condition. This reaffirmation of the value of work should not be confused with the Calvinist glorification of the work ethic and besides this ethic has lost most of its power of persuasion, especially over the young people. Although work is no longer THE socialisation factor, it remains to be a factor of social integration. The crisis of the modern concept of work (as a social activity differentiated from subsistence activities) reveals that this form of work is a consubstantial socio-historical creation of industrial modernity and not an ontological category, as for thousands of years humanity lived without paid work and will continue without it for a lot longer. The present-day challenge is to improve the wage-earning society by reinventing work, which means rethinking and extending the right to work and forms of recompensing it.

The search for new dimensions of work and alternatives does not imply renouncing the struggle for the right to work as a fundamental dimension of citizenship. In this sense, the indispensable performance guarantee based exclusively on the citizen condition could not be put into effect without a

productive counter-weight that presupposes becoming professionally involved; there is an indissoluble link between the right to income and the right to work, excluding those of the elderly and those not in a condition to work.

In any case, the metamorphoses of work that have taken place have made it possible to break certain conceptual pressures that subjected discussion on work to discussion on employment. Now we can think about work in more ways than just that relating to the production factor (workforce). We can more easily affirm that selling ones capacity of production to capital is not the only way or the most free way to earn a living and also make a better evaluation of possibilities in the occupational matrix of peripheral countries, where the majority of the economically active population never officially had a job.

In the First World, the Welfare State's dismantlement has led to a feverish search for new solidarity mechanisms. We can not forget that the challenges that peripheral and semi-peripheral countries are faced with are in part different from those of more developed capitalist countries. The crisis derived from production restructuring and economic globalisation in peripheral countries is made worse by the simultaneous collapse of the imports replacement model. Also, as these countries never really had a wage-earning society, their paths for constructing citizenship are not the same as those for societies that built the basis for integration on paid work. The attempt to invent a new solidarity in Southern countries has another meaning, as here it is first of all necessary to find out what the poor, who never depended on the weak Welfare State, have been doing.

In these countries, creating alternative projects requires deep consideration of the great symbiosis between archaism and modernity that exists in these societies. In peripheral countries there is still an arrogant prejudice towards archaism and our mixed-race, Indian, black and provincial people (considered to be exotic and the object of anthropological study) especially on the part of intellectual middle classes (and those of elites in general). There is also the incomprehension derived from the enormous social distance that separates the poorest from the university middle classes in Southern countries, made worse by the predominance of a colonised social science, which is alienated with regard to our realities and not at all committed to its transformation. Blinded by the Illuminist gleam, we sometimes surprisingly discover the Carolinas de Jesus, Chicos Mendes, Doñas Purezas and Rigoberta Menchú, after due international recognition, of course.

We must recognise that not only great leaders emerge from working classes, but also a protective circle of self-employment economic initiatives (if we more closely observed the functioning of Brazilian society, we would not need to resort to physical sciences to understand the theory of chaos and the generation of order from disorder). Informal solidarity networks offer some protection outside the market. Under the waterline of legal-institutional formality we find that there is somewhat more than the lack of law. It is not a territory lacking in values and sociability.

Continuity between the development of production forces and human emancipation can not be presupposed. If a greater income does not necessarily contribute to greater welfare in the wealthiest countries, in other countries, with the exhaustion of the Fordist model, the illusion of progress dies, in

which we would be included through “employment” and “development”. With the erosion of Illuminist faith in an integrating modernisation that emanates from the ascending progress of history, the belief that only the most highly industrialised society enables the liberation of human potentialities is destroyed. In the end, what is and isn’t Work? What is its role in contemporary society? As this is an unending debate, mainly because continuous transformations take place in the world of work, it does not make sense to give definitive answers, but just to point out main elements of discussion.

The western vision of work is linked to the notion of production, which restricts its definition, merchandising human beings and all nature. It devalues other forms of work present in other cultures and also slights the work of women, social management, craftsmen, poets and artists in general and all kind of work that are not related to material production.

As work is part of life (and not the other way round), differentiating work from employment makes it possible to see that, on the one hand, work covers a broader field than employment, and on the other hand, that it not only exists as regards the production of goods and services, but also as regards the reproduction of life, which involves social and nature reproduction tasks.

Wealth is always produced socially, in other words, it not only depends on the direct and indirect workers involved in the production process, but also on a wide range of factors that motivate, give meaning to and enable the effort of those that are linked to the work considered to be “productive”. Access to this social wealth in other civilisations never simply depended on the extent of each person’s contribution to the production process. The utilitarianism that identifies our modern civilisation depraves life and impoverishes the majority of our people, which is seen in absurd Nazism, an extreme example of the materialism which results from subordinating access to material conditions of life to each individual’s efficiency in the production of these conditions.

Present-day civilising transformations lead us to question work’s central role in survival in our culture and to realise that other human activities are also valuable. We are experiencing a “work disillusionment” process, seeing that human dignity is present in all forms of work carried out by men and women and not only in those that, in the middle-aged period of life, are included in the social division of work. Whether in childhood or old age, whether involved in leisure or contemplative activities or simply limited to a vegetative life, all human beings have complete dignity and the right to sustain their lives: not only work dignifies man. We must not forget that, above all, we are citizens and that this social condition is more extensive than that of worker.

## 4. Proposals

1. **No more associating access to and participation in society's production and creation process simply with participation in the labour market.** The solution to unemployment and exclusion is not employment, but the act of breaking the link between work and income (taken here as the right to access wealth, which, at the end of the day, always originates in society), which currently rules over the labour market. The struggle to dis-alienate work, although it is a precondition for building a new world, differs from the struggle to procure mechanisms that ensure the intrinsic dignity of all people (although it is not sufficient in itself).
2. **Other human activities (above and beyond work defined as employment) must be valued in terms of their relevance to social life and how it is reproduced.** The profound social changes that we are undergoing, as well as demonstrating that “the wage system is no longer at the service of the worker”, also indicate that citizenship and human dignity should no longer depend on the volume of work necessary to society (which is decreasing as society's work productivity increases), and that other human activities are a factor in social life and can hardly be considered “work”.
3. **Work towards sharing work time, so that everybody can work and time can be given over to the important task of human development.** The technological progress that has accompanied globalisation saves human energy and necessary work time, increasing society's work productivity. Workers should be allowed to enjoy the benefits of this. However, financial capital tends to privatise these benefits if the control and management mechanisms of production goods are not changed. Democratising the gains of productivity means generating time for developing the higher dimensions of human beings.
4. **Building a new world means building a new social imaginary, other political assumptions and a different culture.** The current crisis, i.e., the need to make a more human world (creating a new social pact to transfer the benefits of corporate productivity to society) will not be overcome unless the social agents organise themselves and carry out a political struggle and another social imaginary is built: the building of new social assumptions also implies the construction of a new culture.
5. **An Economy of Solidarity is the backbone of a new outlook on social change.** The Economy of Solidarity, because it fits into a different paradigm of consumption and production (an alternative to the current consumption and production model that subordinates work into a means of reproducing capital), becomes the backbone of a new outlook for social change, in which the values dimension has a fundamental role. It is not enough to simply designate “players” or “leaders”, but to make sure that change leads to an organic transformation process that is not restricted to or hinged on a moment of strength.
6. **Building an Economy of Solidarity means building a political and educational project.** Although everything is a process, not everything occurs spontaneously. It is urgent that a political project be constructed, particularly

because an Economy of Solidarity does not just involve economic relations. The key element here is the contribution of Solidarity: it is around this axis that the wide-ranging political project for a new national and global society can be built. The Economy of Solidarity cannot be developed automatically or mechanically. To become an agent of social change, one must reinvent oneself as a political and educational force. An identity of solidarity can only be actively created in a process that is also educational.

**7. Building “a different development” on the local level, with linking strategies at the micro, meso and macro levels.** The challenge is to build and make viable a “different development” starting from the grass-roots level, generating systems that integrate micro-experiences, strengthening the counter-power that is born at the grass roots of society and that will become the social force able to implement and universalise the Economy of Solidarity. Sharing an area or region allows for solid bonds, particularly the integrated construction of the “production environment”. The strategy of an Economy of Solidarity consists in starting with local and micro-socioeconomic experiences to then, little by little, make viable link-ups across both horizontal networks (integrating consumption, production, technology, trade and finances, as well as different sectors of the economy, with solidarity) and vertical networks (integrating the production chains of every product and service, with solidarity), acting simultaneously on the micro, meso and macro levels, until a self-organising system has been constituted as an alternative to the one that is currently dominant.

**8. Strengthening “citizens watch” actions, so that the agreements and policies are implemented and fulfilled.** Here we should highlight the experiences of Peru and Chile, where indicators have been created to assess human rights within a corporation,

**10. Controlling and regulating the action of transnational corporations.** A “new internationalism” is incorporated into this approach. The aim here is to control the actions of transnational corporations, following-up and regulating their conduct in relation to labour rights and environmental guidelines in the various countries in which they operate.

**11. Promote direct forms of participation and development of local self-management; control and public management of goods and services that are to be shared by mankind.** Citizenship in the world of work requires instruments with which workers can develop resistance, control and management of work organisation: the processes of self-management of production, marketing and finances. On the level of geopolitical areas (in the countryside and in the cities), citizens can exercise democracy directly through instruments such as the participatory budget, city forums, etc. This is what we call social self-management. Power at the local level is therefore exercised in work environments and in association with the urban or rural public space. This is the essence of what is known as a “citizens’ union”.

## 5. Strategies and players

There are numerous strategies under debate for overcoming this crisis, taking the approach of the emancipation of the majority. One of them consists in sharing necessary work time in order to respond to the supply in the capitalist labour market, using the “work less so that we all work” formula. This means putting back into society the benefits of productivity generated by the new technologies, by sharing available time. Another strategy is the right to a lifelong income as a recognition of community activities (we refer here to the “third sector” of the social economy which, through voluntary or remunerated activities, would be a boost for the large volume of services necessary for the reproduction of social life; services that were previously rendered by the “extended family” and which the privatised State has not been effective in generating). There is also an initiative to introduce into private and state firms the system of social balance and the promotion of corporate ethics vis-à-vis workers, citizens’ space and the environment.

Working-class sectors of society basically live out of local markets and at the margin of the major markets, in spite of their relationship of subordination with the more globalised circles. Although there are numerous formats for organising a Popular Economy (PE) – ranging from organisation based on family ties, on independent work and on small co-operative branches to more capitalist formats), PE is characterised by a strong identity born out of shared experience: people in a PE are more closely linked to Labour than to Capital. In a PE there are embryos of what could become an Economy of Solidarity (ES), because in the practices of working-class sectors, we find an economic rationale based on work and on co-operation.

Although this shared identity means that the field of PE is extremely fertile for releasing an ES, we cannot restrict ES to this field, because not all that relates to the people relates to solidarity and because the elements of solidarity are widely scattered around the social arena in general, even in the mercantile/corporate and state spheres. But we must not forget that the people’s agents, more than any others, want a change in society and they are decisive in the building of a different social project.

Our Workshop is introducing the theme of TRADE UNIONISM into the Alliance. Without ignoring the role that the trade union institution plays in society (based on social protection for those who are formally employed), we are adopting the approach that puts forward the idea of a “Citizens’ Union”, a new form of unionism no longer restricted to labour relations and the corporate world but integrated into the society of citizens and the struggle for social self-management.

According to this approach, trade unionism must undergo profound changes.

In the face of the current challenges, unionism must change. In particular, it must become an ally of the forces of civil society. To face up to the process of globalisation, it must create new ties of solidarity.

This is new ground for the trade union movement, and it is a true “cultural revolution”: in other words, it means abandoning a certain approach to

representation and hiring that was key when the main objective was to gain the monopoly on company hiring. How can we bring about collective hiring that also covers the interests of “excluded” sectors of the population and workers, in relation to housing, social security, minimum wages, education, health, transport, children, and so on?

This revolution in corporate trade union culture also encompasses the ways in which unionism is organised. Thus, a form of unionism that is built on a vertical structure based on industry sectors can hardly represent the world of those who are in the unofficial sector, unemployed or scattered around the region; neither organically nor politically. An enormous qualitative leap is required, in other words, we need to look at the organisation on the territorial level and reinvent the regional dimension and the inter-trade organisation aspect. Forge links between the “organic union” and the “citizens’ union”. Organise the union in workplaces and industry sectors, and extend its political mandate in relation to society as a whole.

In “corporate unionism”, the rights of affiliated workers are stronger than those of the sectors that are “excluded” from work. But an alternative form of national union covers the interests of many sectors of society, not only workers. The cornerstone of this union is its representational nature, as it builds alliances with other sectors of society in order to be a stronger player in the collective design of an alternative social project. The key issue is to know which sphere the union must represent.

In the face of current hardship and unemployment, unionism must take on a determining role in relation to the nation state, by evaluating work through professional qualification policies and new rights that allow work to be categorised and new jobs to be created even “outside” the official economy (“an Economy of Solidarity”), controlling company training procedures and questioning the education system in force.

The unions need new strategies for job creation. The transformation of an economy of exclusion and informalization into an “economy of solidarity” can create a number of lucrative, qualified jobs such as land and environmental recovery, waste recycling, services for people, lifelong training, creation of co-operative communities for mutual aid between workers etc. These are the new horizons for labour.

Nevertheless, we know that none of this will come about on its own, nor out of the policies of transnational companies: it will come out of civil society. This is why it needs a boost from public policies, from the community and, in particular, from the trade unions, in order to be able to become a new form of economy and gain a share in the market.

Combating the hegemony of inhumane individualism means building a culture of solidarity and opening oneself up to a set of new assumptions that have hitherto been alien to trade union culture. This opening-up brings with it a confrontation with cultures that did not form part of the world of trade unions, but that do bring new values and horizons. This new solidarity means new approaches for the unions, a new code of ethics with which to create the identity of unionism in the twenty-first century.

A new political culture means politicising daily life. Culture is praxis, it is elemental, a context for production. The expression “political culture” indicates an everyday relationship, the way in which people discuss and decide on their basic problems. Culture is born out of necessity, it feeds on history and it cannot be imposed “from above” by cultural institutions. It is a vital activity of the mind and the senses: it is a human skill.

Current neo-individualism is an attempt, and a successful one at that, to re-establish conservative cultural hegemony by isolating the principle values of emancipating culture: it is, in short, depoliticization.

However, unionism acts as though culture and politics were two separate dimensions. Unions are not aware of their cultural mandate. In the counteroffensive mounted by capital, the development of microelectronics brings with it an extension of the awareness industry, of which the ultimate consequences can as yet not be completely foreseen, especially in terms of changes of mindset and opinion. It favours the breakdown and fragmentation of awareness and human behaviour. It does not aim to change its more organised interests and needs on a political level, as a medium for public and collective expression.

From this perspective, unionism can no longer follow the line of a traditional cultural policy. The unions of the future will face a major strategic challenge: to develop a cultural awareness that will have a decisive role on an existential and a political level.

It is important to promote direct forms of participation and development of local self-management; control and public management of goods and services that should be shared by humanity.

Historically, citizenship in the workplace tends to be integrated into the public arena of citizenship. For example, at the beginning of their struggles, when machine operators were on strike, they would leave the factories and go into the town squares (the Spanish word “*huelga*” (strike) comes from the name of the square where workers used to meet to make collective decisions). What was born inside the factories was completed in the public squares. In the ABCD experience in Brazil in the eighties, the workers left the factories and went to the *Paço Municipal* where they tried to use their own bodies to spell out the word “democracy”. The result was an indication of the situation in which democracy found itself in Brazil: the word was never finished, because of the repression: “democ...”

With this approach, citizenship in the labour market and in the actual workplace involves OLTS (local labour organisations), instruments with which workers can develop resistance, control and management of work organisation. This is what we call a self-management of production process. In the cities, citizens can exercise democracy directly through instruments such as the participatory budget, city forums, etc. This is what we call social self-management.

Power at the local level is therefore expressed in work environments and in association with the urban or rural public space. This is the essence of what is known as a “citizens’ union”.

Finally, the participatory budget and citizens' contributions are important for the democratic management of finances.

In cities in developing countries, the particular way in which a space is organised links the most varied forms of capital, work and technology. This organisation of the urban space is characterised by a space divided into two spheres of the urban economy: an upper sphere that directly originates in technological modernisation in which the monopolies operate, and a lower sphere made up of small-scale activities which has its roots in the poor sectors of the population. The relation between the two is dialectic; in other words, the lower sphere is the product of the rationale of the upper sphere, and at the same time an obstacle to its expansion.

These cities have a proliferation of zones of resistance in the form of activities designed to attend to specific and immediate survival needs: small companies that engage in a circuit of production, distribution and consumption operating far away from the world of a rationalised, IT-based economy.

So on the one hand we have a globalised economy created from the top down, and on the other a sector built at the grass roots level, which in poor countries is a working class sector and in rich countries includes the underprivileged sectors of society, including immigrants. This means, then, that there is room to create a new sphere in the economy: an "economy of solidarity", through companies managed by their own workers, or through production /consumption co-operatives.

In the economy based on salaried and dependant work, workers organise themselves in their workplaces; in an economy of solidarity, in self-managed and co-operative firms, workers can experiment with new forms of associated work.

Through local power in the cities, citizens can thus develop their own organs of direct democracy (participatory budget, various forums for people's participation). This is a process that is already under way in Brazil. In terms of local power, the example of Porto Alegre is highly illustrative: the participatory budget, through 16 popular councils, is the public decision-making arena. The plenary sessions held over the two legislations mobilised almost 20,000 people, involving more than a thousand organisations (each year these organisations mobilise almost 20,000 people). Another important element is the "Constituent City", a project that already organised two constituent conferences on city planning strategies with the participation of the participatory budget counsellors and other organisations. These are a variety of ways of building a new hegemony in various spheres of society, as an alternative to neo-liberalism.

Together, these organisations will make up the democratic and popular public arena, or what is known as the non-state, local, regional, national and global public sphere

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# The Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

## Working together towards the challenges of the 21<sup>th</sup> century

Ever since the late eighties of the 20th century, numerous initiatives have been put forward from different regions of the world and extremely diverse contexts. Different social actors were thus put in motion with the aim of organising a vast worldwide process seeking to explore values, proposals and regulations capable of overcoming the modern challenges humanity is faced with.

A large number of thematic, collegial and continental meetings were organised in the early nineties, a process which led, in 1993, to the drafting of the *Platform for a Responsible and United World*.

Regional groups were set up, international professional networks and thematic networks on the fundamental issues of our era were developed: the Alliance was created. It is financially and technically supported by the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the progress of Humankind (FPH), among others.

The Alliance is focussed on inventing new forms of collective action on both a local and global scale, with the aim of shaping together the future of an increasingly complex and interdependent world.

The challenge of the Alliance is to actively support unity in diversity by asserting our societies' capability to understand and appreciate the complexity of situations, the interdependence of problems and the diversity and legitimacy of geo-cultural, social and professional perspectives.

**The Alliance, as a space of discussion, reflection and proposals, is built around three main orientations:**

Local groups aiming to bring people of a community, a region, a country or a continent together by looking at the realities and issues of their own societies. This is the **geo-cultural approach**. It reflects the diversity of places and cultures.

Groups of socio-professional actors wishing to provoke dialogue and mobilisation within a given social sector or profession (youth, peasants, scientists, local representatives, etc.). This is the **collegial approach**. It reflects the diversity of social and professional milieus, their concerns and responsibilities towards society and the challenges of today's world.

Thematic workshops seeking to create reflection groups centred around the major issues of our common future (sustainable water management, regional integration and globalisation, financial markets, art and society, etc.). This is the **thematic approach**. It reflects the diverse challenges humanity is faced with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thematic workshops are organised into four areas:

Values and Culture, Economy and Society, Governance and Citizenship, Humanity and the Biosphere.

Seeking both to draw on the richness of materials and experiences gathered by these reflection groups whilst networking with other citizen dynamics with a similar focus, the Alliance fixed itself the objective of obtaining collectively developed, concrete proposals. The following meetings were thus organised:

- **international meetings**, for each thematic workshop and each college,
- **synchronized continental assemblies** (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe) and a regional meeting in the Arab world (Lebanon) in June 2001.
- a **Citizen World Assembly**, held in December 2001 in Lille, France, bringing 400 participants together from around the world.

These meetings together contributed to the drafting of some sixty *Proposal Papers for the 20<sup>th</sup> century* and a *Charter of Human Responsibilities*, published in several languages in different countries.

The Alliance has been involved in a process of disseminating and developing these outcomes since the beginning of 2002. Networks are expanding, branching out and their work themes are becoming increasingly transversal. They also strengthen links with other approaches aiming to create an alternative globalisation.

For further information, please visit the **alliance website** at [www.alliance21.org](http://www.alliance21.org), where the history of the Alliance, the challenges it is engaged in and the workshops and discussion forums being held can be viewed in three languages (French, English and Spanish).

E-mail: [info@alliance21.org](mailto:info@alliance21.org)

# The proposal papers on the internet

Whether in their provisional or definitive form, all the proposal papers and their corresponding translations can be accessed on the website of the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World, at:

<http://www.alliance21.org/fr/proposals>

## Themes available:

### **Values, education, cultures, art and the sciences**

Teachers and education – Education to an active and responsible citizenship – The alliance and the media – Art and cultural identity in building a united world – Women – Youth action and proposals for social change – An intercultural cultural diversity in the era of globalisation – Proposals of the inter-religious college – War, genocide, ...restoring humanity in human beings faced by extreme situations – Thinking through university reform – Social control of the scientific production system – Information society, knowledge society: benefiting from change – time and sustainable development

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