MASSIMILIANO MOLLONA
Goldsmiths College

Community unionism versus business unionism:

The return of the moral economy in trade union studies

A B S T R A C T
In this article, I discuss different forms of working-class activism in two steel factories in Sheffield, England, where I conducted fieldwork between 1999 and 2000. Locating the ethnography in the broader context of the U.K.'s financial capitalism, I describe how the models of "community unionism" and "business unionism" were implemented on the two shop floors, affecting the work practices, political strategies, and forms of solidarities of workers. I show, first, how the current financialization of the economy challenges existing labor strategies, leading to new political solidarities and moralities of labor. Second, I use current debates on trade union activism to think anthropologically about class, labor, and the relations between society and the economy under capitalism. [*labor, trade union, commodification, working class, moral economy, activism*]

Much contemporary ethnography of finance is based on multisited, multiscalar, and interpretative fieldwork and focuses on the "dreams" (Guyer 2007), imaginations (Li Puma and Lee 2002), and even "hopes" (Myazaki 2006) of bankers, brokers, technocrats, and the financial elite.[1] These contributions tend to ignore another aspect of fast capitalism: the slow, monotonous grind of making a living for the majority of people stuck "on the dark side" of globalization. For instance, they have overlooked the reliance of securitization, leverage, and other techniques of financial speculation on the proliferation of microfinance, workers' pension funds, subprime loans, and other imaginative forms of expansion of working-class credit (read "debt"). Indeed, the consequences of the current "failure of trust" in the financial system manifest unevenly along the social spectrum. The shattered hopes of the Japanese brokers described by Hirokazu Miyazaki (2006) do not compare with the immediate struggles—home repossessions, bankruptcies, and redundancies (layoffs)—faced by wage workers today.

In this article, I look at the effect of financialization on the lives of factory workers and on the labor movement. I discuss different models of labor activism in two steel factories in Sheffield, England, where I conducted fieldwork between 1999 and 2000.[2] At the time of the fieldwork, following a sharp recession in the world steel market and a subsequent wave of reorganizations, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) embraced the oppositional models of, respectively, "community" and "business" unionism. Broadly speaking, community unionism stresses the importance of community-based activism, whereas business unionism focuses on traditional workplace activism. Combining shop-floor ethnography and the ethnography of trade union offices, I show how, because of historical circumstances, shop-floor relations, and individual life trajectories, these two models of labor activism were, in fact, interwoven and mixed together in the everyday experience of the workers in the two factories.

AMERICAN ETHNOLOGIST, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 651–666, ISSN 0094-0496, online ISSN 1548-1425.
DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01201.x

Under the stock-market model of capitalism championed by successive New Labour governments in the United Kingdom,[3] firms meet their short-term financial goals through a combination of ruthless job and cost cutting, externalization, and subcontracting, on the one hand, and generous benefit packages to employees, based on salary, health care, and pensions provided through links with the financial market, on the other hand (Ezzamel et al. 2008). This mixture of despotism and commodification of factory work creates uncertainty and fear among the workers—of pension write-offs, corporate takeovers, redundancies, and factory closures. I describe the dilemma faced by trade union activists as capital mobility and labor deregulation sweep away old political strategies, moralities of labor, and forms of solidarity, leading to new practices of labor activism and solidarity. In particular, I show the hiatus between trade union models and the pragmatics of everyday life on the shop floor. On the shop floor, labor activists are constantly caught up in the opposite goals of preserving jobs and preventing exploitation, in the contradictory perspectives of "economic redistribution" and "cultural recognition" (Fraser 2000), and in the conflicting moralities of profit and solidarity.

On a more theoretical level, I make two claims. First, in the current context of extreme financialization of the economy—and of the blurred lines between industry and speculation—the different labor strategies of community unionism and business unionism collapse into each other. The ISTC community union at times acted pragmatically and from a managerial perspective, whereas the AEU at times acted much more as a grassroots movement than as a sectionalist business union. In light of this behavior, I suggest that the labor movement combine these two forms of activism, rather than cast them as mutually exclusive. Second, the current debate on the merits of community unionism as opposed to more traditional union organizing is good to think anthropologically about labor, class, and the relationship between society and the economy under capitalism. It shows that capitalist labor is not experienced on the shop floor as a linear and straightforward process of separation or alienation of "the economy" from "society"—as a narrow reading of Karl Polanyi might suggest (see, e.g., Mann 1995)—but, rather, as a geographical and temporal oscillation between these two poles (Burawoy 2003; Herod 2003; Silver 2003). To understand the complex trajectories of capitalist development—of its revolutions, expansions, and crises—grounded anthropological analysis must be combined with historical and geographical contextualization (see also Roseberry 2002).

In the first section of the article, I discuss how the model of community unionism was "transplanted" from the United States into the U.K. context. In the second and third sections, I describe labor relations on the shop floors of two steel companies that experienced similar processes of reorganization at the time of my fieldwork. In this discussion, I focus on the hiatus between regional and national trade union models and shop-floor activism, as experienced by union representatives ("reps") and stewards. Discussion of the discrepancy between union models of labor activism and the reality of everyday labor continues in section four, which contains an ethnographic description of a divisional branch meeting between stewards, reps, Members of Parliament, and regional political representatives. In section five, I deal with the debate on community unionism, and in the final section, I draw a short local history of the labor movement to contextualize the theoretical debate on community unionism as well as my ethnographic material. In the conclusion, I discuss the importance of anthropological approaches to labor studies and how anthropologists might rethink their own forms of advocacy following the economic transformation of the communities that they study.

Transmutations of labor representation

During my fieldwork, after ten years of declining militancy and a 30 percent decline in membership,[4] the ISTC—traditionally, the union of unskilled steelworkers—was in the process of turning into a community union. Community unionism can be defined as a political coalition between traditional trade unions, community groups—based on religious, gender, race, disability, and sexual affiliation—and political parties that breaks away from traditional unionism based on working-class activism and situated in the workplace. Although the literature on community unionism is varied and complex, there is general agreement that the shift toward community unionism was central in the revival of the U.S. labor movement in the 1990s (Fine 2005). Exemplifying this reorientation, the AFL-CIO shifted its political focus from the factory to the community, reaching out to peripheral workers, ethnic minorities, and marginal social categories traditionally excluded from the struggles of wage workers. The main mechanism of this shift toward community unionism was the revitalization of the central labor councils (CLCs), multiunion bodies operating at local and regional levels. Set up to organize and campaign for the AFL-CIO, these councils achieved semiautonomous status, branching out to provide social services, banking services, job training, and economic development to local communities or getting involved in grassroots activism on behalf of independent ethnic, gender, or faith-based groups. Through the logistical network of the CLCs, the AFL-CIO developed the Union Cities initiative, gaining access to deprived inner-city communities and successfully organizing the national campaign for living wages. Symbolic of this new form of community unionism was the Justice for Janitors campaign by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which targeted offices in particular areas of a city rather than specific workplaces, engaging

in unconventional forms of direct action and street theater and bringing together hotel and restaurant workers, cleaners, janitors, street vendors, and service workers.

The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) document "New Unionism: Organising for Growth" (1996) was the first attempt to transplant U.S. community unionism to the British context. The document augured a return to 19th-century trade unionism based on grassroots movements, horizontal and participative organizational structures, and greater involvement of peripheral and marginal sections of the working class, particularly among part-time workers, women, and young workers. For the TUC, the first dimension of union revival was organizational change, led through the New Unionism Task group and the New Organising Academy—the latter sponsored by 16 unions for the recruiting, mentoring, and training of young and dedicated union organizers. Workers' education was the second dimension of union revival. In 2001 the TUC funded the Partnership Institute to provide training, information, and best practices on social partnerships, in collaboration with corporations such as Ford, Rover, Tesco, Sommerfield, and British Telecom. Finally, in line with the AFL-CIO move toward service provision, the TUC suggested that unions become social service providers, especially of pensions, health care, and education.

Following the strategic program of the TUC, the ISTC focused first on organizational restructuring. It moved away from traditional hierarchical relationships between the factory branch and the regional and national offices and constructed horizontal networks between regional and divisional levels and voluntary groups, churches, local councils, human rights groups, the local media, and employers associations. For instance, it got involved in local educational, retraining, sporting, and leisure activities and liaised with the local Unemployed Workers Centres, thus, mobilizing groups outside its traditional industrial base. In addition, it transferred decisional power from the factory branch to the divisional office and shifted the focus of political action from the shop floor to the community. Reaching outside its traditional working-class base, it merged with the National League for the Blind and Disabled (NLBD), the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and other small unions in the plastics, electronics, and food sectors. This strategy increased trade union membership of non–steel and metal workers in traditional industrial regions by 15 percent.

In addition to pursuing these organizational goals, the ISTC became a provider of legal, educational, and health and safety services to steel workers. It created the Steel Training Partnership (STP) educational scheme, which promotes lifelong learning within the steel communities affected by plant closures and unemployment, through partnerships between employers, colleges, and other training providers. Drawing on European and U.K. funds, the STP has multiple objectives: It gives redundant steel workers skills that are transferable to other sectors; it provides lifelong learning to redundant workers with no reemployment prospects; and it retrains workers for other positions within the existent workplace. Unlike corporate learning, which is controlled by employers and coordinated by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), the STP is under the umbrella of the union and of the government agency that oversees education and job training. In some instances, the STP legitimated labor deskilling and factory reorganization by attenuating the social and political consequences of redundancies. But there is general agreement that the STP allows the trade unions to control the educational development and the training of steel workers outside the hegemonic spaces of corporate learning (Wallis et al. 2005). The ISTC also committed itself to greater safety at work, following a growing concern for health and safety in the law. The Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulation (1978) provided an additional de facto mechanism for labor representation, establishing the role of union health and safety representative in the factory, with the power to challenge managerial decisions regarding shop-floor organization on the grounds of health and safety.

Indeed, the ISTC embraced health and safety activism as a new form of labor representation, along with the representation of marginal categories of labor, such as the disabled, the unemployed, and casual laborers. The national political officer, himself disabled, constantly emphasized this commitment in national and divisional meetings. Some labor scholars saw this shift toward community unionism as a return to neocorporatism and to European models of social partnerships that are in fundamental conflict with organizational decentralization and grassroots mobilization (Fairbrother and Stewart 2003; Martinez-Lucio and Steward 2002). Others highlighted the limitations of transplanting a U.S. model of unionism to Britain (Carter et al. 2003) and suggested that community unionism was a return to the "realism" in labor politics of the 1980s. Below, I describe how community unionism affected the shop floor where I worked as a furnace assistant between 1999 and 2000. In particular, I show how the ISTC's health and safety activism and what I call the "medicalization" of manual labor weakened shop-floor activism and legitimated company reorganization and closures.

The ISTC in UNSOR

UNSOR is a steel factory located on the southern periphery of Sheffield. Its minimill structure once combined steelmaking in the electric arc furnace (EAF) and steel finishing in an integrated production process. Integrated production gave UNSOR greater organizational, technological, and market flexibility vis-à-vis the steel conglomerates. For instance, thanks to its in-house production of steel,

UNSOR operated in different steel markets than the main steel producers, avoiding direct competition with them in times of market expansion and diversifying into niche markets in times of downturns. In addition, the small dimensions of its EAF allowed just-in-time, small-batch production of both high-quality and lower-quality steel and, hence, diversification between the aerospace, mining, and automotive sectors. UNSOR was unique in Britain, but steel minimills are widespread in Japan, the United States, and Korea because of their adaptability to the volatile cycles of the steel industry. The production process at UNSOR involved the coordination of workers in several shops. First, in three heats, ingots of steel were melted by the 11 workers of the melting shop. During two shifts a day, 14 workers in the rolling mill rolled the ingots into billets. The billets were left in the cooling bank for half a day and then turned into steel rods in the rod mill. Then the rods left the "hot" department and entered the "cold" department. There, some rods were cleaned in the nitrogen tank then coated and turned into wires. Other rods were strengthened into bars and ground by the 13 young grinders working the three shifts in the grinding department.

In 1999, the Dutch steelmaker Hoogovens merged with British Steel to form Corus, at the time, the world's fifth largest producer of steel. Under Corus's aggressive pricing policy, UNSOR was forced to cut costs and reorganize. The reorganization was negotiated with the ISTC divisional offices and entailed 60 compulsory redundancies, the introduction of a single night shift at the furnace, and the imposition of teamwork in the finishing department.[5] The reorganization reflected the employers' decision to outsource steelmaking—that is, the "hot" phases of the production process taking place in the furnace and the rolling mills—and to intensify the finishing operations through overtime and teamwork. It split the workforce into two almost separate production units. The young, literate, and unionized workers in the finishing department worked overtime and in three shifts, earning almost twice as much as the workers in the hot department and as much as some managers, supervisors, and members of the office. The older, less skilled, and nonunionized workers in the hot department worked in two shifts, alternating idle time and intensive and unpaid extra work.

The reorganization was detrimental to the company because its focus on steel finishing put UNSOR in direct competition with well-established European producers of low-quality finished products. But the ISTC did not oppose it because it did not threaten its members in the cold department. Indeed, the younger workers welcomed the prospect of intensifying production and increasing their bonuses. But not all the ISTC workers of the cold department were happy with the change. Lind, the shop steward in the grinding department and the factory union representative, opposed the introduction of teamwork for two reasons: first, because teamwork reduced his authority over the rest of the workers in the grinding department,[6] and, second, because reorganization intensified the labor of the wireworkers without increasing their wages. According to Lind, the wireworkers—a notoriously unskilled section of the working class—had been badly affected by their recent absorption into the ISTC. In fact, the ISTC agreed with management's policy of intensifying the labor of the wireworkers, whereas it negotiated paid overtime for the grinders and the other skilled workers of the cold department. In addition, in agreeing with the reorganization of the grinding department, the ISTC exposed the wireworkers to greater occupational hazards,[7] despite its formal commitment to health and safety.

At UNSOR, syndicalization and workplace militancy did not go hand in hand. Indeed, the nonunionized workers in the furnace and hot strip mill protested against reorganization with production blockages, petty sabotage, and slowdowns, whereas the unionized and younger workers in the finishing department acquiesced to reorganization, following the ISTC's official line. Here, I focus on Lind's role as trade union health and safety representative, and his health activism, because it illustrates how workers on the line take advantage of broader legal frameworks and political ideologies according to their own individual perspectives. Lind's family had a long history of industrial deaths. His grandfather, father-in-law, and uncle had all died in mining accidents, and his father, a mine rescuer in Aston, had witnessed the deaths of several of his workmates. When Lind applied for a job at the Aston Colliery, the personnel manager told him, "You are a nice lad and I wouldn't mind giving you the job, but if I did, your father would never forgive me." So, he became a wireworker, instead. He had been a member of the ISTC for 25 years and enthusiastically endorsed the union's shift toward community unionism and health activism. Recent health scares in the Sheffield steel industry had generated public debate within the trade unions on health and safety.[8] The more militant steelworkers discounted health and safety, considering it a managerial discourse aimed at cutting costs and bonuses. Against them, Lind argued that dangerous working practices originate from capitalists' drive to increase profits and cut labor costs. According to Lind, health and safety consciousness is a fundamental dimension of class consciousness. With its narrow and materialistic struggle against wealth inequality, the traditional labor movement underplayed the importance of working-class health—both physical and psychological. Lind had a painful memory of this split within the working class on matters of safety at work. During the 1984 miners' strike, his father crossed the National Union of Miners (NUM) picket line, saying that "danger never goes on strike," and as a consequence, his family was stigmatized by the miners' community and forced to move to a nearby village.

On the shop floor, health and safety directives and regulations created a legal framework the workers of the finishing department could appeal to, to resist intensification of production that followed reorganization. For instance, the introduction of an automated grinding machine was halted thanks to an octave band analysis that showed the machine's noise surpassed the legal threshold. But health and safety activism did not have real support by the ISTC. The ISTC regional officer was not keen on confrontations with management on safety issues related to labor reorganization. He also refused to pay for Lind's National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) diploma. Without the diploma, Lind could not compete with the "expert" authority of Mr. Garrett (the health and safety manager), who, with a degree in engineering and a NEBOSH diploma, monopolized the Health and Safety Committee and used it to legitimize difficult managerial decisions. For instance, the committee used the Environmental Protection Act to shut down the furnace because of "warnings of refractory ceramic fibre in the furnace lining being categorised as carcinogen 2 substance,"[9] introduced overhead cranes and standardized and intensified the packing operations because the workers' handling practices breached the Manual Handling Operations Regulations, and implemented multitask work using the latest ergonomic research. Lind saw the Health and Safety Committee as an arena of labor representation, whereas Garrett—who was also general manager—saw it as a tool of managerial reorganization. One day in March 2001, I found the shop floor silent and the workers standing still by their machines. The owners had ordered production to stop and announced that UNSOR was to be closed down. Although the ISTC was informally supportive of the owners' decision to close the factory down, it nonetheless agreed to put the issue of UNSOR's closure on the agenda of the next divisional meeting, which was mainly centered on the forthcoming general elections.

Political meeting at the ISTC or community unionism in action

Transparent and sleek in its frame of glass and steel, the ISTC Phoenix House was built under New Labour to celebrate the rise of the new community unionism from the ashes of Margaret Thatcher's privatization.[10] Following the transformations of the steel industry in the Phoenix years, Bates, the ISTC divisional officer, also underwent a personal mutation. The migrant son of an Irish Catholic farmer, he started working at the British Steel Corporation (BSC) coke cavern in Port Talbot when he was 16 years old. At the time, coke cavern workers had low occupational status in the plant because of their renowned political docility. Given that stoppages in the coke cavern paralyzed the entire region, the management selected nonunionized workers—migrants, ethnic minorities, and Catholics—to work there. But, unlike his workmates, Bates was politically militant. He led two legal actions against the company, organized a plant strike on health and safety grounds, and became a shop steward when he was 35. Shortly thereafter, pulmonary emphysema due to fume inhalation forced him to retire, and he embarked on a career as a trade union officer. At the time, BSC had declared 56,000 redundancies, trade union membership was sharply declining, and the ISTC decided to cooperate with management on organizational restructuring while stepping up its political pressure on matters of industrial compensations, redundancy packages, and health and safety. Bates's campaigning on safety at work was in tune with this broader political context, and he soon became divisional officer. With the rise of New Labour to power, Bates was put in charge of developing a new community strategy for South Yorkshire.

Although the ISTC divisional office mediated between the national and the factory level, political meetings at Phoenix House always showed how the national and the local were disjointed. National officers and MPs mesmerized local members with Soviet-style bureaucratic language and grand political visions. For instance, the national political officers minutely debated the bureaucratic mechanisms required to implement the national platform at the local level, and MPs, activists, and scholars spoke of basic human rights, workers' control over the means of production, and global working-class consciousness. In the wake of the 2001 general election, Labour MPs presented "New Labour values" and screened propaganda videos with engaging titles, such as *Holding Back the Years* and *Let's Work Together*. This abstract propaganda contrasted with the immediacy of the problems—redundancies, illnesses, bankruptcies—affecting the local members who attended the meetings.

Aware of this structural contrast, the divisional officers constantly tried to make connections between national directives, workplace issues, and community activism. At the local level, they organized raffles to raise money for local charities, spoke at local schools and hospices, shook hands with junior football players, ate sausages at the ISTC-sponsored stalls at the local farmers' markets, and attended graduation ceremonies of lifelong learners. In the office, they arranged industrial compensation, discussed financial returns on workers' pensions, and lobbied against companies in breach of environmental regulations. Reflecting his personal transformation from unskilled furnace worker to union officer, Bates was aware of the ways in which the union model of community clashed with the reality of the workplace. In particular, ISTC's role as provider of services to workers outside the workplace—such as legal advice on compensation and redundancy packages, education, and retraining—conflicted with the workers' needs for representation and protection in the workplace.[11]

The issue of UNSOR's administration was discussed at a divisional meeting attended by an MP, a Corus research and development (R and D) manager, an STP officer, a union representative from a plastics factory in Rotherham, Lind, Bates, and myself. The voiceover of the New Labour electoral video had claimed emphatically, "We created one million jobs." "And we bloody lost another million" was Lind's not so subtle comment. In the meeting, it became clear that each participant had a different idea of community unionism. The manager lamented that the R and D department was controlled by the Dutch partners and that he had become "a foreigner" in his own company. For him, community unionism meant reconstructing a British industrial community in an increasingly globalized economy. For the STP officer, the community consisted of part-time, women, and ethnic workers; the unemployed; and the disabled—who attended his access classes and who were marginalized by the traditional working class, were traditionally suspicious of education, and were largely illiterate. The MP objected to these partial and local views of political communities and sketched an outline of a global and transnational working-class community. Maggie, the union representative from the plastics factory, expressed her concern about the deaths of five of her coworkers who had come in contact with acrolein, a poisonous chemical substance. The plastics factory had been established 20 years earlier in an ex–mining village near Doncaster and employed mainly women. According to Maggie, the village was still under the strong influence of the NUM and still thought of itself as a mining community. Although the NUM was active on matters of miners' pensions and industrial compensation, it was unwilling to mobilize on the five industrial deaths. Like the NUM, the ISTC had downplayed the cases of exploitation taking place in her factory and was "in denial" that the "plastic sector was the new steel industry," in which new working-class struggles had to be fought. Maggie claimed that the ISTC's idea of community unionism revolved around "a small group of Oxford college boys and of elder male manual workers," and she proposed an all-encompassing vision of political community that included women, foreigners, and informal workers. In the discussion, Lind raised the matter of UNSOR's administration and of its imminent closure. He argued that the ISTC had failed to inform the workers of the employers' intention to put the firm in administrative receivership and had wrongly supported the company's reorganization in 1999. He stressed that, in Britain, workers did not have the same right to information on important managerial decisions that most European workers had and criticized the ISTC for its narrow view of community unionism, one focused on national issues and lacking a broader European vision.[12] The MP accused the reps of political naïveté but nonetheless agreed to meet the management of UNSOR. Lind stepped in and said that the ISTC had sided with the interests of Corus and against the interests of UNSOR and that, deep down, this was "a political decision and not an economical one."[13]

Bates said that he acted in the interests of the ISTC members of the cold department, making sure that redundancies were limited to the hot department. Echoing the point of view of management, he argued that job losses in capital-intensive departments—such as furnaces, smelting shops, and rolling mills—were the inevitable consequence of "productivity increases" and "technological innovation." They were a "pure economical and technological fact" and had nothing to do with politics. Drawing on his personal experience of industrial illness, he claimed that manual jobs in such capital-intensive departments are dangerous, unhealthy, and, ultimately, "bloody Victorian jobs." Bates and Lind had very similar backgrounds—in terms of age, trade union activism, and experience of work-related illness. Why were their political views so different? Bates's convictions reflected the ISTC political model. His role as divisional officer was to transmit national policies and to create horizontal networks with the community, thus, bypassing the factory level and preventing the formation of horizontal political networks among the workers. Lind reflected the everyday experience of the workplace by the wireworkers, a traditionally marginal section of the working class then facing imminent redundancy.

UNSOR, the epilogue

In April 2001, the melting shop, billet, and rolling mill at UNSOR closed, and the company reduced its operations to grinding and coating coils purchased from a small nearby wire-making factory. Thanks to help from the ISTC and to governmental aid, the owners gave a £4,000 redundancy package to each worker and £15,000 to each manager, and they reopened the firm under a new name, focusing on the grinding business with a reduced workforce of 30 grinders.

The same phoenix, different trajectories

SEC is one of the main U.K. producers of crankshafts for the automotive industry. When it was founded in 1869 by skilled grinder Andrew Marlowe, the company (then named Marlowe) had a small workforce of engineers who made grinding machines and oil and gas engines. In 1900, Marlowe was a limited company with more than one hundred employees and the biggest Communist base in Sheffield, which led the "shop-steward movement" in 1917, a series of blockades and strikes to protest against the First World War. Skilled Marlowe engineers controlling the AEU were also the main founders of the Sheffield Communist Party. These stewards were modernist and productivist and believed that labor mechanization and standardization increased workers' wealth and collective consciousness. When, in 1917, they approved management's introduction of U.S.

machinery and principles of organization for the production of crankshafts for the legendary Ford T, Fordism and Communism seemed to go hand in hand.

Under pressure from the AEU, the Marlowe family built state-of-the-art welfare facilities for its employees—exclusive sports grounds, nurseries, a library and club—which were also spaces of political activism. The AEU and the Marlowe family established peaceful and paternalistic industrial relations and a common business ethos. With its immense base and popularity, the AEU had great bargaining power vis-à-vis the Marlowe management. In the context of wage deregulation in the 1950s, the AEU and management agreed on a pool system to moderate the wage inequalities of the piecework system. The AEU's pragmatic business view of factory relations mixed with several utopian projects. Under the direction of successive Communist stewards, Marlowe workers led pacifist marches, organized women's literary and sports clubs, and liaised with revolutionary intellectuals, such as the legendary socialist activist Edward Carpenter. The AEU also had a strong family ethos and saw on-the-job training and political activism as fundamental stages for young apprentices to enter into the "Communist family."

In 1985, under the Phoenix plan of privatization, Marlowe was incorporated into a public forging group under the control of BSC. In 1997, because of the decline of the forging division, Marlowe was sold to the venture capitalist firm Prudent Ltd.

Reorganization

The new venture capitalists reorganized the production process, creating a "general area"—where all the crankshafts were roughed and ground—and a dedicated "product area," where Bentley,[14] Ford, and IVECO crankshafts were finished according to the manufacturers' specifications. The new Total Production Management (TPM) philosophy relied on two pillars: the introduction of the market into the production line and teamwork. The commodification of the line meant that customers became direct supervisors of the line workers. For instance, Rolls Royce, which manufactured Bentleys for Volkswagen, kept the workers of the Bentley line under constant pressure with sudden changes to standard specifications, unannounced visits by its engineers, and frequent quality checks. Ford forced the workers on the line to operate with a zero-stocking policy, thus breaking their informal control of the production process based on accumulation of needed parts and material.

Teamwork decentralized the managerial functions of planning, accounting, control, and training onto the line under the supervision of "team coordinators." Team coordinators broke the power of the AEU in three ways. First, they controlled communication between the production managers and the line, which had previously been controlled by the AEU. Second, they controlled the training of the line workers, which previously had been informally controlled by the AEU, and they also changed the very notion of "skill." If the AEU-affiliated skilled workers trained their workmates in the "hard" skills of turning, fitting, and grinding, the team coordinators focused on changing workers' "mindsets" and improving their "soft" skills of communication, sociability, flexibility, and mobility. Third, team coordinators weakened control of the production process by the politically militant fitters and empowered the engineers of the machines' manufacturers.[15] In addition, multiskilling deskilled the production workers, forcing them to perform different operations simultaneously (e.g., grinding and turning) and mechanizing some of their operations through use of computer numeric machines (CNMs).

The introduction of the principle of the market into the line depoliticized the line workers. Forced to update process control charts (PCC) and to meet production targets for their manufacturers, production workers developed separate informal cultures on the basis of their manufacturers' profiles and goals. For instance, the Bentley workers were aware of producing an "elite" crankshaft, valued at £300 in the market and targeted to the sophisticated male, young City workers and their blond, elegant female partners displayed in the promotional posters in the break room. The workers on the Ford line developed an informal culture based on hitting the targets, risk taking, and monitoring the competitive forces located outside the factory, which were perceived as being responsible for downturns, short times, and wage reductions. Teamwork also fragmented the workforce along generational lines. The younger workers, more favorable to changes and less politically motivated, were allocated to prestigious lines; the older workers and "troublemakers" were put on peripheral lines. One of these was the European Engine Alliance (EAA) line, which produced crankshafts for a European car that was said to be the product of a joint venture between Fiat, Ford, and Rover, but nobody knew what it looked like. The European line was the lowest ranking in the factory, constantly under the cloud of the uncertain future of the economic partnership and of the low status of the European Union.

The AEU factory branch

> "We tried hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by re-organising and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation." Gaius Petronius Arbiter. (Nero's administrators)
>
> —Note posted on the AEU office at Marlowe

The union room at Marlowe was located on the first floor, opposite the offices of the logistical and production managers. High on an ancient wooden shelf, a bust of Lenin loomed over a pile of company records, trade union journals, and 15 photographic albums, which contained the visual history of the company, its workers, and their families. History was also collected in the form of posters, newspaper cuttings (some of them from the early 19th century), and several banners whose symbols and colors reflected the long history of labor amalgamation, conflict, and mobilization in Britain. Through these banners, photos, newspaper cuttings, and archival resources, young trade union members learned to make connections between the histories of the workers and the history of the steel industry, the trade union movement, and the nation. Steve (the AEU branch officer) and Gary (the deputy officer) had different styles and philosophies of labor representation. Steve was young and pragmatic, whereas Gary was a traditional Communist leader, with a productivist, hierarchical, and collectivist mentality in line with the business unionism of the AEU. As a business union, the AEU only supported economic strikes and slowdowns. For instance, when 600 workers were made redundant following the closure of the Rover Longbridge plant in 2000, the workers of Marlowe (by that time, SEC) did not strike in support of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) because Rover was not among the firm's customers. Besides, AEU officers were expected to act as facilitators of reorganizations, retraining, and voluntary redundancies and to oppose only those changes that entailed compulsory redundancies. Thus, business unionism held a vision of labor mobilization centered on the economic interests of the plant—which did not necessarily coincide with the workers' interests—and on collaboration between labor and capital.

At Marlowe, AEU representatives and human-relations managers had been equally involved in the pursuit of profit and efficiency, so their roles and careers often blurred. For instance, Jack Darling, who in 1961 was a young secretary of the Communist Party branch and a trade union convener, was made human-relations manager in 1975. Darling was a mythical figure in the company, equally revered and criticized. In the 1960s, when he was AEU convener, he fought against the introduction of the "maximonster," a big grinding machine that threatened to mechanize and deskill the production of heavy engines. When he was human-relations manager, he passed the "average earning" system and abolished the piecework system to prevent wage gaps between skilled and semiskilled workers. Nonetheless, according to many, he betrayed the Communist cause by raising his own salary and power well above those of his fellow workers.

The AEU officers had incorporated the union's business ethos of collaboration with management, but they had different ideas and attitudes toward the implementation of "lean production." Gary thought that by learning cost accounting, production control, and marketing, the workers would control the line and replace the middle management. Considering lean production and teamwork to be tools of skills recomposition and workers' empowerment, he helped the team coordinators implement lean production and multiskill the line workers. Steve had less faith in lean production and saw teamwork as a tool of social fragmentation. From his management course at the Open University, he knew that the implementation of Toyotism in Britain had been used to curb trade union militancy in the past. Despite their differences, both stewards cooperated with the new general manager to increase the plant productivity by ten percent, following the workers' suggestions of cutting transport times between the general area and the lines and of improving coordination between shifts. The workers collaborated with the AEU because they saw the new lean-production system, as it was being implemented by the general manager, as creating havoc on the shop floor.[16] There was a lack of coordination between the workers on the general line and the product-specific teams and between night and day shifts; the kanban system was slowing down line production, and the general line needed a new automatic grinding machine to keep up with the product lines.[17] Paradoxically, the majority of workers saw the AEU as an efficient actor in the reorganization and rationalization of the plant against the poor management of speculative owners, inexperienced managers, and technocratic consultants. But the meetings in the AEU offices always highlighted the dangers for the workers if they thought in pure economic and efficiency terms. For instance, some workers on the general line told the grinders that their suggestion of investing in a new automated grinding machine would deskill their labor, and team leaders and line workers discussed their different perceptions of the boundaries between productivity and exploitation. Another function of the AEU was to collect and distribute reliable information. During the time of reorganization, worrisome rumors and gossip about anonymous players and outside forces circulated on the shop floor. Was it true that Airbus, one of the company's prospective clients, was going bust? Was the steel industry entering into a new recession? Had the company lost £1 million last year? Were redundancies discussed in the last company meeting? And was it true that an Italian firm was buying the place? Finally, the AEU officers organized political events, demonstrations, and workshops that generated trust and cohesion among the workforce. During a day trip to London to demonstrate against a recent pension cut, the workers learned the hierarchies, informal rules, and internal tensions within the national trade union movement. Sharing drowsiness early in the morning, political excitement among the crowd, friendly euphoria in the pub, and desultory comments on the bus returning to Sheffield at night, the workers felt happy to belong to the union and

looked positively at the changes taking place in the factory. Photographed and archived in the AEU photo albums, these events built layers of history, friendship, and solidarity, connecting the factory with outside spaces. Thus, as guarantor of workers' employment, managerial expert, builder of cohesion and consensus, and gatekeeper between the factory and society, the AEU helped management to rationalize and intensify production in a time of organizational change. But the AEU's business pragmatism and support of the Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy undermined its very authority on the shop floor, mostly among younger workers, who identified more with the exclusive lifestyle symbolized by the luxury cars on the posters in the break rooms than with AEU's sober anticapitalist and anticonsumerist ethic.

Business unionism in times of reorganization

In February 1999, IVECO invested £9 million in a new line, and the employers' antiunion stance intensified. Although the union endorsed reorganization and secured workers' collaboration, management believed that that "the old Marlowe labor mentality" scared investors and clients off. To break the association between the company and its militant trade union, it renamed the company SEC. It also repainted the red shop floor orange, used the panels of the break rooms to mark divisions between different lines, and built a small gazebo on the line for the display of crankshafts and promotional videos. The production and logistical managers were made redundant, and the AEU office was relocated from the first floor to the shop floor, where, according to the new general manager, "it belonged." On the day of the move, the general manager told Steve and Gary to clean up "the rubbish" in the office, and Steve replied, "This is not rubbish, this is our history." Apart from the aesthetic changes, the overall production process remained unchanged. Recession in the automotive industry and the lack of middle managers put the line workers under increased strain by aggressive customers. In December 1999, Equitable Life, which managed the workers' pension funds, declared insolvency and cut policyholders' payouts to stay afloat. The workers panicked about their pensions, and rumors of company bankruptcy spread on the shop floor. The AEU officers kept the company together in the midst of financial losses, anarchy, fear on the shop floor, and successive buyout bids by two venture capitalists, one Indian and one German.[18] They gathered information from national and international trade union representatives, members of the European Parliament, journalists, and the Internet and provided employers with enough evidence on the speculative intentions of the two groups to reverse their decision to go along with the Indian bid. They also lobbied local and national politicians in favor of a counterbid by a consortium of steelmakers led by Corus. The counterbid was also supported by some managers and workers but was opposed by the venture capitalists and the AEU general secretariat, and it did not succeed. Having protected the firm from speculative takeovers, the AEU officers organized a meeting with some of the miners who had successfully bought out the Tower Colliery in South Wales in 1995, to explore the possibility of a workers' buyout of SEC. MPs, SEC workers, miners, and NUM and AEU trade union representatives attended a secretive meeting in a rural location outside Sheffield. At the meeting, the SEC workers reacted coldly to the suggestions of the miners and refused to get involved "personally" in running the company. Some of them refused because they lacked political drive. Those who were politically committed refused because they saw the idea of workers' ownership as a political contradiction and believed that "a workers' company in a capitalist world" would not last a week.

Following the failure of the two bids, management communicated to the AEU that the firm was bankrupt and was to be closed down. In response, the union organized a demonstration, together with community groups and the Caribbean councillor of the area where SEC was located and most of the workers lived. The demonstration took place outside Sheffield City Council and brought to the public's attention the threat of SEC's closure and the problems of unemployment and social exclusion of local black community associations. In addition, AEU organized a trip to London together with nonmanufacturing and private unions, legal activists, and anticorporate groups to demonstrate against a court ruling that Equitable had acted lawfully in cutting policyholders' bonuses, thereby threatening the SEC workers' pensions. Thus, despite their formal subscription to the ethic of business unionism, Steve and Gary were constantly expanding labor mobilization outside the boundaries of the factory, connecting class politics with community, ethnic, and legal activism, and translating local economic issues into broader political alliances between workers of different companies, sectors, and countries. Unlike most trade union leaders, they campaigned, researched, networked, and mobilized through the Internet and formed informal political networks outside the traditional labor movement with MPs, journalists, lawyers, intellectuals, and progressive businessmen. It was through one of these networks that the company's current Italian owner was found and closure avoided.

But, contrary to AEU's orthodox notion of business unionism (perfectly incarnated by Gary), Steve constantly challenged the economic logic of the managers and looked at the social consequences of reorganization. For instance, when the logistical manager was sacked and left without the support of colleagues, Steve found him a job on the line. He also fought to keep Jack Darling's disabled son employed and challenged the company's proposal to close the Evergreen Club. The club was located in a neoclassical building

with a billiard room, a small theater, a dance hall, a kitchen, and a big dining area with a view of two bowling greens and the Yorkshire moors. At the club, past and present workers, clerical staff, and trade union representatives played snooker and bingo, lunched together in monthly meetings, and socialized at the company's Christmas parties. Most Evergreen members had retired after having spent their whole working lives at Marlowe–SEC. They remembered the time of mass production, war, nationalization, and the transformation of people, pay scales, and production that followed the arrival of the mythical Phoenix, when most of them "voluntarily" retired. Retired workers, male and female, displayed a fashion, a confrontational political language, and a confidence in the manufacturing industry that both amused and galvanized current workers. Their faces were hardly recognizable as those of the young workers in the company's photo albums, but they embodied SEC's political past and gave hope in the present troubling times. One could argue that Steve pragmatically used the Evergreen Club to increase social cohesion among SEC workers and to perpetuate the previous management's paternalistic views of the company as being "like a big family." But it was not only out of pragmatism that Steve described SEC as a big family. Entering the company when he was 15, he became a skilled worker and political activist through his apprenticeship in the trade union office. He considered himself a "child of the union," an institution that he believed reconciled professional, political, and personal development in a "total way," unlike other institutions such as friendship, school, or family.

The community unionism debate

There is a wide consensus among labor scholars that traditional workplace-based and class-centered forms of labor activism have been displaced by a new capitalist configuration. Postindustrial capitalism—based on subcontracting, flexible production, immaterial capital, transnational workplaces, and precarious and flexible labor—creates fluid and mobile class relations that expand outside the factory into the realm of society. For Antonio Negri (1989), the workers of industrial capitalism were subsumed by capital inside factories, whereas postindustrial workers are subsumed by capital in society and, hence, are "socialised workers." Ronaldo Munck (2004) sees the implosion of the factory as an opportunity to move away from traditional forms of trade unionism toward community-based labor activism. Community unionism breaks with traditional class politics, building transverse alliances between workers and a multitude of political subjects—NGOs, church-based organizations, fair-trade shops, women's associations, and consumer groups. Similarly, Jane Wills argues that the community unionism of the ISTC and the Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council (BWTUC) "may be better suited to meeting the challenges of the contemporary economy" (2001a:468). Traditional trade unions have vertical structures, traditional allegiances, and a narrow redistributive framework, whereas community unions act like genuine social movements, forging multilocal and networked links with ethnic-, gender-, race-, and faith-based grassroots organizations.

One of the problems of implementing community unionism is that it entails a radical shift in workers' perspective. They must move away from the pragmatism of shop-floor relations and from their everyday workplace experiences and see their situation from the perspective of others. Generally, only the high ranking officials or charismatic leaders are able to abstract and expand their political views and look at work not only as a material or economic process but also as a process of symbolic production and cultural recognition.[19] They expand politics beyond the realm of the economic and provide symbolic and cultural understandings of class struggle in tune with the imagination of the whole of society, rather than from the narrow perspective of the working class. In most cases, workers and union reps remain embedded in the dynamics of everyday life on the shop floor, characterized by grievances, fears of persecution, wearing physical labor, and narrow and pragmatic worldviews (Durrenberger 2002). For instance, in *Working for Ford,* Huw Beynon (1973) argues that the AEU and TGWU shop stewards in the Halewood Ford factory in Liverpool lost their political struggles because they were narrowly focused on plant activism and wage bargaining and lacked a broader political vision that included the whole of society. These shop stewards were militant, but in their purely economic focus they were not revolutionaries. Similarly, Teresa Hayter and David Harvey (1993) speak of the "militant particularism" of the Rover workers in their campaign against the closure of their plant at Cowley (U.K.).[20] Engaged in partial and pragmatic struggles at the plant level, they were unable to develop an abstract socialist theory that included the views of the workers in the global South.

Indeed, the narrow workplace and business focus of traditional trade unions can be seen as the product of their ethnocentric framing of class relations (Jakobsen 2001). Many anthropological studies of labor mobilization in the South question ethnocentric notions of class, labor, and politics that are taken for granted in the North. For instance, the Philippine union Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU; Scipes 1992) and the Brazilian Central Workers Union (CUT; Seidman 1994) resemble social movements more closely than they do traditional trade unions.[21] They both rapidly rose to power in the 1980s thanks to support from social forces outside the traditional labor movement, including church organizations, the indigenous movement, women, squatters, intellectuals, and human rights activists. In her study of labor responses to the privatization of the Bolivian mining

industry in the 1980s, June Nash (1979) shows the mixture of cosmological beliefs, traditions, practical customs, and Communist ideology constituting the political consciousness of Oruro miners. Similarly, Michael Kearney (1996) shows the articulation of class and identity in the mobilization of the people of San Jeronimo, in Oaxaca, Mexico. The people of San Jeronimo have fluid identities: as peasants in their town, informal laborers in California agrobusinesses, migrants in the shantytowns of Mexican cities, and proletarians in U.S. cities. Labor movements in the North traditionally have had a white working-class base. In contrast, the fluid identities of Oaxacan peasants help them to develop effective anticapitalist strategies by combining class consciousness with indigenous consciousness, human rights consciousness, and ecological consciousness.

But in the current context of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003), the spatial and political boundaries separating labor in the North and in the South are blurred by the hypermobility of capital, the structural interdependence of labor relations, and the shifting ethnographic and spatial focus of class relations. This structural movement of labor produces new inequalities (Silver 2003), repressions (Gill 2007), and transnational alliances (Anner 2003; Anner and Evans 2004; Beynon 2003). Indeed, in many cases, a narrow economic view—and the opposition between social and business unionism—is reproduced in postcolonial contexts. For instance, Jonathan Parry (2009) discusses the conflict within the Indian steel industry between the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM) union, on the one hand, and the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), on the other hand. INTUC and AITUC represent the aristocracy of formal organized-sector labor, whose interests are protected by state policies, patronage, and legislation. The CMM union articulates the interests of underprivileged sections of the working class, informal laborers, and other political coalitions, including tribal and environmental groups and high-profile civil-society organizations. The charismatic leaders of the CMM expand class relations beyond the "purely economical" (Parry 2009:175) and combine local cultural symbols taken from different political registers—Communist, tribal, environmental—into a new revolutionary discourse. José Ricardo Ramalho and Marco Aurélio Santana (2001) show a similar conflict between business-oriented and community-based factions inside the Brazilian metalworkers union.

In addition to space and ethnography, time and history are central dimensions for understanding the movement of labor. Capitalist development can be seen as a linear trajectory of progressive labor alienation or of separation of the economic meaning of work from its social or cultural context (Carrier 1992). Or, more than a linear progression from society to the economy, the experience of labor under capitalism can be seen as oscillation between these two poles. For instance, Michael Burawoy (2003) discusses the double movement of labor commodification and class mobilization in early capitalism in Britain and shows the mix of workplace-based, class-oriented activism and communitarian, Chartist, cooperative, and Owenite ideals within the early working-class movement.

Similarly, Craig Calhoun (1995) suggests that 19th-century labor movements in Europe and North America had many of the same characteristics as the "new" social movement of the 21st century, including concerns about religion, lifestyle, gender, and culture, and he argues that the emergence of productivist and bureaucratic labor movements was as much the product of modernist historiography as of state ideology under Communism and socialism. The history of labor is paradoxical and circular. In many ways, postindustrial capitalism did not liberate people from work (Gorz 1999) but subjected them to very traditional forms of labor extractions and mobilization (Huws 2003; Mollona 2009).

A short history of steel trade unionism in Sheffield

Although, by 1860, Sheffield steelmakers dominated the world market in railroad, armor, and gun manufacture, they relied extensively on the traditional crucible process—side by side with the Bessemer converter[22]—and employed a variety of skilled artisans, such as cutlers, forgers, blacksmiths, and toolmakers. Inside the factory, artisans controlled the labor process; supervised, trained, and employed kin and apprentices; and owned the main factors of production, such as hammers, cutters, and crucibles. Some of these artisans also worked outside the factory during off hours and participated in informal networks in the neighborhood. In these early stages of steel production, there was no clear-cut distinction between the working class, the artisans, and other subaltern classes. Some toolmakers, cutlers, blacksmiths, rollers, and forgers were fervent Chartists and Liberals and participated in anticapitalist demonstrations and trade combinations. Others shared the political views of the Tory Party and the aristocracy and supported independent and small-scale production, in opposition to mass-production, industrialization, and the intrusion of the state into the economy.

In the 1890s, industrial capitalists set up integrated steelworks employing thousands of workers, but they still paid their rents to the local Duke of Norfolk. Unlike U.S. and German cosmopolitan industrial capitalists, Sheffield industrialists were at the periphery of the British financial empire, their "spirit" still embedded in the structures of Hanoverian society and subordinated to financial speculators, entrepreneurial lords, and petty capitalists. Because they could not rely on the repressive apparatus of the modern factory system, they exploited their laborers through

two institutions of civil society—the Parliament and the labor market. In this context, labor struggles emerged in the form of civic struggle and through the language of "just price," rights to property, and social equality. With the consolidation of the factory system, parliamentary politics was eclipsed by the science of political economy—which set mechanical equivalences between the economy and society—and by the emergence of the workplace as the main locus of labor–capital confrontation.

Industrialization led to labor amalgamation and to the creation in 1908 of the first steel trade union in Britain, the Sheffield Trade and Labour Council, associated with the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Reflecting the fragmentation within ILP, the Labour Council was internally fragmented between Communists and Liberals and between skilled and unskilled steelworkers. It eventually split into two separate steel unions—the Amalgamated Engineers Federation (AEF) and the ISTC. Both the ISTC and the AEF embraced the productivist logic of the capitalists and the language of political economy, articulating their political struggles in terms of wages, productivity, and economics. But the AEF consisted of skilled workers and engineers with radical views on, for example, women's rights, pacifism, internationalism, collectivism, and the abolition of the bourgeois state, whereas the ISTC had a largely unskilled base with militarist and nationalist views. The "proletarians" affiliated with the ISTC, in line with the ethics of the early Labour Party, fought for the empowerment of the working class through its control of factory labor, wage bargaining, trade amalgamation, and collaboration with the liberal classes. The utopian and skilled Communists of the AEF fought for the workers' liberation from work and the elimination of the bourgeois state. Thus, the politics of early steel trade unions mixed revolutionary and reactionary forces, with Communist engineers and skilled workers looking forward to the liberation of society from work and the Labour unskilled steelworkers pushing for their integration into bourgeois society. The split between the Communist Party and the Labour Party took place during the First World War. Communist engineers and shop stewards affiliated with the renamed AEU opposed British imperial ambitions in Europe through blockages, stoppages, and strikes,[23] whereas proletarians affiliated with the ISTC subscribed to the nationalist discourse that put industry and the workers at the center of British expansionist strategy in Europe.

The steel industry was central to the project of postwar reconstruction and of rescaling the British Empire into a European nation. When the steel industry was nationalized in 1967, BSC merged 14 major companies and their 200 subsidiaries and became the second largest steel company in the non-Communist world, with a total capital of £1.4 billion and a labor force of 270,000. At the time, 90 percent of the male population of Sheffield—known as the "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire"—were steelworkers. In this context of "Keynesian socialism," both the ISTC and the AEU were co-opted into the corporatist framework of industrial relations based on coparticipation between the state, employers, and industrial trade unions. This framework implied greater involvement of trade union representatives in workplace management and in activities of wage bargaining, job enrichment, and reorganization at the plant level. The workplace was the central space for the recruitment, representation, and servicing of members by the stewards and for broader political decisions within the union (Heery et al. 2000). Like the corporations they confronted, industrial trade unions had a narrow corporate focus, hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, formalized career and recruitment structures, and sectional and individualistic practices of mobilization and representation.

In the 1980s, after a long history of mergers, plant closures, strikes, and redundancies, the steel industry was privatized through the successive Phoenix schemes, which led to more than 52,000 job cuts and a reduction of one million tons of capacity per annum. Privatized companies bypassed national negotiation through lump-sum bonus schemes and suppressed central bargaining, developing multiunion negotiations. Following the "monetarist" dogma, the Thatcher government saw industrial relations as the cause of labor market rigidity and high inflation and, hence, as obstructing the objective of financial deregulation. Fiscal deregulation, pay decentralization, and the curbing of trade unions forced the AEU and the ISTC to subscribe to the partnership model of industrial relations, which entailed collaboration with the capitalists on human resource management (HRM). But the privatization affected the steel industry much more than the engineering industry, which remained largely profitable and under the control of national capitalists.[24] Thus, the business unionism of the AEU reflected its bargaining power and the industry's relative strength, whereas, for the ISTC, business unionism meant acquiescence to managerial restructuring.

More recently, extensive subcontracting (Fevre 1983) and labor deregulation have increased the role of informal, precarious, small-scale, and subcontracted labor and of flexiwork. For many local observers, the buyouts of Sheffield's steel plants by foreign capitalists symbolized the decline of Britain and the rise of Asian hegemony in the steel industry.[25] In this new context, trade union activism polarized again. The ISTC focused on community unionism and the AEU on shop-floor activism, wage negotiation, national bargaining, and strike actions. As it was for the early 19th-century union, for the ISTC the political was situated in the realm of the community, human rights, and civic action, whereas for the AEU, the "new" political coincided with the realm of the economy.

Conclusion

The cases of UNSOR and SEC turn the opposition between the pure economic vision of business unionism and the

social morality of community unionism upside down. A mixture of business pragmatism, technological determinism, and monetarism inspired the community unionism of the ISTC. ISTC officers viewed redundancies and the closure of the electric furnace at UNSOR as the "natural" outcome of the economic forces of mechanization and productivity increases in the steel industry. The ISTC also subscribed to the monetarist logic of New Labour, based on pension returns and supply-side interventions to compensate for job losses in the manufacturing industry. There is increasing evidence that workers' pensions are tools of co-optation of the labor movement (Duménil and Lévy 2004), rather than of working-class emancipation, as is often assumed. In fact, the ISTC considered redundancies a purely economic matter and was satisfied with compensating for the loss of wages of some UNSOR workers with increased pension returns, without considering the subjective and political loss the workers experienced. In negotiating with management, the ISTC did not protect the furnace workers or the wireworkers but, rather, the narrow interests of its traditional members. One of the main principles of community unionism is to develop horizontal and nonhierarchical networks with members and other unions, but the ISTC, instead, consolidated its organizational structure, incorporating smaller unions and associations, performing welfare services previously performed by the state, and forging one-way communication lines between the national and the divisional level.

Contrary to the AEU's supposed business ethics, the union's branch officers carefully assessed the social and experiential consequences of economic reorganization and pushed politics beyond the boundaries of class and the factory. Through the activism of AEU branch officers, redundant managers were given jobs on the shop floor; workers demonstrated together with black, community, and antiglobalization activists; miners and steelworkers shared their political experiences; and retired workers and their families spent time with the rest of the workforce. The split between the economic pragmatism of the ISTC (disguised as community unionism) and the utopian socialism of the AEU (covered by a productivist ideology) reflects a long history of opposition and oscillation between two moralities of labor in the trade union movement, one that sees the political taking place in the realm of the economic and one that sees it taking place in the realm of society. Looking at the history of the labor movement in Sheffield, one can argue that these two moralities of labor blurred in times of imperial expansion and of financialization and deregulation of the economy, whereas industrialization, amalgamation, and the rescaling of the British Empire into an industrial nation increased the perceived moral boundaries between society and the economy. Today, communitarianism, civic activism, the language of labor rights, and the "moral economy" of the early trade unions have been rediscovered by the "new" labor movement. This reemergence of the moral economy and the decline of the economic under New Labour can be read as a return to the deregulated financial capitalism and mercantilism of the early empire, rather than as a sign of working-class renaissance.

My research suggests, first, that community unionists' current emphasis on the moral economy obfuscates the experience of labor under capitalism, which is based on the double movements of socialization or emancipation (taking place in society) and commoditization (taking place in the factory or the market). Trade union and labor activists should think of the political as a movement in time and space, rather than a uniform field of action. Health and safety regulation at UNSOR is an instance of the double movement of socialization and commoditization of labor. On the one hand, health and safety legislation improves working conditions and prevents hazards and illness at work. Therefore, trade union reps and workers use it as a tool of workplace activism. On the other hand, in the reality of life on the UNSOR shop floor, health and safety regulations have become a form of labor objectification that legitimates managerial reorganization and the political pragmatism of trade union officials. In my ethnography, the politics of health and safety emerged in two oppositional forms. Lind and the hot workers saw health and safety as a way of improving the labor-intensive phases of the production process, whereas Bates—reflecting the views of the finishing department and of management—saw it as a labor-cutting device. The reps' different perceptions of the European political context constitute another example of this oppositional dialectics. Whereas the reps in UNSOR thought of Europe as providing a legal framework for improving workers' rights, the reps in SEC saw Europe in terms of a failing economic partnership with a foreign carmaker.[26] Failing to recognize the continuity between moments of socialization and moments of commoditization of labor, the AEU and the ISTC used oppositional models of activism that engaged workers in partial struggles, located either in society or in the economy.

My second suggestion, addressed to labor scholars, is that abstract models of union activism rarely apply to the reality of everyday life on the shop floor. The theoretical opposition between community unionism and business unionism is not borne out by my ethnography, which shows that the stewards of both UNSOR and SEC mixed workplace and community activism in different ways. For anthropologists familiar with the formalist–substantivist debate in the 1960s and the "moral economy" debate in peasant studies in the 1980s,[27] the opposition between the purely social and purely economic is not new. Indeed, in a famous essay, anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1996) suggests that the invention of "society" by social scientists was the flip side of the economists' invention of "the economy" under the neoconservative regime of Thatcher. In a similar vein, one can argue that community unionism is the flip side of

the monetarism and technocratic capitalism in New Labour in Britain.

My third suggestion, addressed to anthropologists, is to recognize that factories say as much about society as they do about the economy (see also Parry 2009). They are spaces of intersection between personal lives and macroeconomic forces, individual memories and collective history, self-expression, and rationalization. They are political spaces insomuch as they reveal the complex connections between people's livelihoods and structural forces through layers of objects, narratives, memories, and social relations emerging from their symbolic and material production.

Reflecting on labor activism through history and ethnography, I also argue here for rethinking the notion of "political advocacy" in anthropology. Politically engaged anthropologists have rightly suggested that their forms of advocacy should be contingent on the shape of the struggles of the communities they study (Gledhill 2000). But in so doing, they have often uncritically supported community-based and social forms of advocacy in the South and opposed class-based and corporate activism of the kind practiced in the North.[28]

My ethnography shows that, beyond theoretical models and ideological positions, the everyday reality of labor activism always entails the mixing of community and workplace activism.[29] Today, workers, peasants, indigenous people, and the poor are part of the same global space of accumulation; transnational corporations perform the functions of states and of civil society (ecofriendly businesses, debt relief, or paramilitary violence); and global factories rely on socialized—domestic, precarious, and informal—labor. In this context, do we anthropologists know where our communities are located and in what forms our political engagement is most effective? Today, indigenous subjects are also global proletarians. Their community activism is also informed by corporate politics, their domestic economy also embedded in the wage economy, and their cultural consciousness also experienced as working-class consciousness. The ambiguous location of contemporary global factories between the economy and society calls for a new anthropological advocacy oriented toward both cultural recognition and economic redistribution.

Notes

1. Fisher and Downey 2006 contains excellent contributions on the New Economy.

2. At the United Steel Organization (UNSOR) factory, I worked as a furnace assistant on the night shift three times a week. At the Sheffield Engineering Company (SEC) factory I worked as a helper in the tool room one day a week. I took an active part in the events I describe in this article.

3. Ronald Dore (2000) sketches the main differences between Anglo-Saxon stock-market capitalism (with its short-term goal of maximizing returns on shares, low workers' involvement, and managerial bonus culture) and the stakeholders' capitalism of Japan and Germany (with its long-term emphasis on profitability and good administration, workers' participation, and community involvement).

4. Membership in the ISTC fell from 108,000 in 1980 to just over 30,000 in 1997.

5. The layoffs included 22 workers in the melting shop, 20 workers in the rolling and billet mills, and 18 indirect workers.

6. The workers were trained to set up machines without having to rely on the fitter or on Lind's supervision.

7. Given the low staffing levels, greater labor intensity forced the wireworkers into dangerous shortcuts.

8. During my fieldwork, several furnace explosions occurred in Sheffield steelworks, in one case leading to the death of a furnace worker. In addition, an illegal trade in contaminated scrap was discovered.

9. Health and Safety Committee minutes, April 19, 2000.

10. Phoenix was the name of a series of privatizations of the steel industry under Thatcher and affected both of the factories that I discuss here. I discuss the details of the privatization program subsequently in the text.

11. Paul Kent's (1999) questionnaire to ISTC members shows that legal advice and workplace protection were much more relevant to ISTC members than community activities were.

12. At the time of my fieldwork, Britian was the only European country not to comply with the European social model of mandatory employee representation, informing of employees, and consultation of employees' representatives. This model was only partially introduced in Britian with EC directive 2002/14.

13. According to Lind, Corus had the political support of the ISTC and the government because it employed the son of the union's general secretary and because it served strategic electoral constituencies.

14. Bentley was already a subsidiary of the Volkswagen Group.

15. Under the new financial management, machines were not bought but leased and came with free assistance from the manufacturers' engineers.

16. My case does not suggest that SEC–Marlowe workers subscribed uncritically to the model of business unionism, but they did support the model in times of reorganization and uncertainty. For an instance of oppositional consciousness of line workers against business unionism, see Kasmir 2005 and Lopez 2004.

17. *Kanban* refers to the stocking of material on the line, which replaces internal servicing.

18. The Indian bidder was said to be related to the Tata Group and the German bidder to the Thyssen Krupp group.

19. For instance, the successful renewal of the AFL-CIO under the leadership of John Sweeny was linked to his strategy of incorporating different cultural identities—black, indigenous, gay, feminist—within the traditionally white working-class movement (Fantasia 1988).

20. The usefulness of Harvey's theories, as well as their limitations, for a contemporary anthropology of labor is extensively discussed in Kasmir and Carbonella 2008.

21. For examples of social unionism in the United States, see Clawson 2003.

22. A small furnace.

23. The AEU subsequently merged with the TGWU, forming the current body named Unite.

24. The most profitable companies in the engineering sectors also were not nationalized in 1967.

25. Most notable among the buyouts was the acquisition of Corus by the Indian Tata Steel company in 2006.

26. A similar pragmatic rejection of European-based forms of workers' solidarities is described in Wills 2001b.

27. The current debate on community unionism echoes the debate that took place within anthropology on the economic reductionism of traditional Marxist labor analysis, which was triggered by Edward Palmer Thompson's (1971) famous discussion of the moral economy of early labor movements.

28. Kirsch 2002 describes an interesting example of anticorporate activism.

29. For a similar point, see Karatani 2003.

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accepted April 27, 2009
final version submitted May 6, 2009

Massimiliano Mollona
Goldsmiths Gollege—Anthropology
New Cross, London SE14 6NW
United Kingdom

ans01mnm@gold.ac.uk