Flawed Globalization: Why Traditional Political Organizations Have Problems Forming Transnational Meta-Organizations

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Abstract

Departing from an organizational perspective and using the cases of Socialist International and four European trade unions, this paper illustrates why political parties and trade unions have difficulty acting globally. The analysis shows that international or transnational organizations for national parties or trade unions are established as meta-organizations, and herein lies the key to explaining their problems in becoming global actors. The national embeddedness of their members results in broad agendas and quests for national solutions, which divides and weakens leadership. Comparing these meta-organizations to a more successful global political organization, Amnesty International, reveals that its organization is quite the opposite: a centralized leadership, a narrow agenda, not working for the immediate interests of its members or finding solutions to the issues it raises. The paper concludes that if this form of organization is necessary in global politics then there is little room for political parties and unions on a global arena.

Preface

The present report is the result of a side-project, run by us, the authors, for a number of years. Over time, the project's ambitions have grown, but we have not had the opportunity to complete the ambitions with sufficient empirical work. Still, the results and our discussions are, to our minds, interesting, and we therefore wish to make them available this way. To date, there is almost no research undertaken concerning political parties and trade unions ambitions to globalize their activities. What we do know is that globalizing has been an issue for them. This is curious, because many other organizations are successfully globalizing. Hence, we should ask why this is not the case for political parties and trade unions? In this paper, we answer this question by looking into the specific form parties and unions have chosen when acting outside individual countries, comparing this form with other more successfully global political organizers.

Content

Introduction

Globalization, which seems to affect all social phenomena, is now a well-established discourse within the social sciences. It probably makes more sense to talk about *globalizations* (Mann, 2013), however, because globalization is far from a unitary process. Globalization occurs in a number of ways in a variety of social spheres, and different types of organizations have varying possibilities for becoming global actors. In order to explain what global society looks like, therefore, we must describe the differing forms of non-national actors (Kekk & Sikink, 1998; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Our intention in this paper is to explain why political parties and trade unions have difficulty going global and acting outside the framework of the nation state. In addressing this issue, we want to contribute to the body of literature that helps to provide an understanding of the requirements of contemporary politics (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Beck, 2000; Held, 2004; Sassen, 2007).

Political parties and trade unions have been pivotal in the political landscape of modern nation states. Parties comprise the core of the representative parliamentary system. This is not the case with trade unions, which are not equally influential in all countries. It is fair to say, however, that even in countries where unions are less strong than they are in Germany, Great Britain and Sweden, for instance, trade unions have been significant actors in modern politics, although globalization processes have weakened, but not eliminated, the significance of both political parties and trade unions on a national scale. But political parties and trade unions are still searching for their global forms in order to be as consequential internationally as they have been nationally (Archibugi, 2003; Scholte, 2006).

To be sure, political parties and trade unions differ from each other as global actors. International trade unions are active in many types of organizations, having representation in such bodies as the International Labour Organization and partnering with the European Union

in the format of European Works Councils. Political parties are primarily bound to national and regional parliaments, and not well represented outside of their own countries. In this sense, international trade unions are less national than parties.

In spite of these differences, political parties and trade unions share the common strategy of uniting to form *international* organizations when in search for forms of global cooperation. An international organization is not fully global, however, even though it may have members from many countries. Globalization means going beyond national organizations. It is a process by which territories are paralleled by non-territorial forms of organizing that are not locally embedded (cf. Scholte, 2000). Both the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum are examples of attempts to form a global, non-territorial political organization. Although touching down at various territorial locations, these organizations are not bound to them by representation. Together with other non-territorially bound organizations they comprise a global political landscape in which political parties and trade unions are also active – but not with the same leverage they usually enjoy in their own countries (c.f. Kaldor, 2003).

Moreover, even though international trade unions have greater non-national impact than political parties do, they both share many of the predicaments of globalization, because they are cast in the same mold: the meta-organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), embedding them nationally. We propose that this is a crucial aspect in explaining the flawed globalization of both these types of organizations. The meta-organization embeds political international organizations in national concerns, hampering their non-national political ambitions. In what follows, we exemplify and explain some of the reasons for their national embeddedness. To do this, we use the cases of Socialist International and four European trade unions to answer three questions: 1) What different forms of organization are available for the globalization of their activities, and why precisely these forms? 2) What are the weaknesses of these forms in

the global political landscape? 3) How do these organizations differ from more successful global organizations? In addressing this last question, we compare our five cases with Amnesty International.

Empirically, we undertake our analysis from the perspective of organization history based on previous research, and from our study of contemporary expressions of non-national politics. Our contemporary analysis comprises interviews and source material from four European trade unions, Socialist International (SI), and Amnesty International.[1] We begin by examining earlier research and discussing what we believe to be missing. Then, in order to answer our first question – about the what and why of organizations for globalization – we present the development of the organizational forms that became the international labour movement, from the so-called First International, established in 1864, to Socialist International and the International Trade Union Confederation (INTUC) of today. Next, in order to answer our second question – about the weaknesses of these organization forms in the global political landscape – we discuss their limitations in greater detail. The last question – on the differences between successful and unsuccessful globalizing organizations – is answered in the final part of the paper, by comparing Socialist International and the European trade unions with Amnesty International.

Previous research
Research on globally active political parties is conspicuously absent from the literature on globalization and politics, where it is rare to find discussions on the role of parties outside the state, in a nonterritorial sphere (e.g. Habermas, 2001; Held, 2004; Nash, 2010). To be sure, there is some research on the effects of globalization on domestic political parties (e.g. Berger, 2000), as well as parties for immigrants and populations in diaspora (e.g. Dark, 2003), but not on parties and their role outside of nation states. The attempts to create international

cooperation among national political parties that occur within so-called political internationals have rarely been the object of scientific analysis. There is some historical research on the early political and trade union internationals, but practically no research on Socialist International, which was founded in 1951 and has operated continuously ever since – nor on the corresponding organization, Liberal International (see Smith, 1997, 2001, however).

Research on trade unions acting globally is easier to find. Above all, research in this field attempts to find good examples of national unions re-orienting themselves in the era of globalization (e.g. Munch & Waterman, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 2007; Bieler & Lindberg, 2011) or analyses of trade unions in different countries describing problems and attitudes within these countries (e.g. Baines, 2010; Peterson, Wahlström, & Wennerhag, 2012). There is also some research on the way obstacles and difficulties for extended transnational trade union cooperation are perceived from national perspectives (Hyman, 2005; Fetzer, 2010; Larsson, 2012). Silver (2003) has made a key contribution, with an analysis of labour unrest since 1870, advancing the understanding of the relationship between labour and capital and the importance that the formation of labour resistance can have for both national and global politics. Silver, however, focuses on national organizations. Analysis of actual transnational trade union federations are rare in the globalization and global governance literature, and, as Cotton and Gumbrell-McCormick (2012) have observed, what does exist often lacks comprehensive theoretical attempts to explain the difficulties experienced by labour organizations. Cotton and Gumbrell-McCormick's analysis of global unions as imperfect multilateral organizations represents one significant exception. They show that internal differences are the one main problem faced by global unions in their attempts to be efficient policy advocates for their members. Their differences, based upon economic resources and expertise skills, for example, impede their possibilities for mobilizing.

Relative to earlier research, this paper makes two significant contributions. First, we bring party organizations into the discussion on the globalization of politics. Second, we analyze both political parties and trade unions, comparing their attempts to globalize from a comprehensive theoretical perspective and explaining why political parties and trade unions have difficulty acting outside the nation-state framework. For us, the organizational forms of their attempts to work beyond nation states are key to this understanding (Hyman, 2005). As Silver argues, the proliferation of production sites has renewed the premium on associational power (Silver, 2003). New agencies and sites of conflict emerge, with new demands and forms of struggle, reflecting the shifting terrain on which labour relations develop (Silver, 2003), but the organizational forms remain the same. We maintain that this is a fundamental issue for understanding the impediments of global party and trade union politics. Organization studies have been used successfully for enhancing social science knowledge on the globalization of politics in other forms (e.g. Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Drori, Meyer, & Hvang, 2006; Boström & Garsten, 2008; Tamm-Hallström & Boström, 2010). Yet, the most traditional actors of politics, parties and trade unions, are absent in these studies. Combining the insights of organization theory with an empirical focus on these actors will generate a necessary contribution for understanding the globalization of politics.

The globalization of trade unions and socialist parties – from early days to contemporary times
We can distinguish three ways in which organized labour is established globally, with different courses and consequences: the travel of ideas, the travel of organizations, and the establishment of meta-organizations. All these methods have been used by socialist parties and trade unions with varying frequency over time.

In the first case, ideas and conceptions of the way organizations should look, what they can do, and how they can act are transferred among organizations in different locations – a phenomenon usually described as a *travel of ideas* (Czarniawska & Sévon, 1996). This process may lead to increasing isomorphism among organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which, in the field of politics, can contribute to a global landscape, in the sense that there may be similar ideas and political practices in many organizations across the globe. That organizations adopting or applying similar ideas become alike cannot be taken for granted, however. When investigating the travel of ideas, one often finds that organizations take the opportunity to adjust adopted ideas to their local context. They translate these ideas to fit their own environment better or choose those ideas they wish to apply (Czarniawska & Sévon, 1996).

From the beginning, the establishment of international labour organizations in the middle of the 19th century was characterized by the travel of ideas, by which local entrepreneurs and agitators picked up contemporary thoughts on the need for organizing workers and established the first local and then national organizations. These early organizations were relatively weak, but still managed to spread and diffuse their ideas, largely because of the travels and engagement of individuals (Hyman, 2005; Hobsbawm, 1988). There was a strong diffusion of ideas, particularly during the 1870s, when political parties became a fashionable form of organization. Between 1871 and 1889, 16 new socialist parties were established all over Europe (Eley, 2002). But because the diffusion occurred in the form of ideas that traveled, the parties, although all socialist, became dissimilar. Likewise, in the early days of trade unions diffusion occurred mainly through a travel of ideas, by which separate organizations were founded. Consequently, the organizational structures of these national unions became vastly different (Eley, 2002).

Another model for the spreading of organizations worldwide involves the *travel of individual organizations* (cf. Ahrne & Brunsson, 2013). This model for globalization is most common among private companies. But there are other examples, such as the Catholic Church, and social or political organizations like the Red Cross, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace. Although some decentralization may occur when organizations travel, power and control over the organization rests largely with the top leaders at headquarters.

In 1864, during the first days of what was to become the international labour movement, there was a significant attempt to establish an organization intended to travel across the globe: what is usually called the First International or, strictly speaking, the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). It was the intention of the emerging labour movement to work internationally (Hobsbawm, 1988), and the IWA comprised a broad spectrum of political and trade union groups. The internationalism of the organization was based on the conviction that workers from different countries should cooperate. Yet, national interests and differences would soon become one of the factors that finally destroyed the IWA in 1876. A later attempt to form a traveling organization was Comintern (or the Third International), established in 1919, comprising communist parties from numerous countries. It was however dissolved at the end of World War II (McDermott & Agnew, 1996).

Thus, through the travels of ideas, organizations of various socialist denominations (political parties and trade unions) have been established in almost all states of the world, albeit translated to local and national circumstances. The few efforts to establish a central organization that could travel as a homogenous organization have failed. In order to establish cooperation among national organizations, a third model has been applied, for the involvement of organizations in transnational and global processes: the *meta-organization* (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), in which existing organizations band together under an umbrella organization. This is a relatively easy way to establish international organizations, and there

are a large number of global meta-organizations in various fields: Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), World Trade Organization (WTO), the European Union (EU), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), and BirdLife International, to name but a handful of over 10,000 international meta-organizations that exist today (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008).

Compared to globalization through travel of the organization, the meta-organization is advantageous for the local (often national) branches, primarily because meta-organizations are based on voluntary membership; members retain their independence, and have equal opportunity to make decisions through consensus. Meta-organizations do not necessarily become particularly strong agents, however. They are dependent on their members for resources and for effecting various decisions and actions, and they usually command far fewer resources than their member organizations do. They may also have difficulty making decisions, precisely because consensus is usually required (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008).

Since the collapse of the First International in 1876, all efforts at establishing international cooperation among national trade union organizations and socialist parties (with the exception of Comintern) have been in the form of a meta-organization. The so-called Second International established in 1889 as the follow-up to the IWA was constructed as a meta-organization, with members from 20 countries. Because differences among the parties were already considerable, the only possibility was to create an organization in which existing independent parties could cooperate without being governed by other bodies, least of all in another country. The Second International split at the outbreak of World War I, however, when parties from several countries set transnational working-class interests aside, to support their own governments.

Immediately after World War I, attempts were made to resume activities in the Second International, but they came to nothing. It was only in 1951, after a series of initiatives for increased cooperation among various socialist parties, that the Socialist International (SI) could be established – and it exists to this day. Its constitution was drawn up as a meta-organization that was not to limit freedom of action for individual parties through binding decisions (Hejzlar, 1983; cf. Christensen, 1992).

A division between party politics and labour union cooperation was a key difference between the Second International and the first attempts to globalize labour organizations. The underlying idea being that labour market questions should be separate from more general political questions about changes in society, and be pursued by two sister organizations: the union and the party (Milner, 1988).

The history of global cooperation among national trade union centers begins with the establishment of the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC) in 1901. It was relatively strong from the beginning, but could do little without national ties. Over time, a 'national primate' was developed, weakening the meta-organization (Milner, 1988). During World War I, the worldwide trade union cooperation was split, with the establishment of a Christian democratic trade union branch. The division lasted up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Traub-Merz & Eckl, 2007). It was not until 2006 that the ITUC, with members from 155 countries, was formed as a global meta-organization for national trade union centers.

National embeddedness and international meta-organizations
Our first research question addressed the available forms of organization within the international labour movement, and the answer is that the only possibility to establish

international, albeit not global, cooperation has been to form meta-organizations. Meta-organizations have been a critical factor in protecting the independence of national organizations. Our second question concerned the problems of the form used when trying to use a meta-organization in the global political landscape: What is it about this form of organization that does not work well for non-national trade unions and political parties? A meta-organization per se is not predestined to encounter difficulties in establishing a transnational or global cooperation. As a matter of fact, there are a number of successful global meta-organizations; for example the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO), and IATA have all managed to achieve global standardization of products or create common ethical norms, while providing support for their members. One precondition for the success of a meta-organization in the global coordination of its members, however, is substantial similarity among members on such issues as agenda, resources, and location (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). This has been a difficult precondition for meta-organizations to satisfy in the international labour movement. In the following, we provide some answers to why this is the case.

A general trend among our cases over time is the growing number of members. When the Socialist International was founded in 1951, there were 34 representatives, increasing only to 37 by the beginning of the 1970s. In November, 2012, however, the SI had 102 full members, 15 consultative members, and 31 'Observer parties'. This expansion took place at the expense of member similarity. There are more members now, but they are more dissimilar.

Among international trade unions, the trend is to rationalize their organizations into increasingly larger units, which has happened through mergers. Through the formation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2006, for instance, the two main competing trade unions at the global level merged into the new ITUC. The trend is also visible in the case of European trade union federations, which have experienced a number of

mergers, creating a political landscape with fewer, larger organizations – but with greater dissimilarities.

For both types of international labour organizations, these changes may have aided their legitimacy, but it has not solved the problems of coordination and decision making. Old dissimilarities are brought into the new organization, and what is gained in legitimacy is lost in its capacity to act. When too many unions or parties are included in the same meta-organization, their differences may threaten the possibilities of a 'genuine unity of action, based on the articulation of common interests and beliefs' (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2000, p. 40).

Cotton & Gumbrell-McCorrmick (2012) have suggested that one explanation for the internal dilemmas of global unions is their increased size, resulting in a greater distance to individual union members, a factor that may, in turn, have an impact on their internal legitimacy. If we understand international unions and political internationals as meta-organizations, it becomes clear that the distance to individual members and resulting lack of internal legitimacy is but one issue that may explain their difficulty in uniting themselves and acting. In addition, and more importantly, we submit that the differences among members of the same meta-organization occur because of their strong local and national embeddedness. Although achieving similarity among their members is difficult for all meta-organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), we suggest that it is more pronounced in political meta-organizations, given that their members are unusually dependent on and embedded in national and local conditions. Parties and unions are intermediary organizations, and their task is to handle demands from members and sympathizers (voters) related to other organizations. Most of these intermediate activities are directed toward actors in the national environment, such as the state, local authorities, corporations, schools, and hospitals.

In what follows, we distinguish four dimensions of relationships between political organizations and their environments. For comparative reasons, they have been broadly formulated in order to be applicable to different types of political organizations (e.g. a union, a party, a social movement organization, a think tank). Three of these conditions pertain to their aims and activities: how the organization's aims relate to the interests of their members and supporters, whether the organization's agenda is specialized or broad, and the extent to which the organization is involved in solving political problems by negotiation with other organizations or by monitoring others. The fourth condition is related more directly to the form of organization: the extent to which it is hierarchical and the strength and power of its leadership.

Interests

A prime organizational goal for unions and parties is to work for and in the name of their members, for their mandate is to protect the interests of their members. Thus, a national labour union must protect its national members first, even though it is part of an international meta-organization with the broader aim of looking out for each other. A national political party cannot work only for its own members in the way a union must; they work for existing and potential voters in their countries. When part of an international meta-organization, a national party, cannot accept politics that could be seen as detrimental to its constituencies, therefore, it will, in practice hinder the organization from engaging in international politics. The most obvious example is the dissolution of Second International and the ISNTUC at the beginning of World War I. In both cases, it was the interests of the national members that led to collapse. We see the same tendencies today, both in unions and in the SI.

One recurring issue in the international trade unions is the diverse interests of member organizations from different countries with different types and levels of welfare systems,

rendering common solutions difficult. Although the member organizations can identify the common problems, their different interests, derived from different national contexts, make it difficult for the meta-organization to find an appropriate task to champion.

The regional secretary of UNI Europa exemplified this tension by describing the struggle for European legislation on temporary agencies:

> Now we start doing something, but obviously we have to compromise. We have to… it cannot be as good as it is in Belgium or in Sweden. It will not be as good. That means that maybe some of the unions face a reality, in which they are saying, 'Oh, we are considerably over the European average', and they have to say, 'Very good, we should improve even over this average because we are good'. But some of our members find it very difficult to accept that at European level it is not going to be as good as it is in their countries. And they are not prepared to compromise.

The general secretary is saying that local, everyday activities are the highest priority for national representatives. Consequently, as an international labour organization, UNI Europa is constrained by diverging interests at the members' national levels, making common international politics a difficult achievement.

In some cases, the protection of national interests have even led to competition among members. As an international manager at the EMF describes it:

> Because I think, although politically… everybody is supportive of international solidarity. But in practice it is very difficult, when you are on two sides of a competition, when it is about relocating

production to one country or where the investment will go. And I

think there is a conflict between the international solidarity concept

and the day-to-day fight of keeping it up.

In spite of the best intentions to cooperate, the trade union member organizations are

competing with one another, because their primary interest is to obtain job opportunities in

their own countries. Exceptions were mentioned in the interviews – the relocation of SAAB,

for example, where workers at two plants in Germany and Sweden were to compete for a new

plant. At EMF they are proud of the work they were able to do, ruling out competition

between these two national members. This case, however, came up in interviews as a rare

example. The usual state of affairs is competition, not cooperation.

Although members in the SI do not compete with each other, differences among member

parties with backgrounds in different political systems may cause conflicts. There is a risk of

guilt by association between parties from different political systems. During and after the

outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011, for example, it was an embarrassment for many SI

members at the national level when it became known that President Mubarak's party was a

member. Consequently, it has been important for SI member organizations to watch what

other members are doing, and there have been several instances over the decades of members

demanding that other members should be excluded (Christensen, 1992). A recent expression

of this dilemma occurred in 2011, when representatives of member parties in 23 countries sent

a letter to the President of the Socialist International, expressing the problem: 'But not all

member parties of the SI fulfill the hopes that have been placed in them. Some have lost the

common compass and turned away from the democratic path'. The signatories demanded that

the SI become much better at handling issues regarding parties that are beginning to show

signs that they are no longer standing up for mutual goals and values.

<u>Broad agendas – broad national interface</u>

The fact that political views can vary as much as they do in the meta-organizations studied here is also related to the members' broad agendas, with broad interface to their national contexts. In comparison with other types of organizations, such as corporations, sports clubs, or religious organizations, political parties and trade unions have a broader interface with local environments, giving them strong ties to their immediate surroundings.

In the case of parties, this breadth exists because parties are usually not able to specialize. They are tied to one state and must be prepared to face any question on the political agenda (Weber, 1994). Their agenda is primarily national, because parties are involved in local and national struggles and compete with other parties in a national party system (Mair & Mudde, 1998; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Kitschelt, 2013). Labour unions are somewhat narrower in scope; they do not have the same obligations as political parties do to engage in a variety of political matters. Nevertheless, their agendas are broad enough to provide contacts with a large array of actors in national contexts, which may generate difficulties at the international level. Taking the example of Sweden's labour organization (LO) - its political tasks include such issues as family policy, welfare, climate change, and young adults (www.lo.se 18 November 2013). These issues may be self-evident in one national context, but become a burden to the international organization.

In the SI, for example, such issues as anti-abortion and pro-death penalty views have been brought to the agenda by member parties with a national context that renders these issues important. Another area of divergence is related to international relations and foreign policy, in which member parties depend on national priorities and alignments. One of the most infected issues in the SI has been questions regarding membership and representation of parties from Israel and Palestine (Christensen, 1992).

Thus, unions and parties are political organizations that broadly interface with their national environment. This may be a working precondition nationally, but in the international meta-organization, it is a problem if member parties and unions at the national level assume and act upon issues that other members of the meta-organization cannot accept. It easily becomes troublesome for members from other countries within the framework of the international meta-organization if they must deflect an issue that would increase the risk of discordance.

Solutions

Political organizations such as parties and trade unions also become nationally embedded because they must take responsibility for their decisions and solutions in order to reach and maintain power. They are not simply monitoring others in order to make them comply with decisions; they are participants in putting those decisions into practice; in that sense, they are part of the solution. Consequently, they are frequently involved in negotiations with other local actors, often leading to compromises. These compromises and decisions are the state of affairs that member organizations must consider when participating in the workings of the international meta-organizations. A political advisor at the ETUC describes the situation in terms of interests of power:

> It's all about the union's core mission. The union exists to reach
>
> agreements with employers, which is done mainly at a national level.
>
> Should they leave that to others ... to another level, they would have to
>
> see very clear benefits. One can assume that it is hard to hand over
>
> power, especially as their power has been eroded nationally.

The core mission of unions is to conclude agreements, and for many years that has been possible primarily at the national level (although in varying degrees). In the globalized

situation in which unions describe themselves, they must trust the international organization to do this for them, a situation that may risk their contradicting existing national agreements. As the General Secretary of UNI Europa states:

> But some of our members find it very difficult to accept that at the
> European level, it is not going to be as good as it is in their countries.
> And they are not prepared to compromise. And if we don't have this
> openness for compromise at European level, what is going to
> happen? Everybody will stick with their own agreements or
> whatever, but they will have fewer opportunities, because the
> neighboring country will not have even that minimum. It is one of
> the things I find most difficult.

In the same way, being part of the solution is basic for the way political parties work. They are actively negotiating and governing solutions, encumbering their range of action in international meta-organizations. Within the SI, member organizations participate in national elections and make compromises in order to be able to govern. They are committed to the party system back home and cannot contradict it on an international or global level.

Leadership
Decision making has usually been difficult in meta-organizations because their members need to appear autonomous to their own members back home. In many meta-organizations, therefore, consensus, or at least a qualified majority, is a common prerequisite for decision making. Consequently, many of their decisions are formulated as standards – as 'voluntary rules' that allow for members' discretion in following them.

After World War II, there were several initiatives for increased cooperation between socialist parties in various countries, but they all fell through because the expected central control at

the international level was seen as too strong. When the SI was finally founded in 1951, this was possible only because its constitution was drafted as that of a meta-organization, with a large degree of independence for the member parties, without possibilities to limit freedom of action for the individual parties through binding decisions (Hejzlar, 1983; cf. Christensen, 1992). The principle of unanimous decisions is unyielding and non-negotiable (Hejzlar, 1982), guaranteeing the independence of members through consensus. In practice this is an obstacle to decision making, which is antithetical to strong leadership. Therefore, the SI is not an acting organization in the true sense of the term; its first aim is to provide a forum in which member parties can help and support each other based on their common values (Christensen, 1992).

In the case of international unions, leadership is clearly expressed as a difficulty by this political advisor in the ETUC:

> If a national member organization makes a decision at its congress,
> or a national board decides to make a decision, then that decision has
> validity. So, they can sanction. ... if one of their members won't
> comply with this decision, then there is a straight and neat structure
> for implementation. But this is not the case in the ETUC. The power
> resides much more within the national organizations than in the
> ETUC, of course. So ... the ETUC works much more as a consensus
> organization in that way.

This quote demonstrates why such organizations experience inertia by requiring consensus in order to act, thereby weakening leadership and obliging their leaders to become diplomats or good negotiators. They often have less power and lower status than do the leaders of their member organizations. Since there are few possibilities for sanctioning member

organizations, it is often up to the member to decide if it wants to follow the meta-organization's decision or not.

Disembedded non-national politics?

So far, we have shown that the meta-organization has been the main, not to say the only, option for political parties and trade unions to work outside the realm of the nation-state boundaries. Nevertheless, this option comes with drawbacks in relation to decision-making capacities, and thus, functionality. We now turn to our third question: What makes political meta-organizations less functional on a global scale? We compare our five meta-organizations with Amnesty International – a political organization that has managed to become relatively successful and well-known globally by traveling to many corners of the world.

Amnesty started in 1961, when an English lawyer published an open letter in a British newspaper that was immediately published or reviewed in many international newspapers. It attracted a great deal of attention, leading to the formation of Amnesty groups in at least ten countries. In order to coordinate activities in these national groups, an international meeting had already been arranged within the first month. By 2010, Amnesty International had divisions in over 150 countries, with a membership of over 3 million. Most people would consider Amnesty International to be a successful organization, as 'a key catalyst of change in the human rights arena' (Clark, 2001, p. 19). We submit, that a precondition for Amnesty International's ability to travel as a coherent organization has been its disembeddedness, manifested in a number of ways.

When we compare global unions and political internationals with Amnesty, we can see several striking differences regarding the four organizational aspects that embedded the trade unions and parties. In the following four subsections, we analyze these differences, and the way they impede or propel disembedded politics.

Interests of others

The member organizations of Amnesty are relatively independent of national contexts, as their activities are unrelated to the direct interests of their members. Members of Amnesty do not address their own everyday problems and issues; nor do they address the living conditions of their own members. No Amnesty group is permitted to work for prisoners in its own country, and it must not provide information on conditions in its own country (Clark, 2001; Power, 2001). Moreover, each group should work for prisoners from three regions – the East, the West, and the Third World – not a specific country (Clark, 2001). This means that organizations in specific countries are independent of anything that is happening locally or nationally.

Limited agenda

The agenda of Amnesty International is limited. Compared to the meta-organizations of unions and political parties, it is a niche organization. Precisely as written in the original document, its main purpose is the writing of letters to urge the release of 'prisoners of conscience'. How the letter writing should be conducted, and who should be considered prisoners of conscience became subject to strong regulations, handled mainly by Amnesty's head office in London (Clark, 2001). The narrowness of the agenda means that there is a lower risk of members engaging in issues that cannot be accepted by other members.

The focusing of one specific issue and the relatively strong cohesion among members does not imply that Amnesty is without internal tensions. There has long been pressure from national or local sections of Amnesty to expand its activities to include more issues and to include questions with greater bearing on a specific country: women's rights and sexual

rights, for example (Tomson, 2008). Changes have occurred in Amnesty lately, and over time Amnesty has officially included a number of new issues in its activities. In spite of these changes, including new aspects on the agenda, the organization still has a comparatively narrow focus, and has not been bound to specific national conditions.

Monitoring solutions

Amnesty International does not participate in trying to solve the issues that it has brought to the attention of the world. It does not run for elections or negotiate with states or any corporation; nor does it solve the problem or depend on other organizations to deliver its message. Rather, its goal is to organize the world by using one key organizational element: monitoring what states are doing and writing reports that are publicized as widely as possible.

Centralized leadership

In comparison with international trade unions and the SI, it is clear that Amnesty is a strongly centralized organization that can make binding decisions for its members. Centralization and the hierarchical structure of Amnesty are possible because of its narrow agenda; how it relates to solutions; and the fact that it is working to rescue others, rather than working in the direct interests of its members. This strategy creates organizational cohesion, based on similarities and a lack of internal differences among the national divisions (Hopgood, 2006).

There are other examples of contemporary political organizations that have limited agendas and centralized leadership and that primarily monitor problematic issues that have safeguarded the interests of others rather than the interests of their own members. The environmental organization Greenpeace works similar to Amnesty. Although the environment may be considered broader than the issues for which Amnesty International is working,

Greenpeace has built a hierarchical and specialized organization well suited to globalization. Because Greenpeace can, above all, be characterized as a centrally governed, closed oligarchy based on inactive supporters (Boström, 2001), the organization can travel like a corporation all over the world. It has consciously sought a form of organization that enables it to act and to make decisions quickly (Boström, 2001).

But we can also find examples of a development in the labour movement toward more specialized activity. The Fair Trade International has focused on bettering the work environment of Third World workers by certifying products that are produced under decent working conditions. This activity is clearly specialized, yet, has global dimensions.

Summary and Conclusion
Departing from an organizational perspective, our aim with this paper has been to explain why political parties and trade unions have difficulty becoming global actors. In order to understand political globalization, we cannot take it for granted that political parties and trade unions are obsolete in a global world where many other older organizations are successful. We have to explain why.

From its inception in the middle of the 19th century, the labour movement's ambition has been to become a global political actor – an aim expressed by Marx and Engels in the famous phrase: 'Workers of the world, unite.' Since the globalization of the labour movement took place through the travel of ideas rather than the travel of organizations, the resulting organizations have emerged as very different from each other, making international and global cooperation a difficult task.

Still, the aim to be a united global actor has not been abandoned. Since the middle of the 19th century, a number of efforts have been made to establish international, transnational, or global

organizations with national parties or trade unions as members. These organizations of organizations have always been established in the form of meta-organizations, and have encountered problems in becoming global actors.

Time after time, these organizations have dissolved because their nationally embedded members are strongly differentiated. Furthermore, there is frustration in today's labour movement meta-organizations because of their inability to make common decisions and become important political actors. The best explanation for their difficulties relates to internal differences, caused by the strong national embeddedness of political parties and trade unions – intermediary organizations that interact with other local actors, giving them close ties to their national environments.

We have distinguished several crucial aspects of embeddedness: members' interests, the broad agenda, and the necessity of engaging in solutions (see Table 1):

	Parties & Trade Unions	**Amnesty International**
Interest	Own members	Others
Agenda	Broad	Limited
Solutions	Participation	Monitoring
Leadership	Weak	Strong

Table 1. Organizational characteristics of international parties, trade unions and Amnesty International.

Together, these aspects can account for differences among members in the global meta-organizations, while explaining lack of leadership and lack of a strong hierarchy.

When we compare the meta-organizations of political parties and trade unions with a more successful global political actor such as Amnesty International, we find that Amnesty is the opposite of the labour movement's meta-organizations in all these aspects. Amnesty has strong leadership; it does not fight for the immediate interests of its members; it has a narrow agenda; and it does not try to find solutions to the issues it raises.

Common sense could lead to the conclusion that a global political actor should be a broad and diversified decentralized organization with strong local embeddedness. But according to our analysis, the opposite seems to be more advantageous. In order to be a successful, globally organized political actor, it is necessary to be specialized. Ideally, the narrow agenda should concentrate efforts on one or a few political activities, mobilizing only for protests, to monitor other actors, or to suggest solutions, while carefully avoiding involvement in the solving of these problems or entering negotiations or discussions with other actors. Moreover, the organization needs to be strongly centralized. If this is the case, there is no place for political parties, or even trade unions, in *global* politics. Global politics require and favor other forms of organization than local politics.

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[1] Interviews were undertaken in 2007–2008 at the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ETUC), the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF), the European Transport Workers' Federation, and UNI Europa. Informants were international managers or general secretaries. The theme of the interviews were possibilities for and difficulties in the globalization of trade union activities (Sörbom 2012). From Socialist International, we rely on internal documents and interviews with Swedish representatives. In the analysis of Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and other global organizations, we rely on earlier research.