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Tall among the trees: Organizing against globalist forestry in rural British Columbia

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Abstract

In January of 2001, the TimberWest Corporation permanently closed its Youbou sawmill facility near Duncan, British Columbia, Canada laying off 220 workers. On the surface, the Youbou mill closure reinforced a pervasive sense that workers and communities in the province are increasingly vulnerable to an ever more globally integrated and footloose forest industry. But a funny thing happened in Youbou; the workers fought back. While the mill was completely dismantled and scrapped, with no discernable response from the provincial government, workers from the Youbou sawmill banded together to form a new NGO called the Youbou TimberLess Society. Since its inception, the YTS has developed into one of the most unique and compelling voices for forest policy reform in BC. In so doing, the YTS also represents something of an anomaly in exhibiting many of the characteristics of so-called new social movements, and yet emerging from the industrial working class. This paper explores the ways in which the YTS has served as a powerful arena in which the subjectivities of sawmill workers and other community members have been transformed through organized resistance to global capital. At the same time, informed by the YTS, the paper draws on Polanyi's idea of the dual movement to examine scales and terms on which globalization and competing notions of autonomy are contested in moral economies of both work and nature.

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1. Introduction

On 26 January 2001, the Cowichan sawmill in Youbou, British Columbia closed. At approximately 5 p.m., workers in this small town in south central Vancouver Island, about 100 km from Victoria, left the mill for the last time. Their former employer, the prominent forest multinational TimberWest, had decided the mill was redundant. In an industry suffering through an agonizingly protracted restructuring and retrenchment, facing pressure in the US markets courtesy of the simmering softwood lumber dispute, and with lucrative profit margins on the export of raw logs, the Cowichan mill's closure could hardly have surprised many knowledgeable observers. Indeed, it had been rumoured for some time. Paralleling as it did numerous other mill closures in the province over preceding years, the Cowichan mill would have been easy to write off as one more casualty of a fickle global economy.

But the employees of the mill were unwilling to accept this script. Instead, they formed an NGO—the Youbou TimberLess Society (YTS)—and began to lobby for social and environmental justice. At first, they focussed on evidence of corporate and bureaucratic wrongdoing. The company, they argued, had an obligation to continue operating the mill via the terms of a lease with the local state governing access to public forest lands in the area. While these and other efforts for reversing the mill closure stalled, members of the organization broadened their ambitions, embracing community-controlled forest tenures, more labour-intensive value-added production techniques, and more ecologically sustainable forest practises. They built broad political alliances working with community, environmental and First Nations groups. In the process, the YTS emerged as one of the more compelling voices for forest policy reform in British Columbia (BC).

This is not a paper about a social movement that won; the YTS has yet to win much of anything tangible. Instead, the paper is intended as both an anatomy and

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interpretation of response to the mill closure by those most affected. Specifically, the paper has three main objectives. The first is to document and profile the development and evolution of YTS organizing, in part for the mere purpose of highlighting and documenting that there has indeed been a response, one that has produced an enduring and well-known (in the BC forest policy community at any rate) NGO, and has also precipitated meaningful reflection among members about themselves, their communities, and their relations to the non-human world.

The second purpose is to draw on the YTS in order to try to understand the character and implications of organizing around globalist forestry in BC, and around the political ecology of globalization more generally. How do we understand and appreciate what is at stake for groups like the YTS in terms that transcend the merely particular and local dimensions of the group, its activities, and the substantive content of their struggle? Why would anyone interested in the politics and the social and environmental implications of globalization take an interest in this group? I argue that the YTS is significant because, at the most abstract level, the group politicizes the ways that people and the non-human world articulate with the global economy and the market. I see this as extremely significant. Organizing around social justice and environmental sustainability is necessary, difficult, and rare since labour and environmental groups *have* often worked at cross purposes with one another, particularly in BC. In order to explore, explain, and interpret the significance of the YTS for thinking through the politics of contemporary globalization, I draw on the work of Karl Polanyi, and specifically, his notion of the double movement for and against market self-regulation, particularly vis-à-vis the circulation of labour and nature as commodities.

This raises the third objective of the paper. While I find Polanyi's work helpful in tracing, illuminating, and interpreting the political contours of YTS organizing, working with and through the YTS also highlights important problems not well elaborated by Polanyi. Most centrally, this includes the highly difficult and contingent process of constructing a counter-hegemonic globalization, a viable alternative political ecological imaginary that can transcend the particularities of this group and this place. Here, drawing in part also on Gramscian theory, questions are posed about changing individual and collective subjectivities, particularly in relation to the political and intellectual "work" required of civil society in order to "jump scale", and advance a counter-globalization agenda.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I elaborate on the issues I wish to explore in this paper, drawing from my collaborative relationship with the YTS.¹

¹This research is based on 6 years of ongoing, collaborative research with the YTS based on a method I would characterize as somewhere between ethnographic and participant observation, drawing in part on the "extended case method" for global ethnography described by Michael Burawoy and others in the Berkeley Sociology tradition (Burawoy, 1998, 2000). My observations, it should be noted, are based on intermittent

Following this, I provide additional context for the YTS by discussing the closure of the Cowichan sawmill, linking it to the broader political economy and ecology of globalist forestry in BC. I then review the evolution of YTS organizing, tracing in particular the ways in which the group has moved from being largely reactive and place-bound to being a more proactive group with broader resonance vis-à-vis the commodification of labour and nature in BC's forest sector, in part by networking with environmental and First Nations groups around the idea of "community forestry". I close with further considerations about what all this suggests to me about the politics and pitfalls of organizing around anti- or counter-hegemonic globalization.

2. Responding to restructuring

Very little work has explored worker and community response and contestation to increasingly globalist forestry in BC and in the Pacific Northwest more generally, even in communities where mills have been shut down. There are some exceptions (see e.g. Barnes and Hayter, 1992; Barnes et al., 1999, 2001; Brown, 1995; Egan and Klausen, 1998), but most studies have explored social, economic, and health impacts.² There has been particularly little research on how workers, their families, and their communities view and mobilize around questions of environmental management and policy, and environmental politics more generally. Instead, these are seen (often implicitly) as the exclusive concerns of a scientific elite, contested by an increasingly powerful environmental movement posited as apart from and antagonistic to labour groups. To some extent these perspectives merely reflect prevailing divisions of intellectual and political labour, as labour, environmental, and First Nations struggles proceed in parallel or even in opposition to one another (Hayter, 2003; McManus, 2002; Salazar and Alper, 1996; Wilson, 1998).

However, there is a danger in reifying these intellectual and political divisions, particularly in the face of evidence that workers and labour organizations do contest and help shape economic geographies (Herod, 2001) as well as political ecologies (Adkin, 1998). In this light, one of the goals of this paper is to document willingness on the part of

(footnote continued)

rather than continuous interaction with the YTS, and some have been heavily mediated by email and telephone conversations. I am a member of the organization, and have attended numerous meetings and functions from which I have drawn some of the inferences here. I have also sought out specific meetings with members, individually, and in groups, to solicit input. And I have collaborated with the group on joint research more directly associated with its organizing activities. I have also relied on active assistance from the YTS, particularly from members of the executive in collecting and analysing research materials. I do not name individual research subjects here in compliance with ethical standards in research established at my home institution.

²For example, see inter alia Carroll et al. (2000a,b), Daniels et al. (2000), Halseth (1999a,b), Kusel et al. (2000), and Ostry et al. (2001, 2000).

members of an NGO formed by displaced mill workers to organize around and contest not only employment and the allocation of economic surplus (the typical bread-and-butter issues associated with labour organizing), but also broader issues of forest management and environmental sustainability, social and cultural relations at the local scale, and issues of community and regional economic and social development in the broadest sense of the terms.

By examining worker and community responses in this specific instance, I am interested also in reflecting on their broader political and intellectual significance for the study of the politics of globalization and counter-hegemony. This might seem a rather heroic agenda to map on to an admittedly small, largely ineffectual (by most conventional measures), and marginal group that has, for the most part struggled to achieve even the most basic material transformation in the lives of its members. Moreover, few if any of the members of the group would characterize their efforts in the ways I do. Yet the group, as I discuss, is in a very evident sense attempting to transcend the immediacy of the circumstances of this mill's closure to reach out to other local groups around the province, and indeed around the world. In the process, group members and particularly the group's leaders have found it necessary to engage and grapple with largely taken-for-granted or hegemonic conceptions of themselves and the political economy and ecology of globalist forestry.

Reflecting on these efforts, I take my cue from Stuart Hall's interpretation of Gramscian concepts of hegemony and ideology; Hall asks "how already positioned subjects can be effectively detached from their points of application and effectively repositioned by a new set of *discourses*. This is precisely a historically specific level of application of the interpellative [sic] aspects of ideology ..." (Hall, 1988, p. 50, emphasis added). As he goes on to state, "the problem before us is ... the question of how subjects could be induced to begin to enunciate their relation to the world in quite different meaning or representational systems" (Hall, 1988). This problem is at the heart of what I hope, in whatever flawed and partial fashion, to shed light on by examining this small NGO.

That said, there are some differences between my project and Hall's discussion. My reflections are, admittedly, more theoretically pedestrian, but they are also more grounded in the experiences of the people in this NGO with whom I have been working in collaboration for the better part of 4 years. Moreover, my point of departure is somewhat less top down and after-the-fact than Hall's contemplation of Thatcherism and the problem of ideology and hegemony in Britain; and my focus is more local than national. If Hall was pre-occupied with how Thatcherism could organize and mobilize support from significant portions of the masses in Britain, in his words begging the question as to what was "true" or made sense about Thatcherism, I do not have the benefit of examining in retrospect what alternative model of globalist forestry in BC will succeed in displacing the current one. No such alternative has

gained sufficient momentum to warrant this status. Notwithstanding important institutionalized power relations which condition and largely work against YTS organizing and political imaginaries (issues I admittedly give short shrift to in this paper), there is in fact no way of knowing *a priori* which (if any) disparate movements—political and intellectual—might succeed and why.

Moreover, hegemony and counter-hegemony rely on a conjuncture of discourses that regulate, normalize, and produce subjectivities (Hall, 1988). With reference to globalist forestry in BC, essential elements of this discursive conjuncture involve conceptualizations of what is "right" and "wrong" in the positioning of individuals and groups in relation not only to the "economy", but also to ideas of and relations to the non-human, biophysical world. This makes the conjuncture of environmental politics, as well as the politics of work, production, the market, and the economy central to my reflections here, as indeed, this conjuncture is central to the organizing of the YTS. The efforts of the YTS to reframe a political ecological imaginary run up against the already known and taken-for-granted world of capitalist social relations, state administration, and forest-based commodity production and exchange relations. The project, as their efforts indicate and as I discuss, involves the formulation from within civil society of contending moral claims on the structuring of social relations to one another, community, and the non-human biophysical world.

In this respect, and particularly in relation to nature-based capital accumulation, I draw parallels between the YTS struggle over the political economy and ecology of forestry in BC and Karl Polanyi's notion of the double movement (Polanyi, 1944). For Polanyi, the ebb and flow of *laissez-faire*, or what he called self-regulating market capitalism, in 19th and early 20th century Europe, and particularly in the UK, could be understood as the product of contending social forces wrestling over fictitious commodities, including land and labour (as well as money, which I do not discuss here). Any attempt to "free up" the circulation of either is subject to countervailing pressure from civil society to regulate their allocation and protect society from the ravages of an un-regulated market. In this context, one of Polanyi's insights is to elevate the sociological significance of environmental politics by linking ecological conditions with social reproduction and everyday life. Moreover, with his ideas of a double movement for and against *laissez-faire*, Polanyi refuses the reification of economic processes, and instead insists on their social, cultural, and political embedding, often mediated in and through the state. I find this helpful in interpreting but also in situating the efforts of the YTS in part because it seems to me the group points to the ongoing salience of the dynamics identified by Polanyi, not least political struggle over the articulation of an increasingly globalized capitalist market on the one hand, and local economic and environmental conditions and social relations on the other.

At the same time, YTS organizing highlights some of what is left unsaid in Polanyi. Specifically, if the YTS echoes Polanyi's notion of social mobilization against the commodification of land and labour, the limited spatial reach of YTS mobilization faces the challenge of political "scale jumping" in order to link up with and subsume local, particular struggles, not least in order to compete with the substantial material and symbolic resources of trans-national capital, whether in the forest sector or more generally. How does a group like the YTS transcend the particular, place-bound character of the circumstances of its own origins to become part of a larger, broad-based network or coalition, and thus become part of a counter-hegemony? This is a problem invoked in different ways by both Polanyi and Antonio Gramsci, as noted by Michael Burawoy in his discussion of each (Burawoy, 2003). Since a counter-hegemonic formation must emerge from what Burawoy calls the "real utopias" of groups like the YTS, such utopias must also be a focus of study for critical research on the politics of contemporary globalization and counter-globalization. On the other hand, since it cannot be assumed that these concrete struggles will transcend the local and the particular, critical scholarship needs also to grapple with understanding (and ideally contributing to) the conditions for this broader synergy.

3. The Cowichan sawmill, BC forest policy, and the emergence of the YTS

The closure of the Cowichan sawmill brought to an end a period of over 70 years in which the fate of the community and that of the mill were tightly interlinked. Symbolizing this connection, the name "Youbou" derives from a combination of the surnames of the two men who built the first sawmill on the site in 1929. At its peak, the mill employed in excess of 700 people, and as recently as the mid-1970s in the order of 650 people worked on the site at a combined lumber and veneer facility. Owned by several configurations of local and multinational capital, the Cowichan mill was assigned to TimberWest in the early 1990s, along with other assets spun off from the New Zealand multinational Fletcher Challenge.

Before closing, Youbou's Cowichan sawmill processed logs supplied largely from provincial Tree Farm License (TFL) No. 46, an area of approximately 99,000 ha located largely to the west of Youbou and leased exclusively to the company under the terms of a renewable, 25-year agreement. Harvest volumes from the TFL were prescribed by maximum annual allowances established by the provincial government's Ministry of Forests. Moreover, the wood from TFL 46 was central to sustaining the Cowichan mill. Figures from the early 1990s indicate that the mill relied on TFL 46 for about 75–80% of its total log supply.³ Logs

were manufactured into a range of finished lumber products, most intended specifically for the Japanese market; approximately 75% of the mill's output went to Japan in the 1990s.⁴

The Cowichan sawmill at Youbou and TFL 46 together through their conjoined histories linked the town of Youbou and the Cowichan Lake area more generally to the fortunes of increasingly large scale and multinational capital, but also to a model of globalist forestry made in and through local state policy. This model may be viewed as a kind of "structured coherence" (Harvey, 1985), and has been thoroughly discussed by Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter (see Barnes and Hayter, 1992; Barnes et al., 2001; Hayter, 2000). Sustained by a so-called "exploitation axis" of generally large scale capital, organized labour, and a state-based scientific and bureaucratic elite (Salazar and Alper, 1996), this model has prevailed for much of the period subsequent to the Second World War, making for a spatially extensive and environmentally intensive "fix". Signs that this fix has become strained if not exhausted are myriad, as are critiques of the ecological and political "costs". These have been extensively discussed and debated elsewhere; I do not rehearse these critiques here in any detail, but it is important to note that they are in many ways salient to the Youbou case, and have been increasingly identified and politicized through YTS organizing.⁵

Key connections between the particular circumstances of the Cowichan mill and the more general character of BC's globalist model of forestry include not only the increasingly prominent role of multinational capital and a pronounced export orientation, but by also the role of organized labour. At the Cowichan mill, workers were represented by the Industrial Wood and Allied Workers (IWA)—the province's largest woodworkers union—under the terms of a pattern agreement between the IWA and Forest Industrial Relations Ltd. (representing capital) that covered the Coast Region of the province.⁶ An additional facet of the Youbou case to note is the role of public timber,

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typical production data suggest that the mill processed on the order of 400,000 m³, of which about 75–80% came from TFL 46. These specific data are quoted in Confidential Memorandum of 12 December 1994 from Garry E. Mancell of Davis & Company Legal Services to Bob Beard, Vice-President South Island Region, TimberWest. In a BC Ministry of Forests internal memorandum of 18 July 2000 (File 19040/20/1050), the mill was characterized as processing 33% of the log volume coming from the TFL in 1998 and 1999, while the above figures suggest the mill processed closer to half the log volume coming from the TFL.

⁴This figure comes from an email message sent on 25 April 2000 by Jim Gowriluk, then Manager of Timber Tenures with the BC Ministry of Forests. Obtained via Freedom of Information request by the IWA Local 1–80.

⁵For critical appraisals of BC's forest industry and policy complex, and diagnoses of its problems (see variously Braun, 2002; Burda and Gale, 1998; Burda et al., 1998; Hayter, 2003; Magnusson and Shaw, 2003; Marchak, 1983; Marchak et al., 1999; Ostry, 1999; Ostry et al., 2001; Prudham and Reed, 2001; Willems-Braun, 1997; Wilson, 1988, 1998).

⁶For the version covering workers at the mill when it closed, see "Master Agreement 1997–2000 Forest Products Industries Coast Region

³Specifically, in 1991, the mill processed 402,000 m³, of which 318,000 m³ came from TFL 46. In 1993, the mill processed 240,000 m³, of which 213,000 m³ came from TFL 46. Company characterizations of

supplied via TFL 46. The exclusive lease of this TFL to TimberWest very much exemplifies provincial forest policy more generally dating to the mid-1940s, under which long-term, exclusive rights of forest access have been provided to private capital in exchange for investment, employment, and income in forest dependent communities. Tethering capital to communities was, until recently, frequently reinforced by appurtenance clauses in TFLs directing specific harvest volumes to named facilities. Just so, a clause referring to the Cowichan mill specified that the lease-holder of TFL 46: "... will not cause its timber processing facility at Youbou to reduce production or to close for a sustained period of time, unless, and to the extent that the Minister, or his designate, exempts the licensee from the requirements of this paragraph".⁷

This was known as "Clause 7" of the lease, and it ostensibly secured an annual flow of 330,000 m³ of logs from TFL 46 to the mill in Youbou.⁸ The lease also specified that failure to comply with Clause 7 could result in the company losing its access rights to TFL 46 altogether. Indeed, IWA investigations after the mill closure reveal that TimberWest had explored options for closing or selling the mill in the 1990s, but the company's own legal counsel had warned it of potentially serious consequences that might result from violating the TFL lease.⁹

If the appurtenance clause in the lease for TFL 46 stayed TimberWest's hand from closing the mill earlier, the removal of the clause from the lease upon its renewal in 1997 was equally instrumental in allowing the company to close the mill in early 2001. The exact circumstances surrounding how Clause 7 was deleted from the lease for TFL 46 are not clear. The Minister of Forests then in office apologized for what has been represented by the government as an administrative error (Gelb, 2001). The IWA filed suit, together with the YTS, naming both the Government and TimberWest, and seeking either to gain direct control of the fibre in question (something the IWA has always shied away from) or (more likely) some form of financial compensation for the lost incomes.

(footnote continued)

British Columbia" signed by the International Woodworkers Association of Canada and Forest Industrial Relations Limited.

⁷See Gelb (2001).

⁸Reflecting the intent of appurtenance clauses as instruments to regulate capital's autonomy in relation to forest dependent communities, the clause was originally inserted into the lease in 1991 by then Forest Minister Dan Miller in response to pressure from the IWA and driven by concerns about job losses associated with industry restructuring and the transfer of the lease to TimberWest from Fletcher Challenge (Gelb, 2001).

⁹A letter from Gary Mancell of Davis and Company Vancouver to Don McMullan, Chief Forester with TimberWest, dated 10 October 1995 reads "I don't believe this clause can be interpreted so broadly as to permit a reduction in production at Youbou ... If such reduction or closure is anticipated, it would be prudent to obtain the Minister's exemption from the requirements of Clause 7. Failure to do so might subject TimberWest to a host of remedies, not the least significant of which might be a suspension and, possibly, cancellation of the license ...". Letter obtained by the author via the IWA.

These are the immediate circumstances that gave rise to the YTS. But an exclusive focus on this mill, this company, this community, and these workers would miss some of the broader salience of YTS organizing efforts, and would fail to capture the more general character of the critique of globalist forestry developed by the YTS and other aligned groups in the province, a general critique that has also helped sustain the energy of YTS organizing for more than 5 years. Put simply, the more the group has worked to understand and critique the political economic and ecological context of their mill's operation and closure, the more they have become energized by the need for a different model of "doing" forestry. Even the intrigue around removal of Clause 7 is not all that exceptional. There have been other mills closed in BC over the course of recent years and under very similar circumstances—that is, with appurtenance clauses seemingly in place. Recent instances include the Eburne sawmill in Vancouver, the Tahsis sawmill on Vancouver Island, and the Gold River pulp mill also on the island. In each case, appurtenance clauses proved less effective than was supposed. And more generally, these mill closures are manifestations of consistent, long-term employment attrition in wood products production over the course of the last 25 years in BC, both in aggregate, and in the number of jobs per volume of harvest and production (see Hayter, 1997, 2000, 2003; Hayter and Barnes, 1997; Marchak, 1983). Gradually, this has decoupled the forest sector from the economic and social development of hinterland communities, prompting more and more people (including those in the YTS) to question an apparently Faustian bargain, institutionalized via state forest policy, that ties these communities to transnational capital and increasingly far flung markets.¹⁰

Confronted also by the declining availability of old-growth forests, environmentalist campaigns, and First Nations organizing, the provincial state has been grappling for some time with how to reconfigure the social regulation of forest commodity production. Reform has been characterized by a contradictory mix of attempts to both restrict the autonomy of capital through new social and ecological regulation, but also to *enhance* it and stem capital flight. During the 1990s, pluralistic reform headed by the social democratic NDP stagnated. Important forest management reforms and increases in protected areas were exceptions in a political climate characterized more by stalemate, as the NDP failed to transcend tensions between labour and environmental groups which comprised the party's core constituencies (McManus, 2002; Rayner et al., 2001; Wilson, 1998).

This stagnation in turn paved the way for a highly revanchist neoliberal administration to take control in June 2001 under the leadership of Liberal Premier Gordon

¹⁰Public, academic and policy literature concerning BC's forest industry is replete with examination of the local impacts of layoffs and mill closures (see Barnes and Hayter, 1992; Barnes et al., 2001; Halseth, 1999a, b; Hayter, 1997, 2003; Ostry, 1999; Reed, 1999).



Fig. 1. The decommissioned Youbou mill site; Summer, 2002.

Campbell. The Liberals moved quickly to roll back elements of the NDP reforms, including commitments to job security and job creation for forest workers. In 2003, the Liberals announced the outright elimination of appurtenance clauses such as the one in place at Youbou until 1997. Outright cessation of the use of appurtenance clauses explicitly rolled back state commitments to constrain the autonomy of capital in relation to forest dependent communities, removing any source of leverage appurtenance clauses provided to wrest concessions from forestry capital.

3.1. *The YTS*

It is in this broader context, not just the closure of a single mill, that the YTS has emerged. The Youbou TimberLess Society was formed in December 2000 in advance of the mill shutdown, after TimberWest publicly announced the mill would be closed, and in the aftermath of several failed attempts to sell the mill and the TFL to a third party. The YTS's stated mission is "to educate the larger community to the wrongs being perpetrated on communities by multinational corporations in the name of profit, and assist other communities with the benefit of our experience" (Youbou TimberLess Society, 2005). However, this simple and polemical introduction belies the group's transition from a largely reactive, confrontational and seemingly ad hoc movement drawing almost exclusively on former mill workers to one with a broad-based mission, diversifying membership, and intricate networked relationships to a coalition of groups seeking broad forest policy reform in BC, and elsewhere.

The first activities of the group were purely reactive, seeking to publicize and impede the company's plans for closure. After the mill actually closed, the YTS tried to stop

TimberWest from decommissioning it, driven by hope that the mill might still be sold. For a time, the YTS attempted to broker IWA purchase of the mill, in order to operate it directly. Arguments for forcing TimberWest to sell as opposed to dismantling the facility turned on the supposed obligations of Clause 7. Yet this leverage quickly evaporated when it became apparent that there was no Clause 7. In addition, TimberWest made it virtually impossible for the union to buy the mill.¹¹

Besides trying to buy the mill, initial efforts of the YTS focussed on organizing its members and the wider community in order to draw attention to their plight from the wider public, and to put pressure on the province and TimberWest. Activities included a rally outside the provincial legislature in Victoria, in January of 2001, and a log truck count in the first days after the mill closed. The latter was aimed at documenting and politicizing the continued flow of unprocessed logs from TimberWest lands and specifically from TFL 46, most destined for the company's log export docks in nearby Crofton. The YTS also protested at the mill site, attempting (unsuccessfully) to prevent the company from decommissioning the mill. A court order stopped the protest in April of 2001, and the mill was decommissioned (see Fig. 1). Even though the protest failed in an immediate sense, members cite this moment as a significant benchmark because it helped galvanize supporters to a longer term struggle.

In 2001, the YTS was empowered by a shareholder to present information at the company's annual shareholders'

¹¹Specifically, in a letter of 28 February 2001 from Paul McElligott, President and CEO of TimberWest to Carmen Rocco, Vice-President of the IWA Local 1–80, the company gave the union until 23 March 2001 (i.e. approximately 3 weeks) to work out all its planning and the details of its proposal or the company would refuse to further consider the matter.

meeting, documenting company social and environmental (mal)practices and drawing on a corporate research campaign aimed at embarrassing TimberWest. A similar presentation in 2003 disclosed to shareholders the preliminary findings of a survey of former Cowichan mill employees commissioned by the YTS in collaboration with the Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG). The survey provided evidence of lasting hardship and persistent unemployment, contradicting TimberWest statements that downplayed the impact of the mill closure.¹²

Other strategies included letters to the editors of local papers calling for provincial sanctions against TimberWest, as well as for forest policy reform more generally. YTS members networked relentlessly through the provincial ministries of labour and forestry, seeking more information about available options but also the precise circumstances of the mill closure, and what role the province played vis-à-vis Clause 7. And the YTS has kept up this pressure via the lawsuit over removal of Clause 7 from the lease. This suit has seen some twists and turns over the last 6 years. IWA Local 1–80 initially launched the suit in May 2001, naming the provincial government and seeking damages. However, the union's lawyers, in a letter of 25 April 2003, argued that all evidence gathered to that point indicated that the Minister of Forests must have actually known that Clause 7 was being removed (contrary to the Minister's claims and those of his staff).¹³ In June of 2003, the IWA dropped the suit, but the YTS immediately re-launched it. On 6 May 2004 BC Supreme Court Justice Dean Wilson certified the case as a class action suit, allowing it to go forward. The case was still pending at the time of writing, but unquestionably provides a thread of hope for the members that some form of reparation will be awarded, or that the province will agree to a cash settlement, or an offer of rights to fibre for a YTS-led community forest tenure.

Some people, including individual members of the group itself, have argued that YTS preoccupation with the circumstances of the mill's closure only prevents the workers and affected community members from moving on, and from achieving some measure of closure. For these people, grief and acceptance are the over-riding responses to the loss of jobs, and income, and to the disruption of their daily lives and immediate social relationships. But for others, the lawsuits, the rallies, and the political organizing around the specifics of the Youbou mill represent the

group's most immediate hope for achieving some kind of tangible, material justice. These efforts also keep the group "on-the-ground", close to the lived experiences of the people from whom it draws most support.

Most intriguing about the group, however, is the way in which it has slowly worked to transcend the immediacy of its origins, and to develop a more general critique of globalist forestry, albeit always connected to the case of the mill in Youbou. By the time I first met members of the YTS in person in July 2002, this transformation was well underway. YTS membership had grown to more than 200, with fully half comprised of people who had never worked at the mill. This seemed significant as a measure of the success of YTS organizing. At the meeting I attended that July, most of the talk concerned a YTS float in the Duncan Summer Festival parade which had won first prize. Significantly, the float theme was a tree seedling giveaway, and the YTS had distributed 1300 seedlings at the parade, signifying the group's incipient critique of provincial forest management practices and their connection to job loss and industry attrition. Signifying the group's attempts to come to terms with the broader context of globalist forestry, most of the questions the group's leadership had for me at the time concerned alternative forest practices, community forestry, and how to get access to technical and practical expertise that could explain how to combine high-value-added, more craft-oriented production with environmentally sensitive and selective logging techniques (i.e. individual, select trees rather than whole stands).

It was explained to me at the time that the raw log export campaign had precipitated these changes. In February of 2001, the YTS helped organize a highly successful protest against raw log exports in front of the provincial legislature in Victoria. A widely circulated film produced by the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC) entitled "Exporting BC's Future" (Williams, 2001) included footage of numerous YTS members at the protest. YTS collaboration with the WCWC on the film helped forge connections and raise consciousness around a broader programme of forest policy reform beyond mere protectionism. Specifically, the raw log export issue served as an entry point for addressing issues such as higher value-added production via processing logs "at home", combined with more selective, less damaging forest practices. While the raw log export theme has remained a visible and compelling part of the YTS campaign (see Fig. 2), members of the YTS (particularly as led by their executive) used this as a way to draw the group into networks of forest policy reform involving social and environmental groups throughout the province.

Gradually, the YTS established working relationships with numerous environmental groups, including most prominently the WCWC and the Sierra Club, while also beginning to network with First Nations (also representing a rare rapprochement between First Nations and worker-based social movements in the province). YTS members cited successful efforts to network and collaborate with

¹²A survey conducted in 2003 sampling 100 of the former employees of the Cowichan sawmill found that 29% remained unemployed 2 years after the mill closed, while another 29% had simply "retired", most unwillingly (for detailed findings, see Prudham and Penfold, 2005).

¹³A letter from Banister and Company, Barristers and Solicitors, to IWA-Canada Local 1–80, 25 April 2003, p. 5 reads: "... the elimination of the Youbou clause is consistent with the move towards generic TFLs which the Minister approved. To the extent a conscious decision was made to eliminate the appurtenance clause, a court will exercise considerable deference to the Minister's decision and will not overturn it". Letter provided to the author by a YTS member.



Fig. 2. A YTS banner en route to Youbou.

First Nations, particularly the nearby Cowichan and Ditidaht, on issues surrounding smaller scale, locally oriented production. Working in tandem with many community and First Nations groups, the YTS began to gravitate toward the idea of community forestry tenures. This notion, emblematic of a worldwide trend toward devolution and community natural resource management (Baker and Kusel, 2003; Bradshaw, 2003; Kellert et al., 2000; Ribot, 1999), entails local groups gaining direct control of resource access rights, enabling them to pursue varying combinations of alternative management practices, higher value-added production, and more inclusive, accountable, and democratic and participatory governance—at least, these are the ideas championed by advocates.

In BC, a suite of community forest tenures have been established since 1998 under a programme initiated by the provincial NDP (McCarthy, 2006). Reflecting and reinforcing the growing momentum of this alternative, as well as the evolution of YTS political allegiances, several members of the group attended the BC Community Forestry Forum, held at the University of Victoria in March 2002, where they met activists, academics, and policy analysts from around the world. The group is now advocating for its own community forest tenure, either as a form of reparation via the lawsuit, or as an award to the group as a community representative via the existing provincial community forest programme. A willingness to operate a form of co-operative, community-controlled forest tenure, embracing both higher value-added and non-traditional forest practices in some ways encapsulates (albeit at an exclusively local scale) the expanded political ecological imaginary that has developed within the YTS through its organizing.

4. Discussion: the double movement and counter-hegemony

There are many reasons to pay attention to the YTS. True, the group has never really won anything significant by way of reparations or in gaining access to fibre. The YTS has had little direct role in helping former mill workers gain alternative employment. But measuring success in strictly material terms overlooks consciousness raising and political organizing, important in changing the ways people affected by the mill closure think about themselves in relation to economy and ecology (in the most abstract terms), and more concretely, as a potentially necessary precursor to achieving direct material gains (i.e. the YTS may well still win something by agitating). In addition, YTS organizing has made the group an inspiration outside of the Cowichan Valley. Indeed, while there are other NGOs that have formed in the province subsequent to layoffs and mill closures, the YTS stands out as a worker-based NGO to emerge from a highly globalist forest sector to champion substantively more sustainable forest practices, more co-operative and democratic relations of production and tenure, and higher value-added production. The group has networked widely outside of traditional organized labour circles, and has become a significant voice for forest policy reform in BC.

In the remainder of this paper, I focus on interpreting the YTS and its implications. In particular, I am interested to draw from this group in order to reflect on how resource-based, rural social movements organize themselves in relation to actually existing globalization, and what challenges they face in the inter-connected processes of trying to change themselves as political subjects, and the

world around them. Obviously this is a single instance, these are rather grand themes, and I cannot do justice to them here. But, and again drawing on Stuart Hall (1988), these questions are most important when posed in relation to real world processes, politics, and experiences.

The first point I would like to make, particularly in anticipating scepticism with regard to my claim that the YTS is engaged in anti-globalization politics, much less the production of a counter-hegemonic globalization, is that it is indeed globalization that is at stake here. Specifically, globalization must be seen as produced and shaped (not merely contested) by groups such as the YTS. Globalization is politically constructed and produced through discourse and actions by contending moves for self-constituted autonomies, including the autonomy of the YTS and its members. Globalization must not be seen as something “given” from above, and then contested from below. To accept globalization on these terms would be to reify the very power relations that underpin the globalizing phenomena we seek to understand and (for some) transform, and to assume that action is what capital does, and re-action is what workers, communities, the subaltern do (Herod, 1995). As Gillian Hart (2002) argues, exploring the experiences of local groups such as the YTS, and the political, economic, and ecological circumstances of the Cowichan sawmill closure, is constitutive (or ought to be) of our conceptions of the specific spatiality of actually existing globalization (see also Burawoy, 2000). In her words, localities are “... constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, inter-connected arenas of everyday life” (Hart, 2004, p. 22). Perhaps most tellingly, YTS group members have been increasingly inclined to make more general critiques of the economics and ecology of globalist forestry in BC and of the actually existing global economy over the time I have been working with them.

A second theme concerns this very way in which the YTS seeks to politicize both economy and environment simultaneously, and the challenges this raises. I am drawn in this respect to “read” the YTS in relation to Karl Polanyi’s *Great Transformation* (Polanyi, 1944) (hereafter the GT), and vice versa, in thinking through some of the political economy and ecology of contemporary globalization and anti-globalization struggles. Reflecting on 19th and early 20th century economic liberalism, and in particular what he called the self-regulating market, Polanyi argued that a society based on greed alone will tear itself apart. This is in large part because, as Polanyi argues, labour and land (the latter understood to mean non-human biophysical nature) cannot be commodities because they are not produced by processes that can be subsumed under market coordination alone.¹⁴ This is in part an

objectivist, foundational claim because of the logical impossibility of social or ecological production being wholly regulated by the price mechanism of capitalist markets (Block, 2003). But it is also an historicist, constructivist observation, since Polanyi notes that the allocation of labour and land (nature) are regulated by and embedded within social processes and cultural values in every society known, even in a capitalist and market centred society. In Polanyi’s view, (civil) society—what Burawoy (2003) refers to as Polanyi’s notion of *active* society—never has and will never accept self-regulating or totally free capitalist markets because trade unions, cooperatives, parishes, political parties, educational institutions, etc. would not and did not agree to relinquish or subordinate people and the non-human world to the ebbs and flows of a faceless capitalist market (Burawoy, 2003). Polanyi thus posits what he calls a “double movement”, pushing for freer capitalist markets on the one hand, and yet stronger forms of social regulation on the other. In Polanyi’s words the double movement:

can be personified as the action of two organizing principles in society, each of them setting itself specific institutional aims, having the support of definite social forces and using its own distinctive methods. The one was the principle of economic liberalism, aiming at the establishment of a self-regulating market, relying on the support of the trading classes, and using largely *laissez-faire* and free trade as its methods; the other was the principle of social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization, relying on the varying support of the market—primarily but not exclusively, the working and landed classes—and using protective legislation, restrictive associations, and other instruments of intervention as its methods. (Polanyi, 1944, p. 138)¹⁵

Numerous scholars have noted Polanyi’s relevance to contemporary globalization (see Block, 2003; Burawoy, 2003; Jessop, 2001; O’Riain and Block, 2003), and there is much more to his ideas that I can do justice to here. But I see in the double movement notion important insights reinforced by the YTS experience. One key insight is Polanyi’s emphasis on the development of a more market-governed society as something that must be *made* to happen. Challenging widely held dichotomies between politics and economics, Polanyi’s thesis has a “levelling” effect. It defines politics not as that which is opposed to the “normal” or the “system” but rather that which subsumes the economic realm to contending pressures. In short, Polanyi’s work prioritizes the political in political economy (Jessop, 2001). This seemingly innocuous and even obvious point is worth reinforcing because it helps confer legitimacy on groups like the YTS for studies of globalization. Polanyi’s double movement refuses any dichotomy that would accept the taken-for-granted world is apolitical, while rendering the work of NGOs and social movements

¹⁴Polanyi actually identifies three fictitious commodities, the third being money. I do not address his money argument in this paper though it is in some ways the best developed of his fictitious commodity arguments, and certainly pivotal to Polanyi’s take on international relations in the period from the middle of the 19th century through the Second World War (Polanyi, 1944).

¹⁵The same passage is cited in Jessop (2001, p. 221).

(“resistance”) as the sole domain of the political. Instead, what Polanyi provides is a theoretical and historical antecedent for viewing economic globalization as a set of processes that are politically constituted.

Thus, in BC, globalist forestry is not only *contested*. It is also *made*, not least by and through state action which, also echoing Polanyi’s framework, has internalized elements of double-movement like tensions. A careful historical political economy of the structured coherence of globalist forestry in BC, for instance, would reveal concerted efforts by the local state to “fix” particular configurations of relations between capital, labour, and nature. This includes key reforms introduced in the 1940s and 1950s to establish rights of access to public forests via modern tenures under the rubric of sustained yield forestry (see Bridge and McManus, 2000; Prudham, 2007; Sloan, 1945, 1957). The double movement idea also captures well the lurching stalemate of 1990s reforms under the NDP, followed by Liberal measures aimed at actively enhancing the freedom of capital accumulation and market exchange, including the outright elimination of appurtenance clauses. Clearly, as both the specifics of YTS organizing, and the broader politics of globalist forestry demonstrate, the double movement requires neither simultaneity of movement for and against unfettered commodification of labour and nature, nor equality of power. At the same time, groups like the YTS qualify Polanyi because they demonstrate an inherent *geography* to the double movement, operating in and through the construction and production of diverging scales of political capability and action, and in the context of differential capacities to act “at a distance”.

However, Polanyi’s double movement is also an important resource for theorizing the ways in which society seeks to protect itself from the ravages of a truly self-regulating or free capitalist market on the basis of cultural, moral, and ideological imperatives. A crucial dimension of this theory turns on the role accorded by Polanyi for contending social claims to both labour *and* biophysical non-human nature. This is one of the most important reasons for contemporary scholars of globalization and its politics to take note of Polanyi, particularly those interested in linking the political ecologies of resource hinterlands and rural landscapes into broader networks of global integration. For Polanyi, the commodification of land (nature) is placed on an equal footing with that of labour as a source of political friction and contending struggles. Rather than prioritizing the politics of production as *the* source of progressive politics in capitalist societies, Polanyi examines market coordination and alienation of nature and labour together as key sources of social friction, again not only because of conflict in the arena of production relations, but because of tensions between the demands of the market, and the demands of a wider society (Burawoy, 2003). This is a key framing, particularly in relation to orthodox Marxism, because it offers a unified point of departure for thinking through the politics of work and environmental change. And if

environmental and labour politics are too often conceptualized as disparate if not antagonistic movements, particularly in the industrialized world, Polanyi suggests that this separation is historical, not pre-given or inherent to labour or environmental politics.

Yet, reading Polanyi against the YTS, and vice versa, it would seem that the double movement is more complicated than perhaps even Polanyi himself suggests. One reason is that there is no reason to suppose that the politics of work and environmental change proceed in sympathy. So, if contending processes propelling and restricting commodification proceed according to different historical and geographical dynamics, and if these struggles are manifest differently in relation to nature and labour, we actually need to track a quadruple movement operating across spatial and temporal scales and in the potentially disparate realms of environmental and labour politics. Quite a task.

A second reason concerns the commodification of labour and nature in their ideological manifestations. One of Polanyi’s most important insights is that markets are always embedded within society, giving rise to frictions over market allocation, and the reproduction of land and labour. In this respect, Polanyi’s work is very much in sympathy with the moral economy idea (Scott, 1976) in drawing attention to the social mores that *necessarily* govern economic behaviour (Booth, 1994). But these mores cannot be themselves understood as pre-given or static; they are instead historical, geographical, and constructed. To suppose otherwise would be idealist, but this is a point on which Polanyi is somewhat ambiguous. Yet, echoing Gramsci (1971), political subjectivities and ideas about the world, at the most basic level, are always conditioned (and I stress here, *conditioned*, not *determined*) to some extent by the specific historical and material circumstances in which they occur. This provides an additional reason to be cautious in assuming that disparate social struggles against the capitalist market and commodification will line up in sympathy, much less that these struggles will be progressive. Polanyi clearly recognized the latter concern in his argument that fascism could be understood as a twisted response to the excesses of economic liberalism. Yet, as Jessop notes,

This argument [about the double movement] can be taken further not only by noting the different economic and political programmes and ethico-political visions into which economic liberalism is articulated but also by considering the range of counter-hegemonic projects that can be developed to resist the onward march of liberalism. For if society’s fightback is to move beyond dispersed, disorganized and mutually contradictory struggles, attention must be paid to the ways in which ‘society’ acquires a relative unity and cohesion in resisting capital’s unhampered logic. (Jessop, 2001, p. 222; my emphasis)

The problem or challenge of uniting these “dispersed, disorganized, and mutually contradictory struggles” is a

central problem grappled with by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks*. Specifically, he argues that in a complex, democratic society, where consent has displaced coercion, the organization and development of a successful counter-hegemony (not his term) requires what he calls a “war of position” waged gradually and painstakingly from within civil society, in contrast with what he calls the “wars of movement” apparent in earlier, more sudden and often violent revolutionary transformations (Burawoy, 2003).

Here, the concrete experiences and trajectory of the YTS struggle helps illuminate some aspects of this challenge. Consider first the disparate realms of labour and environmental politics in everyday life. The commodification of labour and nature in British Columbia’s forest sector are for all intents and purposes institutionalized as two solitudes. An entire edifice of specialized professional and technical knowledge has formed around forestry and forest management in BC, in parallel with the broader development of the forestry profession as an expert, and typically state-centred domain (Demeritt, 2001; Scott, 1998). Even forest tenure in the province has been governed primarily as a bilateral relationship between the state writ large and capital, including appurtenance clauses as a key example. Community forestry is a recent and as yet relatively marginal divergence. The particular trajectory of labour’s commodification, by contrast, has been shaped in significant measure by a form of collective bargaining and trade unionism that has not seen, for some time now, environmental governance and the commodification of nature as an area of immediate concern in the relations between organized labour and capital (it was not always thus—see Prudham, 2007). This is epitomized by the IWA’s largely narrow focus on so-called bread-and-butter issues, a source of frustration even to other unions.¹⁶

YTS organizing has had to confront this historically and geographically dichotomized political ecology. The commodification of both labour and land (à la Polanyi) have clearly been implicated in YTS and its surrounding environs, places whose economic and environmental fortunes have been tightly bound to forestry capital, global markets, and state administered scientific forest management for some time. But the disparate *politics* of nature and labour must also clearly be confronted by the YTS as exactly that, two solitudes whose antinomies have been quite pivotal in constituting the YTS struggle and the ideological and political evolution of the group.

Gramsci and Polanyi are both correct in pointing to actual material and ideological struggles arising within society as a way of understanding social regulation, hegemony, and counter-hegemony. But the need to engage with real world struggles is important also to see the

magnitude of the challenges these struggles face. One problem is clearly that of “scale”, as Jessop’s allusion to scattered, disorganized struggles signifies. The scale literature is now a cottage industry (Brenner, 1999; Peck, 2002; Swyngedouw, 1997; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003), but at a basic level, one lesson of this literature is that power relations work in and through scale, constructing and producing scales of action and knowledge which reflect and reinforce power relations and power struggles. Another lesson is that scale is a terrain of struggle and contestation, in environmental politics no less than in any other respect (McCarthy, 2005). If local, community-based movements such as the YTS are sites where globalization is actively produced and constituted, there remain profound challenges to the sort of “scale jumping” (Smith, 1992) required to mobilize a truly counter-hegemonic form of globalization from these disparate, dispersed particularistic movements.

A second but related challenge is that the individuals involved in these struggles cannot be characterized by pre-given fixed, fast, and frozen identities and worldviews. Rather, hegemony draws on but also produces, through discourses, institutions, power relations, and social relations, new forms of political subjectivity (Hall, 1988). There is much to be inspired by here in looking at the YTS. The collective, and many of its most active and influential members, have moved away from their initial alliance with the trade union movement in BC, and particularly the IWA. In a literal sense, this divergence is a product of the fact that former Cowichan sawmill workers lost their status within the IWA, which the union argued gave cause to withdraw permission to hold YTS meetings in the Local union hall in Duncan in early 2003.¹⁷ Since then, YTS meetings have taken place at one member’s house on alternate Wednesdays. Yet YTS members argued the real reason the union withdrew permission to use the hall was anger and retaliation over the raw log issue, and YTS collaboration with environmentalists. YTS positions on raw logs, sustainable forestry, collaboration with First Nations groups, and the embrace of community forestry all fly in the face of the IWA’s traditional conservatism on matters of forest policy, befitting the union’s status as a pillar in the so-called exploitation axis.¹⁸

¹⁷Union members lose their status 1 year after they stop paying dues. Once the mill closed, YTS members who were former workers at the mill no longer paid union dues.

¹⁸Tensions over the raw log issue, according to some YTS activists, account for why the IWA dropped the lawsuit over TFL 46, paralleling a similar withdrawal from suit over the closure of Vancouver’s Eburne sawmill in 1999. The IWA has largely refused to question rising levels of raw log exports from the province, widely considered evidence of the power of the logging division within the union; in as much as unionized loggers rely on continued harvest from this and other TFLs, any move to expropriate would be seen as a threat to this constituency of the union. But this is also consistent with the union’s conservatism on forest policy more generally, including its refusal to apply for a community forest tenure under the provincial pilot program, despite the seemingly obvious appeal of doing so. When I asked one IWA organizer why the union did

¹⁶As one organizer with the BC Federation of Labour told me, “The IWA came to our annual policy conference last year, and do you know what their proposal was? A flat tax. That is all you need to know about the IWA. When it comes to solidarity, they have their second houses and their speedboats, and that’s all they care about”. Interview, British Columbia Federation of Labour organizer, 13 August 2002 in Vancouver, BC.

It bears noting that the evolution of the YTS's political ecological imaginary cannot be accounted for by straightforward, materialist interpretations of politics and social movements. In fact, the YTS has adopted positions on forest policy reform that could very well undermine its chances of securing access to forest tenure by antagonizing both the Provincial Government and the Ministry of Forests on the one hand, and the IWA on the other. At least one leading member of the group claims, credibly, that his prospects for future work in the area have been compromised by his organizing with the YTS, branding him a “trouble maker”.

However, I do not want to suggest by these examples that the identities of YTS members are fluid, and that the discursive, political, and intellectual “work” that underpins counter-hegemonic coalition building is a matter of voluntarist selection from among pre-given notions and narratives. Knitting together potentially quite disparate discourses into a coherent worldview is by no means obvious, not least when the particularities of a place-based collectivity remain only partly subsumed. It is hard work. To me, the YTS demonstrates this as concretely as it does anything. Notably, it has taken more than 7 years of organizing for the group to get to where it is. In this time, there has been no shortage of internal conflicts, and there are evident limitations the group continues to confront as a broad-based community organization.

For instance, despite making significant in-roads in transcending strictly workplace-based politics and recruiting members who never actually worked at the mill, the YTS remains overwhelmingly male dominated. This is likely due to numerous, interacting reasons. Foremost, few women actually worked at the mill. But the group has tried to reach out beyond the mill's workforce for membership. More generally, representations of forest industry work have tended (erroneously) to make little room for the role of women in forestry and forest dependent locales (Reed, 2003a, b, c). Limited success in transcending the highly gendered discourses and practices of industrial forestry limits the group's inclusiveness, but also its ability to draw from what research indicates are highly gendered experiences of industrial restructuring and response in BC's forestry communities (Barnes et al., 2001; Egan and Klausen, 1998; Reed, 2003a, b, c). Equally, although a significant proportion of the mill's workforce was Indo-Canadian (perhaps 10–15%), only one of these workers has

remained in any sense active in the YTS, and very few members of the Indo-Canadian workforce joined the YTS. My observations to this point do not indicate any overt racism as the underlying cause of this, but rather racially and ethnically differentiated experiences of both work and being laid off. But again, failing to transcend this difference is by any estimation (including those of the YTS leadership) a lost opportunity.

Perhaps most surprising is that the YTS has made little progress in undertaking or experimenting directly with what might be called alternative economic production strategies and social relations. Successful mobilization to make discounted extended health insurance available to YTS members in a group plan is a rare exception. This is surprising since community forestry would seem to open the door to co-operative production relations, more sustainable forestry, and the production of both conventional and non-traditional forest products (e.g. floral greens, mushroom gathering, firewood, etc.). But thus far, community forestry is largely an abstraction for the YTS, its realization contingent upon state provision of fibre. Little has been done in trying to train workers with new skills for these kinds of activities, nor in exploring some kind of co-operative enterprise independent of state sanction. A limited number of former mill workers have explored economic alternatives. One, for example, went on to start her own, now successful business carving custom furniture from “slash” (unwanted wood left behind on clearcuts) and marketing the products directly via the Internet. Despite the obvious skill and experience she could now offer, at a focus group held in December 2005, when the question was posed as to how the group might work better to develop such strategies and why it had not, there was enthusiasm for the idea, but few answers as to why little had been done (even from the person in question). Why this would be is an open question, though I am tempted to point to the deeply ideological character of capitalist production relations that continues to script the workers as wage workers, long after the mill has closed. At the very least, it is certainly evident to me from individual and group interviews and conversations that for many of the workers in question, some of whom worked at the mill for in excess of 20 years, change has not come easily.¹⁹

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to document aspects of the struggles of the YTS since closure of the Youbou sawmill. I have placed some emphasis on tracing the transition of the group from being a largely reactive organization departing little from the relatively conservative politics of the IWA to a more broad-based group bridging labour and environmental politics, reaching out to community groups

(footnote continued)

not go on the offensive to protect union jobs and explore alternatives in forestry at the same time, he told me simply and disdainfully “We tried socialism. It doesn't work” (Interview, former IWA organizer, 13 August 2002 in Vancouver, BC). It bears noting that the IWA refused to back the Coalition for Sustainable Forest Solutions in 2002. This group called on the BC government to take back 50% of forest tenures and redistribute them to small, community-based organizations emphasizing greater value-added and more sustainable forestry. While the coalition drew broad support from labour, First Nations, and environmental groups, the IWA would not join in.

¹⁹Similar findings are evident from other communities in BC (see Ostry et al., 2000, 2001).

of various descriptions, and asking more fundamental questions about globalist forestry in BC, and about actually existing globalization more generally. I have been motivated in documenting this movement on one hand out of a sense that this is a story that needs to be told, and that this is a group with some novel features whose consciousness raising is noteworthy and potentially inspirational to activists and scholars alike interested in the politics of work, nature, community, and globalization in rural hinterlands.

At the same time, I have tried to interpret the YTS in relation to some key questions that arise in the organization of counter-hegemonic movements out of disparate groups such as the YTS, including the thorny problem of how social movements can transcend the so-called red-green divide between social and environmental justice, and at the same time, jump-scale and transcend their place-boundedness. I have drawn on the work of Karl Polanyi and Antonio Gramsci (as well as commentators on these) to try and work through the political problems at stake, inspired in part by Stuart Hall's musings on Thatcherism, hegemony, and counter-hegemony. I have also been motivated by Michael Burawoy (2003) who calls for accounts of "local experiments" and "real utopias" in analyses of the politics of capitalist globalization. After all, in the spirit of Gramsci in particular—but also the work on alternative economies by Gibson-Graham (1996, 2003) in some respects—the converse of recognizing the extraordinary, politically contingent obstacles that stand in the way of these localisms ever amounting to anything is that we can never be sure which ones will.

As I was finishing my last revisions to this paper, a YTS email notice appeared in my inbox. It announced an upcoming rally to protest against raw log exports. The rally is organized in conjunction with the Pulp, Paper, and Woodworkers of Canada (PPWC) Local #2, representing workers at the paper mill in Crofton, BC, just northeast of Duncan. I wish I could go. The notice reminds me not only of the persistence and energy of the YTS, committed to fighting for justice and change now more than 5 years after the mill closed. It also strikes me as a reminder of the group's highly organic organizing style. Despite the YTS's increasing alienation from the IWA in the aftermath of the mill closure, the group has hardly given up on organized labour. Rather, the YTS works in coalition with community, environmental, First Nations, and labour groups who will work with them toward a strategy of social and environmental justice grounded in more sustainable exploitation of forests. It is not clear what this strategy will or would look like, yet arguably the group's most compelling attribute is a simple faith, born from extremely difficult circumstances, that it cannot be much worse than what actually existing globalist forestry in BC has delivered. I do not harbour any grand illusions about this rally. It will likely not lead to much beyond a limited number of people getting together, affirming their ideas, perhaps getting their pictures in the

paper. On the other hand, it might be the start of something.

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