Networks of Trade Protest in the Americas: Toward a New Labor Internationalism?

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1990s, for the first time in the history of the Americas, truly hemispherewide collaboration among labor organizations became possible. Yet this new political opportunity structure has not brought actors together in an undisputed new labor internationalism. This article focuses on two key sources of contention among labor organizations in the context of free trade mobilizations between 1990 and 2004: the discussions about coalition building with other civil society actors and the debates about including a social clause in trade agreements. It argues that transnational collective action occurs parallel to the continued relevance of national-level claims and targets, and that this simultaneity represents a real source of challenges, for scholars and labor organizations alike. Based on social network data and qualitative interviews in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and the United States, the article analyzes the actions taken by labor organizations, and how these changed through time.

When labor organizations began to mobilize around the wave of free trade agreement negotiations that swept the Americas in the 1990s, their leaders realized how ill-prepared they were to deal with this new context. First, some of the key labor federations in the region did not speak to each other because of grievances inherited from the Cold War era.[1] Furthermore, there were few hemispheric or even subregional spaces to exchange ideas and information with other civil society actors. Even if the spaces existed, labor organizations that felt threatened by trade agreements were also struggling to elaborate common alternatives to the neoliberal model that came to dominate the hemisphere in the 1990s and that had free trade as one of its pillars.

Labor organizations were not the only civil society actors to face such organizational and ideological challenges. In fact, these have been at the core of a broader debate, held by scholars and activists alike, about the characteristics and potentiality of transnational civil society collective action. Since the publication of the pioneering studies on this issue more than four decades ago (see Kaiser 1969, 1971; Nye and Keohane 1971), the literature has analyzed the roles of an increasingly heterogeneous set of actors and has made an ambitious effort to understand the relationships between globalization and new coalitions. As

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Keck and Sikkink (1998, 15) argue, while many activists working transnationally today come out of the traditions of the past, they no longer tend to define themselves in terms of these traditions or the organizations that carried them.[2]

This article contributes to efforts to understand the novelty, variety, and dynamics of current transnational collective action by proposing a relational approach that bridges the gap between labor studies and the social movement literature and that is sensitive to the embeddedness of actors in dynamic political contexts. Such a relational approach assumes that behavior is explained best if analyzed from the perspective of the actors' relationships, rejecting "the notion that one can posit discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as ultimate starting points" (Emirbayer 1997, 287).[3] Furthermore, it "sees relations between terms or units as preeminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances" (Emirbayer 1997, 289).

Thus, this article argues that in order to understand transnational collective action, it is not enough simply to reveal the specific interests of labor organizations, but it is necessary to identify the mechanisms by which actors are able (or unable) to overcome their differences and construct common purpose.[4] Some of the divisions among labor organizations are related to different ideological traditions that guide their perceptions about the world. However, these traditions are not tools that automatically provide instructions for behavior.[5] A relational approach seeks better to understand changes in prior beliefs that result from the interactions among actors.

The analysis focuses on the roles played by a key set of labor federations from Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the United States in trade-related mobilizations from the beginning of the 1990s to 2004. The mapping of relationships among these federations and between them and other actors is based on the results of a social network questionnaire applied to 123 civil society organizations in the four countries. In-depth and semistructured interviews with key informants complement the network analysis by providing information on how relationships have evolved through time, the contents of ties mapped, and labor's reactions to changing political contexts.[6]

This is a relevant object of study because in the 1990s, for the first time in the history of the region, truly hemispherewide collaboration among labor organizations seemed to be feasible.[7] In fact, the converging positions of major actors in opposition to trade agreements such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and their increased levels of collaboration with other civil society actors with respect to trade negotiations, at the domestic and transnational levels, would not have been imaginable as recently as the beginning of the 1980s. This broad consensus, however, hides key differences among actors and the persistence of obstacles to transnational collective action.

Recent agreements, as important as they are, have not led to an undisputed new era of labor internationalism. Instead, labor organizations can take—and indeed have taken—different paths to transnationality. While some actors have participated in trade debates mostly from within domestic borders, seeking to influence domestic institutions and processes, others have sought allies across national boundaries, have lobbied other government officials, and have spent scarce resources in building transnational coalitions. Furthermore, while some organizations have tended to focus primarily on labor's particularistic claims, others have attempted to broaden their agendas and have transformed their initial demands and visions.

These choices of paths are not fixed but are "contingently reconstructed by actors in ongoing dialogue with unfolding situations" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 966). More specifically, they can change because of lessons learned, and through negotiated interactions with other actors. Changes can also result from how actors interpret new political opportunities at the domestic level.[8] By bringing together a focus on relationships and on political contexts as sources of change, the approach advocated in this article can help to explain the variations in labor's paths to transnationality through time.

The first part of the article explains the profound shifts in how labor organizations and other civil society actors have discussed the contents and impacts of multilateral trade negotiations and have mobilized in order to influence them. It explains how, in the past 30 years, a global trade regime has emerged in parallel to the proliferation of new regional and bilateral trade agreements. It is in the Americas that this change in trade politics has been most clearly felt.

The second and third parts analyze the different paths to transnationality taken by a key group of labor federations in this new context. These paths are analyzed in terms of the various attempts at coalition building among allies and in terms of the different answers given by actors to the question, what should trade agreements look like? The last part of the article pays special attention to the proposal of inclusion of a social clause in free trade agreements The introduction of language in treaties that links access to trade agreement benefits to respect for labor rights has been the focus of contentious debates among labor organizations, business representatives, and governmental actors in the region at least since the beginning of the 1990s. What is more interesting is that this proposal also has been a matter of difference among labor organizations themselves, as well as between them and other civil society actors. This makes the issue a good example of the possibility of negotiating common ground within heterogeneous transnational coalitions. It also, however, indicates how fragile the new attempts at labor internationalism remain in the face of different interpretations and reactions to changing political contexts.

THE CREATION OF A GLOBAL TRADE REGIME

The trade policy arena has historically been a contentious one, and labor organizations have participated intermittently for many decades in debates about the potential impact of protectionist and liberal policies. It has also been a multifaceted arena. Although only recently have actors and scholars paid greater attention to the interfaces between trade and other policy arenas, such as the environment, food safety, or human rights, these were been completely ignored in the past (Aaronson 2001). Given the potential impact of trade negotiations on productive systems, the labor market, prices, and technological innovation, decisions about trade policies have always been a part of broader economic and political debates about development models and the role of the state. Furthermore, because gains and losses from trade are unevenly distributed, the moral implications of such decisions also have been an inseparable part of these debates (García 2003).

Governments officially acknowledged the link between international competitiveness and labor rights in the 1919 Preamble to the Constitution of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which states, “the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries” (ILO 2006). Although the ILO never had the necessary tools to enforce this principle effectively, it thus recognized the need to promote a balance between competitiveness and respect for labor rights, which was in fact one of the motivations behind its creation (ILO 2006).

At times, these early debates involved other civil society organizations. For example, negotiations on specific international regulations that linked trade and environmental issues included conservationists and naturalists, who lobbied state officials at the domestic as well as at the transnational level (Aaronson 2001, 45). However, perhaps the best-known instance of early transnational collective action related to trade did not deal with trade in goods but trade in persons: the transnational abolitionist movement that lasted from the end of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. It brought together activists in Europe and the Americas, who engaged in intensive dialogue and collaboration (Keck and Sikkink 1998, esp. chap. 2).

In spite of these precedents, however, as early as about 30 years ago, international trade was an issue of interest mostly to government officials (the executive powers and, in some countries, such as the

United States, the legislative), to international organizations (in the twentieth century), and—unevenly through time—to farmers, producers of industrial goods, and workers. Civil society groups, such as the environmentalists, became interested in trade negotiations indirectly, through the filter of specific issues, such as the trade in furs or the protection of an animal species.

Indeed, for most of the history of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), business organizations were almost the sole nonstate actors to follow negotiations closely.[9] This situation began to shift partly because of a progressive process of expanding the negotiating agenda. The Tokyo Round (1973–79) introduced debates about nontariff barriers, such as subsidies, national procurement, and health and regulatory standards, and the Uruguay Round (1986–94) subsequently deepened this trend.

This expansion of the scope of the negotiating agenda coincided with the transitions to democracy in Latin America and with a greater awareness by a broad variety of civil society organizations of the domestic impact of international negotiations. The new role of the GATT represented a wake-up call to many, whereby "what had been sort of an apathetic attitude towards trade agreements quickly became a central issue" (Dillon 2004) to civil society actors, such as nongovernmental organizations specializing in human rights, development, and consumer rights (see also Wallach 2004).

Thus, by the time the World Trade Organization (WTO) was created in 1995, a broad group of civil society actors from developed and developing countries alike had concluded that trade negotiations should be more closely followed, at the domestic as well as at the international level. The WTO's greater powers and expanded membership compared to the GATT helped further to justify this attention (Wallach and Woodall 2004; Williams 2005).[10] Not only did this new organization continue to expand the agenda to other policy areas, but it also gained new regulatory powers through the creation of a more efficient and stronger dispute settlement mechanism than the one that had existed under the GATT; the extension of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, which, under the GATT, was limited to reviewing members' policies on goods trade, and under the WTO also reviews public policies on services and intellectual property; and the development of a set of mandatory codes.

The transition from the GATT to the WTO represents the culmination of the process of creation of a global trade regime. In this new context, the focus of much of the political economy literature on the interests of labor, capital, and states became too narrow to understand the coalition-building dynamics around trade.[11] Side-by-side with labor organizations, other civil society actors, such as environmental, human rights, faith-based, and consumer rights organizations, became part of the trade debates. Collaboration and conflict between labor and these newcomers became more relevant in explaining labor's choices of paths to transnationality from the 1990s on.

Free Trade and Labor in the Americas

At the dawn of the 1990s, the Americas became an important laboratory for this new chapter in the history of trade politics and transnational collective action. However, debates about trade agreements and regional integration were hardly a novelty in the region. The goal of free trade between the United States and Canada was more than a century old when the two countries finally signed an agreement (in 1989). Similarly, Latin America's history is punctuated by failed attempts to fulfill what many saw, at least rhetorically, as its "historical calling"; that is, to become integrated as only one country. The first round of attempts at integration in the nineteenth century—some of which included the United States—collapsed under the weight of geographical distances, the power of local caudillos, and the different interests of the subregions (see, e.g., Furtado 1976, esp. part 1; Lambert 1968; Bethell 1985).

Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the United States and Latin America pursued antagonistic trade policies. In the United States, the end of World War II inaugurated a period of trade liberalization. In Latin America, however, these were protectionist times. Both strategies were influenced by the Cold War. While in the United States free trade was perceived as an important part of the nation's anticommunist strategy, in Latin America, protectionist policies were considered a key tool in reaching autonomous economic development.[12]

Civil society participation varied considerably during these decades. According to Aaronson, "from 1945 to 1979, most Americans simply did not care about trade policy. . . . Trade policy was made in Washington and in Geneva by a relatively small circle of government officials, trade unionists, business leaders, and academics" (Aaronson 2001, 85). Even if most U.S. citizens remained oblivious to trade negotiations, labor and business organizations participated actively in the debates promoted by Congress, but not necessarily as opponents to free trade. Up to the 1960s, most affiliates of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) were part of pro–free trade domestic coalitions (Destler 1998). In Latin America, though, trade policies remained a black box, accessed almost exclusively by a small circle of national bureaucrats.

At the beginning of the 1990s, a third round of trade liberalization and integration attempts began, in a very different context. Economic policies in the United States and Latin America converged, and a new wave of agreements was negotiated within an ideological framework provided by neoliberalism. Under U.S. leadership, this "new regionalism" consisted mainly of the negotiation of agreements aimed at creating free trade zones, while at the same time including a wide number of provisions in issue areas such as intellectual property and investors' rights.

In this context, the traditional understanding of free trade areas in regional integration theory as the first phase of trade liberalization in an ever-widening process that would lead to the formation of a customs union, a common market, and eventually an economic union (Balassa 1961) was not useful for understanding these negotiations. For example, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) liberalized trade and, at the same time, introduced specific elements of domestic policy harmonization typical of the formation of a customs union or a common market.

On the other hand, freedom of movement of labor was excluded from the negotiating agenda, and the creation of supranational authorities was limited to those needed for dispute settlements.[13] At the same time, a few South-South initiatives, such as the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) and the Andean Community, maintained the ambition to create common markets, once again justifying Latin American efforts at integration as a way of strengthening the region's autonomy and political power in the international system.[14]

Labor did not respond to these initiatives with one voice. In North America, the Mexican Confederation of Labor (CTM) supported NAFTA, unlike most U.S. and Canadian labor, as well as other Mexican organizations. In South America, the most important labor federations decided to give MERCOSUR their "critical support."[15] In both cases, however, these were disappointing experiences for labor. Although it is true that organizations from South America were able to participate in various decisionmaking and consultative forums, 15 years later this participation has had little impact on integration policies (Jakobsen 1999; von Bülow 2003).[16]

Similarly, NAFTA's labor side agreement has not led to concrete and measurable results in terms of better compliance with labor rights standards in North America. Some scholars argue that it has had an indirect impact because of the so-called "sunshine effect"; that is, the public nature of the agreement's complaint procedures and the public's adverse reaction have exerted pressure on governments and employers to follow the rule of law (see, e.g., Bognanno and Lu 2003). What is certain is that these experiences have helped generate important shifts in the alliances among labor organizations and between these and other civil society organizations in the region.

Debates about the impact of negotiations in these subregional tracks converged at the hemispheric level when governments launched the FTAA negotiations in the mid-1990s. Unlike both NAFTA and MER-

COSUR, however, the FTAA talks never even incorporated a labor dimension (for a review, see Charnovitz 2005). The main arguments from those who opposed the agreement focused on the potentially negative impact of further trade liberalization on jobs, labor standards, and national sovereignty, all of which built on the critiques of NAFTA. Similarly, the diffusion to several countries of multisectoral domestic trade coalitions came out of the anti-NAFTA organizing experience in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The creation of consensus-based transnational spaces and attempts to develop alternative proposals also built on labor's previous efforts to influence MERCOSUR (von Bülow 2003).

THE POWER OF LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, AND ITS LIMITS

The relevance of labor organizations emerges as a common pattern in the trade protest networks mapped in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the United States. This is, arguably, not surprising, because labor organizations enjoy more access to financial and human resources than many other civil society organizations, and their membership, in general terms, perceives itself as affected directly by trade agreements. Indeed, unions have participated in debates about international trade for many decades, and some of the most contentious disagreements over the benefits or dangers of trade liberalization have concerned the consequences for labor markets.

On the other hand, labor organizations in the Americas, a few notable exceptions notwithstanding, have traditionally had weak collaborative relationships with other types of organizations at the domestic as well as the transnational level.[17] International relations of labor movements, moreover, still are characterized by diplomatic relationships among labor federations, and their international relations secretariats are usually weak in comparison with those in charge of domestic affairs.[18] Sustained collaboration between workers' organizations from the North and South that compete for scarce jobs and investments is especially difficult to produce. Despite more than a century of internationalist rhetoric, labor organizations have retained deep national roots.[19]

To map the embeddedness of labor organizations in trade protest networks, this study asked key informants from 123 civil society organizations (CSOs) from Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the United States various questions about their relationships at the domestic and transnational levels. Although this is not a representative sample, it does include the labor federations and the subset of CSOs that were most active in challenging trade negotiations until 2004.

Specifically, informants were asked to nominate their organization's closest allies in trade-related collective action.[20] Although labor organiza-

Table 1. Civil Society Organizations Most Nominated as Closest Allies in Trade Debates (by country, in-degree, and type of organization)

Country	Civil Society Organization	In-degree (%)[a]	Type of Organization
Brazil	CUT (Unified Workers' Central)	75	Labor federation
	MST (Landless Workers' Movement)	68	Rural workers' movement
	FASE (Federation of Organisms for Social and Educational Assistance)	54	NGO
Chile	ACJR (Chilean Alliance for a Fair and Responsible Trade)	64	NGO
	ANAMURI (National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women)	41	Rural womens' organization
	CUT (Unified Workers' Central)	41	Labor federation
Mexico	DECA-EP (Equipo Pueblo)	60	NGO
	FAT (Authentic Labor Front)	57	Labor federation
	CILAS (Center for Labor Investigation and Consulting)	47	Labor NGO
United States	AFL-CIO	65	Labor federation
	Public Citizen	57	NGO
	IPS (Institute for Policy Studies)	50	NGO
	Friends of the Earth	50	Environmental organization

[a] In-degree counts the number of times each organization was nominated by the others as one of their closest allies in trade-related activities. In the table, in-degree is presented as a percentage of the total number of possible nominations.
Source: Author interviews.

tions represented less than 20 percent of the total number of CSOs interviewed, they were among the most nominated in every country. In the Brazilian case, for example, 75 percent of the 29 CSOs interviewed nominated the Unified Workers' Central (CUT) as one of their closest allies; similarly, 65 percent of the 41 CSOs interviewed in the United States nominated the AFL-CIO. Although in Chile and Mexico labor organizations were less central, CUT-Chile and Mexico's Labor Authentic Front (FAT) still were among the three most nominated by informants (see table 1).

Still, not all informants nominated every labor organization as a close ally. Labor did not respond as a unified or homogeneous front to the challenges and opportunities created by trade negotiations. Labor organizations in the four countries studied took different paths in these debates in terms of the breadth of their alliances, the site of activism privileged (domestic or international), the amount of resources dedicated to trade-related mobilization, and the willingness to negotiate common agendas and frames with allies.

Labor in a New Relational Context

The scholarly literature on labor transnationalism has struggled to explain how and why labor organizations engage—or not—in transnational collaboration. Many authors use as independent variables the differences in industrial structure, state institutions, and practices or labor ideologies to explain the variety in form and frequency of labor transnationalism. Generally speaking, these authors have not explored the impact of labor organizations' relations with other actors. Transnational action is seen *ex post* as the product of a single, previously taken autonomous decision, as if organizations existed in bubbles and did not change their views through time as a result of interaction with others.

For example, Michael Dreiling and Ian Robinson can successfully explain the variation of union strategies on NAFTA on the basis of their differentiation of union types, defined "in terms of the inclusiveness of union collective identities and the degree to which union conceptions of a just political economy are at odds with the existing system" (Dreiling and Robinson 1998, 164). However, it is difficult to generalize this argument so that it can explain how organizations representing very different union types achieved a common position in regard to MERCOSUR, or how positions have converged in opposition to the FTAA. Past trajectories, political identities, and alliances are relevant, but in the 1990s, labor organizations became embedded in a new environment of relationships, which influenced the goals and strategies they pursued.

At the beginning of 1998, four years after NAFTA took effect, John Sweeney, the president of the AFL-CIO, made a historic trip to Mexico, the first by a U.S. labor federation president to that country in 74 years. During that visit, Sweeney talked to the whole spectrum of Mexican labor organizations, including independent ones, such as the FAT and the newly created National Union of Workers (UNT), thus officially ending the exclusive relationship it had nurtured with the CTM during the Cold War.

Contentious debates among labor organizations from both countries about NAFTA's potential impact are the key to understanding this change. As an AFL-CIO official explained,

> NAFTA was very significant in that the old Cold War definitions of trade union alliance—with whom we should work—were no longer viable. It put down a kind of practice dogma, if not an explicit dogma, that the only real partner in Mexico was the CTM, and that even that partnership, the only way it could be maintained, was on a very superficial diplomatic basis. The challenge of NAFTA completely overturned that premise. (AFL-CIO 2004)

The weakening of the AFL-CIO–CTM alliance helped, in turn, to change the role of the Inter-American Regional Workers' Organization

(ORIT) in the debates about trade agreements in the Americas.[21] As table 2 shows, up to 2004, all of the labor centrals involved in trade protest networks in the four countries studied were affiliated with the ORIT at the regional level and with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) at the global level. Although the ICFTU was not the only global-level labor organization, it emerged as the strongest one in the post–Cold War era (Myconos 2005, esp. chap. 5). Similarly, ORIT was not the only regional labor organization, but in the 1990s it became by far the most representative and powerful, especially after several important, previously nonaligned labor organizations, such as the Brazilian CUT, decided to join.[22]

This revitalized ORIT contributed significantly to strengthening the view among labor leaders that sustained alliances with other civil society actors in the region were vital. Labor federations that had participated in efforts to build cross-sectoral trade coalitions at the domestic level, such as the Canadian Labour Congress, and organizations that had historical ties to other civil society actors, such as CUT-Brazil, were key advocates of the so-called social alliances within ORIT.

An important event exemplifies this trend clearly. During the Workers of the Americas Forum, held in parallel to the Belo Horizonte FTAA Ministerial Meeting in 1997, representatives of other kinds of CSOs were invited for the first time to participate in an ORIT-organized event of that size (CUT 1997). A final declaration signed jointly by ORIT, NGOs, and social movement organizations turned out to be the first step toward the creation of the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), a broad transnational coalition that, between 2000 and 2004, mobilized against the FTAA negotiations.[23] At this point, the lack of negotiating channels strengthened a common identity among labor organizations that were most opposed to the agreement and weakened those in the AFL-CIO and ORIT that advocated a less critical position (Smith and Korzeniewicz 2007).

Reaching out to other civil society actors also meant formulating a broader agenda on trade negotiations. Until then, ORIT's demands, presented to negotiators in previous FTAA ministerial meetings, had been specifically labor-related: the creation of a Labor Forum (as a counterweight to the already existing Business Forum) and the creation of a working group on social and labor issues. But when ORIT formally declared its opposition to the FTAA negotiations, in April 2001, its arguments were based on a wider set of issues, including those that were considered relevant by NGOs and social movement organizations affiliated with the HSA (Anner and Evans 2004, 41).

However, not all of ORIT's affiliates accepted the argument that broader alliances and extended agendas were an imperative of new times. Their individual levels of engagement in the construction of the HSA varied widely, and several important labor federations were not

Table 2. Main Labor Central Participants in the Trade Debates in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the United States, 2004

	Brazil			Chile	Mexico			United States
Labor Central	CUT	CGT	FS	CUT	FAT	CTM	UNT	AFL-CIO
International labor organization membership	ICFTU-ORIT CCSCS	ICFTU-ORIT CCSCS	ICFTU-ORIT CCSCS	ICFTU-ORIT CCSCS	ICFTU-ORIT	ICFTU-ORIT	ICFTU-ORIT	ICFTU-ORIT
Position in trade debates (MERCOSUR, NAFTA, FTAA)	Critical supporter of MERCOSUR, participated in campaign against FTAA	Critical supporter of MERCOSUR but not active participant in campaign against FTAA	Critical supporter of MERCOSUR but with no clear position on FTAA	Internal division during U.S.-Chile FTA talks. Against the FTAA but not active participant in campaign against FTAA	Early challenger of NAFTA; participated in campaign against FTAA, joined UNT 1997	In favor of NAFTA, changed its position to oppose FTAA, but not active participant in campaign against FTAA	Created after NAFTA (1997); against FTAA but not active participant in campaign against FTAA	Early challenger of NAFTA; participated in campaign against FTAA
Active participant in domestic trade coalition	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Active participant in HSA	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Source: Author interviews.

active participants (Anner and Evans 2004, 42). For example, the Mexican CTM, the Brazilian Labor Force (*Força Sindical*, FS), and the Chilean CUT were much less active than the CUT-Brazil, the FAT, and the AFL-CIO (see table 2). Debates about the scope of labor's "social alliances" were a key source of contention among organizations in the 1990s, and remained an unresolved issue in some cases, as ORIT's secretary-general explains.

> We had to overcome a lot of resistance. There was a lot of confusion about the definition of civil society. Many argued that it was only NGOs, but there's also rural movements, etc. . . . One of the ICFTU officials argued, "what are social alliances worth if NGOs are only the dog and its owner?" We had to fight that. The second obstacle was the fear that labor unions would lose their identity. The third was the attitude that social alliances are all right, but the labor movement must lead them. In 1998 was when we had the most difficulties. Today, no ORIT affiliate questions the validity of social alliances. However, some do not put them in practice. (Báez 2005)

Báez mentions the difficulties faced in 1998 because of another key event: the Summit of the Americas, which was held in Chile that year. While ORIT affiliates, such as CUT-Brazil, the Canadian Labour Congress, and the AFL-CIO wanted to organize a People's Summit jointly with a group of Chilean NGOs and social movement organizations, the local affiliate (CUT-Chile) rejected the idea. In the end, two events were held simultaneously, the Labor Summit and the People's Summit.

> It was very problematic for us in ORIT, because we were trying to forge a broader alliance, what became [known as] the "social alliance." We thought it was very important, very strategic . . . but it was difficult, because CUT was our main host. (AFL-CIO 2004)

According to the various coalition-building strategies chosen by actors up to 2004, it is possible to differentiate three groups among the major labor federations in the four countries studied. One type is those that participated systematically through time in domestic and transnational alliances and built a diverse array of trade-related ties with other types of organizations at both levels (CUT-Brazil, the AFL-CIO, and the FAT in Mexico). Second is those that had only a subregional presence and few trade-related ties with other types of organizations (the other two Brazilian federations, the General Workers' Confederation, CGT, and FS, along with the Chilean CUT and the Mexican UNT). Third is the Mexican CTM, which had a domestically oriented approach to trade debates while at the same time maintaining its regional and global diplomatic ties (see table 2).

Labor leaders from the first group justify their decision to seek sustained and strong links with other CSOs as a way of achieving better results in a context of diminished labor power.

> Many labor unions still think that they are the main actors of revolutionary change. This is false; labor unions have less and less power. We think that the specific labor agenda has to be converted into a public interest agenda, and we have not been able to do this conversion. (Villalba 2004)

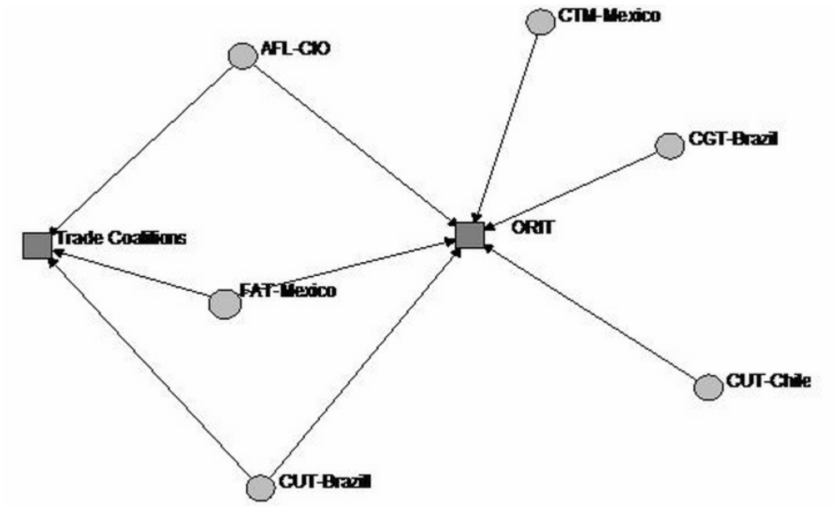
Two active AFL-CIO participants in the trade debates at the time of the interviews went further in justifying the extension of labor unions' agenda and coalition-building practices as a way of changing other actors' perceptions about labor organizations' practices.

> The weakness of labor unions in the trade debates is that everybody assumes that it is entirely self-interest that motivates you, so they can dismiss that. When you are working with religious organizations, the human rights organizations, it adds credibility. . . . The labor movement in the U.S. is too small and too weak to carry a lot of political debates if we are isolated, and we recognize that. . . . We want other people to understand that labor groups can play a progressive role in international trade discussions. (Lee 2004)
>
> We have focused more and more of our work on issues like investment, services, intellectual property, all these things that may not have a huge impact on the U.S., but do have a huge impact on developing countries. . . . In Seattle [during the 1999 WTO meeting], the press reported that what we were for was only focused on workers' rights, and they characterized it as sort of the antidevelopmental agenda. We realized that we needed to be more aggressive and more public about the fact that our critique on trade is not just about labor standards. (Drake 2004)

The different views on the breadth of coalition building are reflected in the answers given by representatives of labor federations when asked how they would contact allies in order to plan parallel events to an FTAA ministerial meeting in another country.[24] Although all those who responded asserted that they would use labor's diplomatic channels (ORIT), the ones most committed to the creation of broader alliances—the AFL-CIO, CUT-Brazil, and FAT-Mexico—also said that they would coordinate their actions with other kinds of civil society organizations through multisectoral trade coalitions such as the HSA or its national chapters (see figure 1).

Accommodations like these, however, present labor with a dilemma. The extension of issues and agendas allows labor organizations to maintain relationships with many heterogeneous actors at once,

Figure 1. Main Gateways Used by Selected Labor Federations to Contact Allies in Other Countries Before a Trade Summit



○ Labor Federations

■ Gateways used to contact allies in the other country to organize a trade-related event.

Source: Author interviews

but often at the cost of suppressed demands, diminished visibility of their own agendas, and greater complications in negotiating common actions.[25] As Sidney Tarrow has argued, activists often find themselves "divided between the global framing of transnational movement campaigns and the local needs of those whose claims they want to represent" (2005, 76). This problem is clearest when actors perceive that they have a new political opportunity to negotiate their demands. A good example of this dilemma is that faced by labor organizations that are active members of the Hemispheric Social Alliance.

THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES

Labor organizations involved in the trade policy debates often have confronted the question, if not this agreement, then what? The question may come from parliamentarians, government officials, the media, or other civil society organizations. Once again, responses have not been homogeneous. The different answers given by labor organizations also help to differentiate among the paths to transnationality those organizations take.

Indeed, it has been easier for labor organizations to find common ground simply by opposing negotiations such as the FTAA than by agreeing on an alternative that would be acceptable to all. Even in the context of the FTAA talks, however, there were attempts at building a common understanding of what such an alternative should look like, and these attempts went well beyond ORIT's boundaries. The initiative came mainly from the labor centrals that were most active in the HSA.

The document produced by HSA members, *Alternatives for the Americas*, represents a "unique effort" (Doucet 2005, 277) to craft a common platform among organizations from different countries and sectors. In its first edition, the authors defined it as "more than an economic doctrine. . . . It brings together proposals that were considered viable and on which there was a broad consensus. *The priority was the establishment of the basis of an inclusive alliance* (HSA 1998, 6, 10; emphasis added).

Thus, *Alternatives for the Americas* (henceforth *Alternatives*) was as much an attempt to foster the HSA's credibility with negotiators and other civil society actors as to build collective identity within the coalition.[26] The five editions produced between 1998 and 2005 illustrate three mechanisms by which members have attempted progressively to construct agreement: the extension of agendas, the suppression of divisive issues, and the transformation of initial demands.[27] The debates about the introduction of a social clause in free trade agreements is a good example of two of these mechanisms, the extension and transformation of demands.

The Debate over a Social Clause in *Alternatives for the Americas*

The section of *Alternatives* on labor rights presents two key demands: the incorporation of a social clause (or "labor clause") in trade agreements and the progressive upward harmonization of labor laws and conditions among signatories. While it would be hard to find any member of the HSA that would oppose these general demands, they presuppose a vision of global governance that is not shared by all, one that accepts international regulations that, in practice, would place limits on national sovereignty. The comparison of the proposals on the introduction of a labor clause in trade agreements in the first and fifth editions of *Alternatives* (see table 3) exemplifies how actors have transformed the initial version and extended their agenda to include migrants' and women's rights.

The introduction of labor clauses in trade agreements has been a perennial source of contention among actors, not only in the Americas but worldwide.[28] Many in the South, as well as some in the North, have

Table 3. *Alternatives For The Americas*:
Main Proposals on Labor Standards in Two Editions

1998 (1st Edition)	2005 (5th Edition)
Incorporation of a labor clause (the commitment to respect basic workers' rights with an enforcement mechanism delegated to the ILO with the possibility of trade sanctions targeted at governments or businesses), and a safety net for workers who lost their jobs	Incorporation of a labor clause *(with the possibility of trade sanctions targeted primarily at businesses, and only initiated when expressly requested by organizations representing the workers whose rights have been violated*), and a safety net for workers who lost their jobs
Progressive upward harmonization of working rights and conditions	Progressive upward harmonization of working rights and conditions; *access of migrants, women, and informal workers to labor rights*

Changes in italics.
Sources: HSA 1998, 2005.

seen labor clause proposals as safeguards and protectionist tools rather than as labor solidarity initiatives. Under the umbrella of the HSA, nevertheless, some of the most important labor organizations in the Americas finally reached a consensus on the issue.[29]

The 2005 edition of *Alternatives* differs from that of 1998 in several aspects. It puts greater emphasis on a system that is based on incentives instead of coercion. It stipulates that the perpetrators of labor rights violations (not the countries) should be the ones made accountable. It asserts that the enforcement process must be transparent and public, with the participation of civil society organizations and experts (see table 3). It accepts the idea of supranational tribunals to investigate violations and decide on enforcement, at the same time that it guarantees greater control of decisions by demanding the participation of representatives of those affected.

This agreement on the wording of a proposal became possible because advocates of labor clauses transformed their initial demands. More specifically, it provides an example of a negotiated outcome of differences between the AFL-CIO and Latin American labor federations. The disciplinary focus on actors that violate laws, instead of on the whole countries, was an early demand of the FAT and other Mexican actors during the NAFTA debates about the labor side agreement. Similarly, the inclusion of those affected by potential sanctions in the enforcement debates and the emphasis on incentives are attempts to avoid using enforcement procedures as protectionist tools and to minimize the potentially negative consequences of penalties on the development of the South.

By accepting these changes, actors in the North could downplay charges that their defense of the social clause was motivated by "labor protectionism," because trade sanctions would only punish workers in developing countries by making goods produced in those regions less competitive. This, however, remains a fragile consensus. Debates about how labor rights and trade should be linked exemplify the tensions originating from the extension and transformation of demands in order to accommodate different visions.

The fragility of this consensus relates to the dilemmas of the simultaneity of action at multiple levels. More specifically, domestically rooted organizations, such as labor unions, try to reach agreements with allies from other sectors and countries, while at the same time responding to local and national pressures from their constituencies and other actors. These pressures, however, are felt differently in each country, because of the various rules concerning trade policymaking and the changing domestic political contexts.

In Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, the negotiation of international trade agreements is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the executive branch. The proposed agreements are then submitted to the national congress for a yes or no vote, without the possibility of revisions or amendments.[30] The United States stands apart from the Latin American countries because its constitution grants Congress the primary power over trade policymaking. Since 1974, it has been Congress's responsibility periodically to approve a Trade Promotion Authority Act (TPA, best known as fast track legislation). This grants temporary authority to the President to negotiate trade agreements with other countries while limiting the role of Congress to approving or rejecting the treaties within 90 days, without the possibility of amendment. Although the restrictions on the role of Congress have sparked criticism by those who oppose trade negotiations, U.S. legislators still have considerably more power than their counterparts in Brazil, Chile, or Mexico. Through the TPA, they can specify objectives that they expect U.S. negotiators to pursue and can introduce criteria for labor standards that negotiations must meet for agreements to be subsequently approved. The President has to notify Congress before entering into an agreement, and is required to consult with congressional committees during the negotiations.

The different domestic policymaking rules and changing political contexts present various challenges to those who would contest trade agreements, including which decisionmakers to target, when to present alternatives, and the content of the alternatives. In the United States, efforts to influence trade policymaking are divided between lobbying Congress—especially during fast track and trade agreement votes—and executive agencies—especially during trade agreement negotiations. Thus, legislators ask U.S. labor representatives to present specific criteria that trade agreements would have to meet to become acceptable, especially when Democrats have held the majority in Congress (as they have since the 2006 legislative elections).

Although the AFL-CIO did extend its agenda on trade and thereby transform the contents of the labor clause proposal, if there had been the opportunity to negotiate what remains its key demand—the inclusion of enforceable provisions to protect core labor standards in future trade agreements—the strong ties built with allies would be in peril, as a Brazilian CUT representative admitted after the U.S. presidential elections of 2004.

> If [John] Kerry [the Democratic candidate] had won, with regard to the trade issue it would have been very complicated for us. . . . I think it could have created a conflict with the AFL-CIO on the social clause. Because even if CUT has agreed to a social clause, we have gone beyond that in our internal debate. . . . Today we are in favor of the contents of a social clause, but we think that introducing it in a trade agreement is not at all sufficient [to gain our support for it] (CUT-Brazil 2005).

The recent debates about the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement in the U.S. Congress further illustrate the fragility of agreements established among members of the Hemispheric Social Alliance in the context of a new political opening to negotiate labor's agenda at the domestic level. Anchored in the changes that it was able to negotiate with the new Democratic majority, the AFL-CIO kept a neutral position with respect to this free trade agreement. It neither supported nor vocally opposed the FTA, an ambiguous and novel position by this federation in the period since the NAFTA vote. In a letter to congressional representatives signed by its legislative director, dated October 1, 2007, the AFL-CIO applauded the changes made by the new Democratic majority to the labor and environmental sections of the agreement; at the same time, however, it criticized the lack of response to its demands to change the contents of provisions on investment, procurement, and services (Samuel 2007).

Not all U.S. labor organizations reacted the same way, though. In fact, different interpretations of how best to deal with this new political opportunity led to a deepening of the recent split in U.S. labor. The newly created Change to Win Coalition opposed the U.S.-Peru FTA and criticized the AFL-CIO's position, siding with the majority of members of the national chapter of the Hemispheric Social Alliance. While also applauding the changes made by the new Democratic majority, it argued that they did not go far enough to gain its support (Burger 2006; Change to Win Coalition 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Never before the mid-1990s were political conditions so favorable to labor internationalism in the Americas. Collaborative ties among labor organizations and other CSOs in the hemisphere have multiplied considerably in the past 15 years. Yet this new chapter is part of a process of arduous political negotiations, not only among labor organizations from different countries but also within countries and across social movement sectors. The multiple paths to transnationality taken by labor organizations in the context of trade mobilizations express not the birth of a homogeneous kind of labor internationalism, but the dilemmas that actors face in the search for ways to respond to a new and uncertain political context.

Some attempts at new forms of collaboration have succeeded. In the period studied, between the beginning of the 1990s and 2004, a common view was constructed among key ORIT affiliates in the hemisphere with respect to trade negotiations between Latin American countries and the United States. The opposition to agreements such as the FTAA was based on a broad set of complaints and demands that extended well beyond labor's particularistic demands. Through this expanded agenda, some of the region's most powerful labor organizations, such as the AFL-CIO, have tried to overcome the traditional difficulties in labor unions' relationships with NGOs and other civil society actors. Recent initiatives, such as *Labor's Platform for the Americas* (see Godio 2007), a document presented by ORIT affiliates to presidents during the Mar del Plata Summit of the Americas in 2005, support the argument that at least a group of key labor organizations has come to discuss trade negotiations and integration processes through broader frames.

Simultaneously, though, labor organizations maintain their roots at the domestic level, with agendas of their own and particular priorities. Thus, even among those that have struggled to build common paths to transnationality since the 1990s, the fragility of agreements is clearest when actors perceive that new windows of opportunity for negotiating concrete proposals have opened at the domestic level.

The various paths to transnationality taken by labor in the Americas in the period studied do not divide them or their allies neatly between an "internationalist" and a "nationalist" group. Different emphases are used ambiguously by the same actors, depending on the specific issue, the context, and the results of negotiated interactions at the domestic and transnational levels. The politics of scale, understood in terms of the paradox of the rise of transnationalism in parallel to the continued relevance of national-level claims and targets, represents a real source of challenges, both for scholars and for labor organizations.

In sum, there is no single type of labor internationalism waiting to be discovered. To understand the potential of and the obstacles to labor collective action across borders, it is crucial to consider the complex interactions between dynamic domestic political contexts and labor's embeddedness in new multiscale and cross-sectoral networks. A relational approach that is sensitive to domestic politics—domestic decisionmaking rules and perceptions of new political opportunities—helps to explain the different choices made by similar organizations across countries and through time.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
CCSCS	Coordination of Southern Cone Labor Centrals
CGT	General Workers' Confederation (Brazil)
CLAT	Latin American Workers' Confederation
CSOs	Civil society organizations
CTM	Mexican Confederation of Labor
CUT	Unified Workers' Central (Brazil, Chile)
ECLAC, CEPAL	Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean
FAT	Labor Authentic Labor Front (Mexico)
FS	Labor Force (*Força Sindical*, Brazil)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
HSA	Hemispheric Social Alliance
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
MERCOSUR	Southern Cone Common Market
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
ORIT	Inter-American Regional Workers' Organization
RMALC	Mexican Action Network on Free Trade
UNT	National Union of Workers (Mexico)
WTO	World Trade Organization

NOTES

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1. The first attempts at hemispheric collaboration date from the end of the nineteenth century, but they were short-lived. During the Cold War, previous initiatives fell under the ideological polarization between "free unionism," sponsored in the hemisphere mainly by the AFL-CIO, and unions that were linked to the Communist-led World Federation of Trade Unions. A third, nonaligned group existed, but its transnational activities were often limited to diplomatic exchanges. Unionism in Latin America was further stifled by the military dictatorships that dominated the region between the 1960s and the 1980s.

2. Similarly, Tarrow (2005) speaks of "new transnational contention" and "new transnational activism"; and Waterman and his colleagues talk about "new labor internationalisms" (Waterman 1998; Waterman and Wills 2001).

3. Let it be noted that this is not a new approach, and many previous writers, such as Georg Simmel and Karl Marx, adopted a relational perspective in their writings.

4. For a call to shift from the search of general models to the study of mechanisms, processes, and episodes, see McAdam et al. 2001. These authors define mechanisms as "a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations" (24).

5. As Mark Blyth has put it, "structures do not come with an instruction sheet" (2002, 7).

6. Most of the interviews were conducted between May 2004 and September 2005. (For more details about the research, see the methodological appendix in von Bülow 2007) .

7. CUT-Brazil's former secretary of international affairs goes even farther to argue that in spite of previous instances of cross-border labor collaboration, it is only now, with the process of globalization and technological progress, that it is really possible to speak of labor internationalism. See Jakobsen 1999, 234.

8. The concept of political opportunities has been the focus of intense debate in the social movement theory literature in recent years. The definition used here is the one suggested by Tarrow in the second edition of *Power in Movement*: "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure" (1998, 76–77). In this article, however, the term emphasizes the relevance of considering how actors may differ in their interpretations of these opportunities, in agreement with the critique presented by authors such as Goodwin and Jasper. (For the debate about the often overly structural use of the concept of political opportunities, see Goodwin and Jasper 1999a, b; Tilly 1999; Tarrow 1999).

9. There are few but noteworthy exceptions, such as the Canadian coalition GATT-Fly, which gained an interest in negotiations through its work on development issues. See Laurie 1990.

10. The GATT was originally signed in 1947 by 23 countries; in its last meeting in 1994 it had 128 signatories. As of July 2007, the WTO had 151 members.

11. For example, Rogowski's model purports to explain domestic coalitions based on the different factor endowments across countries. The three factors he takes into consideration are labor, capital, and land (see Rogowski 1989). Midford argues that Rogowski's model fails to make adequate predictions; but Midford limits his critique to the way factors are measured and does not go beyond the basic model (see Midford 1993). Similarly, Hiscox contributes to the sophistication of the model by focusing on the impact of interindustry factor mobility to better understand variation in coalition building. In his analysis of the passage of NAFTA in the U.S. Congress, he does not even mention the participation in the debates of groups other than labor, farm, and business (see Hiscox 2002, esp. 69–70).

12. The technical justifications for Latin America's protectionism were provided by the Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, or CEPAL in its Spanish acronym), which, on the basis of a critique of classic trade theory inspired by Keynesianism, argued that the region's specialization in primary products was detrimental to its development because the terms of trade of these products (in relation to manufactured products from developed countries) tended to deteriorate over time. This critique led ECLAC to propose autonomous development policies based on a strong role of governments in promoting the industrialization of the countries of the region, through the extensive use of protectionist measures (see CEPAL 1949, 1959; Prebisch 1964; for a review of ECLAC's first 50 years, see Bielschowsky 1998). The proposed new development model, known as import substitution industrialization, became dominant in Latin America between the 1950s and 1970s. The many regional integration initiatives dating from this period were considered an essential part of the model, because greater regional integration would provide incipient industries with access to the larger markets they needed. In spite of the progress of some initiatives in liberalizing trade in the region, however, by the end of the 1970s, negotiations had stalled (Urquidi 1993).

13. For a comparison of old and new regionalisms in Latin America, see Devlin and Giordano 2004.

14. In December 2004, during the third Summit of Presidents of South America, the initiative for the creation of a South American Community of Nations was launched by the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

15. For a comparison of labor's positions in both regions, see von Bülow 2003.

16. For an even more negative evaluation of labor's participation in the Andean integration see, e.g., Pardo 1998.

17. Perhaps the most important exception in the countries studied is CUT-Brazil, which, since its creation, has maintained strong ties to NGOs and other social movement organizations. Even in this case, however, throughout the 1990s, new ties were forged between CUT and other civil society organizations at the domestic and transnational levels.

18. See the analysis of the CUT-Brazil and the CGTP-Portugal in Costa 2005a.

19. For the historical debate on labor internationalism see, e.g., Hobsbawn 1988; Stillerman 2003.

20. A roster of organizations to be interviewed was created before data collection began, based on the analysis of documents such as membership lists in trade coalitions; lists of attendees at events; sign-ons, and so forth. During field research, this list was expanded by the interviewees themselves, based on the snowball procedure: actors were asked if there were organizations that should be added to the initial roster, and these were included if they were mentioned beyond a threshold of three times. In each case, the informant was the person in charge of following trade negotiations or in charge of legislative or international affairs. Most interviews were held between June 2004 and August 2005. Some of the interviews were anonymous at the respondents' request.

21. One consequence of these internal shifts in ORIT was to move its headquarters from the CTM building in Mexico City to Venezuela and, more recently, to São Paulo.

22. In March 2008, the members of the two most important regional labor organizations, ORIT and CLAT (Latin American Workers' Confederation), plus a few independent labor centrals, formed the new Labor Confederation of the Americas. After years of internal debate, in July 1992 CUT-Brazil finally decided to give up its international nonaligned position and became affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Labor Unions (ICFTU) and its regional arm, ORIT. For an official overview of the changes in CUT's international relations policies, see Unified Workers' Central 1992. For an analysis of the internal debates that preceded the decision to join the ICFTU and ORIT, see Costa 2005b, esp. 538–66.

23. The HSA comprises 18 "national chapters," which are domestic coalitions that bring together civil society organizations from various sectors, and 15 "regional members," among them the ORIT.

24. The question asked was, suppose the next ministerial meeting of the FTAA is held in Mexico (Chile, Brazil) and you need to discuss a strategy for participating in it with Mexican (Brazilian, Chilean) organizations. Do you (you can choose more than one): a) get in touch with organizations in this country directly; b) get in touch through domestic coalitions (which one); c) get in touch through transnational coalitions (which one); or d) other?

25. For the importance of this mechanism in coalition building among heterogeneous actors, see Mische 2003.

26. For example, during a meeting the author attended between civil society organizations and official negotiators held in Miami during the FTAA ministerial meeting of 2003, government officials criticized protestors for not presenting alternative proposals. In response, one of the members of the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC) argued that ever since the NAFTA negotiations, civil society challengers of free trade agreements had been working on concrete and feasible proposals, which were consolidated in the *Alternatives*.

27. For a more detailed explanation of these mechanisms and how they work in the context of trade coalition building in the Americas, see von Bülow 2007.

28. For arguments critical of the idea of introducing a labor clause in Brazil, see Portella de Castro 1996; Pastore 1997. For a review of the debate in India, see Hensman 2001.

29. In its 14th Congress, in Santo Domingo in April 1997, ORIT's members decided to support the ICFTU's campaign for the inclusion of social clauses in trade treaties. See ORIT 1997.

30. In Brazil, the most important actor in the negotiations is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but others are also involved, especially the Ministry of Development, Industry, and Foreign Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture. In Chile, the process is similarly centralized in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and especially in the General Direction of Economic International Relations (Direcon). In Mexico, the most important negotiating role is played by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

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