

## **Mexican Labor Unions Facing the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**

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In this essay a brief description will be made of Mexican labor unions, corporative relations, and how NAFTA fits into the neoliberal strategy of the Mexican government. It will be followed by a chronology of the actions and programs of Mexican labor unions facing NAFTA. Finally, an analysis will be made of the actions taken by labor unions and their international relations regarding NAFTA: collective bargaining, international organizations, solidarity, and the limitations and potential of these actions in a globalized economy.

### Introduction

In Mexico in 1990 the salaried EAP (economically active population) comprised 68% of the total working population. In the urban working population this quantity rose to 74%. It is important to mention that Mexico is fundamentally an urban country, and in the gross national product the agropecuarian activities are inferior to those of industry and public services.

The percentage of organized labor is 27.96% (ratio of organized labor to the number of salaried workers). Labor unions in Mexico can be classified into two main types: official unions (pro government), independent unions and "white" unions.

Official unions are characterized by having a corporative relationship with the State (State corporativism as conceived by Schmitter).

1. This corporative relationship implies:

- That the state arena is the most favored by labor unions forestablishing alliances and settling disputes.

-That industrial relations become an affair of State, becoming subordinate to state policies.

-That unions conceive themselves as being corresponsable in the running of the State; they are a part of the political system, participating in the organizing structure of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional and taking part in the party's distribution of elective and government posts.

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-That the State guarantees to the unions the monopoly of representation through legal and extralegal mechanisms: through the registry that the ministry of labor grants to the unions in order

to be legalized; through the clause of exclusivity (one company, one union); through the clause of exclusion ("closed shop"); through the reglamentation of the right to strike and collective contracts. This monopoly guaranteed by the State eliminates labor organizations outside the official unions and electoral competition within the unions, and results in the infrequent rotation of leaders. The monopoly is strengthened by a patrimonial culture, a system of favors and compromises between rank and file members and leaders which extends beyond the scope of the unions.

2. Official labor unions comprise 78.9% of organized labor with close to 6 million members. The principal organizations which form part of the Congreso del Trabajo (CT) are the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores de México), the FSTSE (Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado), the CROC (Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos) and the CROM (Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros de México).

As opposed to the official unions, the independent unions are defined as political opposition to the government. Their origins are socialist or communist, making up 12.4% of the total number of labor unions, and have been the most affected by the transformation of the State and of production. They played an important role in industry in the seventies. This influence has tended to disappear and become reduce mainly to the area of public services: universities, elementary and secondary education, government ministries, the press, small manufacturing industries and public transportation. "white" unions make up the remaining 8.7% of organized labor, so called because they are created by management. They differ from the two types previously mentioned in that they do not participate in the political system. They limit themselves to the area of labor relations, but are controlled by management.

The participation of labor union in the NAFTA dispute took place within the tradition of labor union politics: the official sector favored the negotiation, the independent sector criticized it and the "white" sector abstained from participating.

NAFTA is the culmination of Mexico's reorientation of the economy and the State, as well as the new context of international economy. Since 1982 the Mexican State has followed a different course than that which it had taken for 60 years.

3. The most significant changes in state functions can be summarized by the following:

- State spending ceased to be an important factor in the added demand.
- Social spending is reduced in the eighties and in the nineties it is increased; however, it is directed towards the extremely poor sector of the population.
- The majority of public holdings are privatized.
- The economy is opened to the international market.

The reform of the State towards neoliberalism is completed by the start of productive restructuring. Part of the industries began to make changes in technology and in the organization of labor and/or labor relations, with the purpose of increasing productivity, quality and competitiveness in an increasingly de-regulated economy. However, the new economic model, in addition to being directed towards the foreign market, has been characterized up to this point as being polarized. That is, the restructuring of production and competitiveness is a priority mainly of big businesses. Two poles are formed: the minority, with an important contribution to the national product; and the other a backwards majority. An additional feature of either of the two poles in this model are low wages. A third characteristic is the unilateral extension of the flexibility of labor, that is, the change in collective contracts in giving greater prerogative to management in hiring and firing, in the use of the work force within the work process and conditioning wages in accordance with productivity.

4. The strategy of government and private business to overcome the crisis of the eighties had a very important element of salary restrictions (between 1980 and 1990 the minimum wage suffered a real decrease of 62% and contract salaries in 54%), with which the internal market shrank considerably. The need for investment was increasingly substituted by foreign capital. For the Mexican government the free trade agreement is simply the continuation of the economic policy already set in motion for the last 10 years: basing growth of foreign investment now attracted by the deregulation implied by NAFTA; foreign investment for exportation more than is consumed in the domestic market (small and with an impoverished population; according to official reports 42% are poor); for exportation to the United States, Canada and other regions. This foreign investment is expected to partially alleviate the unemployment, although serious

macroeconomic models do not credit it with having the capacity to end unemployment and subemployment.

5. A contrary effect would be the competition which would result in the domestic market with Mexican businesses which for the most part are not competitive.

The final element to be considered as an antecedent to the signing of NAFTA and the response of Mexican organized labor are the characteristics of the Mexican political system. For the past 60 years the same party has been in power. This party controls the Congreso de la Union (chamber of deputies and senators). Not only that, but it is the president of the republic in office who directly controls the political system.

Although since 1988 new parties have appeared which have made the elections more competitive, but government control of the electoral process and the patronizing of the vast sectors of the extremely poor have helped the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) to conserve power. This governmental political control is an important element to consider along with labor corporativism in understanding the relative ease with which NAFTA was approved in Mexico.

The participation of labor unions in the debates and pressuring regarding NAFTA correspond to the main stages of the treaty approval: opening of negotiations, approval of the "fast track" by the U.S. Congress, end of NAFTA negotiations and beginning of the parallel accords, finalization of the parallel accords and the approval of the treaty by the U.S. Congress.

Throughout this process which had been activated by the advancements in the negotiations between the three governments of North America, the labor unions maintained positions outlined from the beginning with slight variations. On one hand, official unions favored negotiation of the treaty. On the other hand the independent unions opposed it or demanded that it include topics not considered in the treaty.

### **1. Period prior to the start of formal negotiations until June 12, 1991.**

During this period the Mexican labor organizations which favored or opposed NAFTA negotiations were slow to react with respect to governmental initiatives. However, they gradually formulated their reasonings and proposals, so that by April of 1991, political blocs had been well established. These blocs were maintained throughout the negotiations. Within

Mexico their positions didn't change, but the opposition found new nexes and means of pressuring in the United States and Canada.

In June of 1990 the presidents of Mexico and the United States made known that they were in favor of signing the NAFTA agreement.

On August 8, 1990 Carla Hills and Serra Puche, secretaries of commerce of the two nations, recommended the opening of NAFTA negotiations.

6. In the same month President Salinas formally called for the opening of negotiations. In September of that year the Canadian government asked the U.S. government to be included. On September 14 of the same year Bush announced that the initiative had been sent to Congress to begin negotiations.

7. On September 25 Congress began to count 60 working days for the authorization to commence negotiations.

8. The Process once begun, the first public debate in Mexico over NAFTA was presented by the Partido Acción Nacional: The subject of labor was brought up in this event which took place in Mexico City on October 3, 1990 between specialists from Mexico and Canada. Don Cokburn, Canadian labor representative of Common Frontiers, predicted a loss of jobs, closing of businesses, loss of labor rights and endangered sovereignty, as had already occurred with the treaty between the U.S. and Canada.

9. Mexican organized labor made public declarations for the first time in the forum organized by the Frente Sindical Unitario (independent unions is which for 3 years included the most important independent organization which for 3 year included the most important independent unions; this organization disappeared in the process of the NAFTA approval) on October 4, 1990 in the auditorium of the Frente Aut,ntico del Trabajo (independent labor organization which headed opposition to NAFTA in Mexico throught the process). In this first labor forum of NAFTA disussions the position of rejeting the agreement was not as strong as the demand for taking labor organizations into account and including them in the discussions. In any case, reference was once again made to the treaty between the U.S. and Canada, qualifying it as negative for the workers and the country: the continued protectionism of the U.S., the closing of small to medium sized bussinesses, relocation of Canadian businesses to the U.S. and pressure on the social security in Canada.

10. At first, the controversy over NAFTA in Mexico was mixed with the demands related to the effects of the recent neoliberal economic model on workers. On October 23 the Frente Sindical Unitario held a march in which 10 to 40 thousand people participated to demand the reorientation of the economic policy, criticizing the export model which favors manufacturers and foreign investment. The principal organizations that participated in this march were the waning forces of traditional independent unions: Frente Aut,ntico del Trabajo (which includes small to medium sized unions from the central zone of the country, with a national membership of 30,000 workers); the workers' union of the National University; the seamstresses union Costureras 19 de septiembre (comprised of small to medium sized unions with no more than 400 members); and the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educaci3n (a labor movement within the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educaci3n, which mainly includes primary and secondary school teachers). The CNTE has a great deal of influence in the central and southeastern zones of the country; this includes as many as 200,000 workers.

11. Almost simultaneously another independent movement connected to the Movimiento Proletario Independiente also declared itself against NAFTA, because it would only benefit transnational companies, and maintain cheap labor in Mexico, and it called for a march on October 23. Among official unions the first reactions were cautious. The CTM held a seminary on employment, productivity and ecology in which some of the specialists offhandedly mentioned NAFTA. At the beginning of the controversy over the opening of negotiations President Salinas asked the Congreso del Trabajo to participate in the negotiating group. Finally, just the CTM would have three representatives, who played a role of little importance. From the beginning this organization reiterated the position of not including the topic of labor in NAFTA. It was not until April of 1991 when NAFTA related actions had a new push. The most important action of the opposition was the creation of the Red Mexicana de Acci3n Frente al Tratado de Libre Comercio (RMAFTLC). Initially, it was comprised of very few labor organizations: the Frente Aut,ntico del Trabajo (FAT), STUNAM. The Impulsora de Telecomunicaciones union and labor research centers which are part of the new non-governmental organizations such as Colectivo de Mujeres, Centro de Analisis del Trabajo, Centro de Estudios de Fronteras y Chicanos, Centro de Coordinaci3n de Proyectores Acad,micos, Centro de Investigaci3n y Asesoría sindical, Equipo Pueblo, Enlace, Colectivo de Mujer a Mujer, Sistematizaci3n de Experiencias del Movimiento Popular Mexicano.

On April 14, of 1991 the RMAFTLC held its first major event. In this event, the participants included the Canadian network of Labor Action, Sections 879 and 249 of the U.S. Autoworkers Union, the Fair Campaign group from Minnesota, the Coalition for Justice in Kansas Manufacturers, Labor Lay-off Control from Washington and the Northamerican Labor Group of Commerce and Development.

12. On April 27 the RMAFTLCE and other independent and official organizations participated in the Chicago forum. Here, for the first time there appeared from the Mexican side the idea of a trilateral charter of labor rights as part of NAFTA negotiations. This proposal was made by an official democratic union, the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas. This proposal did not express an objection to the signing of NAFTA, rather it was considered that it would serve to create jobs and reduce poverty in Mexico.

13. The actions continued on May 1 when the RMAFTLC and 30 independent organizations declared their opposition to NAFTA. This march included the participation of other university unions, iron and steelworkers, airlines factions, a sector of Ford workers and other non-union rural and urban groups in addition to the founders of the RMAFTLC. In a march parallel to that of the Movimiento Proletario Independiente (comprised mainly of Mexico City bus drivers) it reiterated its rejection of NAFTA.

14. As to the official labor unions, the most relevant action during this time was the support of NAFTA led by the CTM, which contradicted the opposition of the American AFL-CIO (co-participants of the ORIT); in particular in the congress of the ORIT held in Ottawa on April 21, 1991, in which Fidel Velazquez, maximum leader of the CTM, would also oppose the proposal of the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas of a social charter. This first period closed with the beginning of formal negotiations among the government representatives of the three nations. It would seem that the pressures from the Mexican side were insufficient to group large sectors of the population against NAFTA. The Gallup poll of April 1991 showed that 70% of Mexicans had heard of NAFTA negotiations; 52% felt that the U.S. would benefit the most from the treaty; but 66% felt that the treaty would be beneficial to Mexico in any case. The forces which the opposition managed to organize at this time against NAFTA were the groups that were present in the previous periods: independent labor, which has suffered a major defeat in the eighties – its forces not only a minority, but diminished by repression and

lay-offs; other rural and neighborhood organizations; non-governmental organization, insignificant in their membership but important in the mass media and the ties they held outside of Mexico; intellectuals participating in debates in mass media. The significance of these groups was not so much their inability to attract followers and their rejection of NAFTA, but the fact that they were able to make ties with similar groups in Canada and the United States. In the past experiences of this type have been rare. Labor organizations in the United States and Canada had seldom looked to the South. Similarly, the activists from the South had identified more with those of other third world countries or with some of the European organizations which were more sensitive in the sense of international solidarity than with those of the United States and Canada. The ties began to form in different ways, for the most part by pushing aside the labor bureaucracies of the North and South, as in the trilateral encounters of Chicago and San Diego. These ties were perhaps facilitated by the confrontation between the CTM and the AFL-CIO at their top levels.

## 2. Period of NAFTA negotiations: June 1991 to August 1992

During this period the forces of organized labor pro and against NAFTA consolidated their reasoning, posture and trilateral relations. As the negotiations remained secret almost throughout the entire period, the actions taken by labor unions coincided with the public knowledge resulting from leaks of information about the advancements of the treaty.

Formal negotiations had scarcely begun, when on August 2, 1990 the RMAFTLC published a manifesto which outlined its position differing from that of the Canadians until the trilateral reunion in Zacatecas in February of 1992. The position of the RMAFTLC during this subperiod was to propose an alternative treaty without the refusal to approve or to sign any treaty. In the above mentioned manifesto entitled "For a Treaty Which Complies With a National and Popular Project" the RMAFTLC proclaimed:

- no to the speed up of negotiations
- no to a treaty which reinforces the Mexican economic model based on cheap labor, acceptance of contaminating industries and the handing over of strategic natural resources to transnational companies in benefit only of big business.

A different type of treaty was proposed, based on cooperation, reciprocal treatment and international reciprocity. It would be a treaty which would not include strategic areas such



as energy sources, basic grains, fishing, dairy products, forestry and agricultural industries, health programs, housing, education and culture. It would be an agreement which would take into consideration that financial services, government property, rules of origin and intellectual property would not be taken from national control. Foreign investment would be permitted as long as it was productive and non-contaminating. It would be a treaty which would foresee compensations for existing inequalities, and finally, which would include a social agenda that would include ecological protection, labor rights (mechanisms for wage increases according to productivity increase, the right to organize, to strike, make contracts and health benefits), human rights (especially of migrant workers) and social participation in order to guarantee that it be carried out.

Unlike the RMAFTLC, on August 20, 1992 the CTM made a detailed announcement of its position. In another manifesto it declared that NAFTA was highly beneficial to national interests and that as a labor organization it considered itself co-responsible in achieving its approval, recognizing that the government was taking labor into account in the negotiations. It also declared that NAFTA should not imply modifications in the existing labor laws nor in social security, and that the expectation of better wages with the agreement should be met in addition to job security. For the CTM, NAFTA was necessary because it would contribute to the modernization of the country, attract foreign investment and reduce unemployment. In addition, it would increase exports and competitiveness of the North American region with respect to other parts of the world, and would permit access of Mexican industry to the markets of the United States and Canada. However, it recognized that precautions were necessary in the negotiations to prevent the possible effects of disequilibrium in some sectors of the economy (from asymmetry), and that strategic sectors of the economy should be protected as well as small to medium sized businesses.

16. The CTM was the only organization to have three representatives on the Mexican negotiating committee. However, its participation was minimal and it offered no contributions to the negotiations. Not only that, on September 14, 1992 the maximum leader of the CTM expressed that it did not correspond to workers to speak of or criticize NAFTA, but to make it a useful tool for Mexico.

One of the last attempts of the large trilateral labor organizations to convince the CTM to change its position was in the congress of the ORIT in January of 1992. In this congress the ORIT proposed a platform of labor rights to be included in NAFTA. The ORIT demanded the introduction of a platform of basic rights in the area of labor to harmonize the legislation of

the three nations and to tend towards homogeneity. It also demanded to be included in NAFTA negotiations and that it include the right to organize, freedom of transit and of trilateral labor, and should tend towards creating similar social security systems. However, the CTM did not vary its position during the entire process of NAFTA approval.

Finally, the new corporative labor organization represented by the FESEBES (Federación de Sindicatos de Empresas de Bienes y Servicios) also declared its position at this time, proclaiming itself in favor of NAFTA for its contribution to the modernization of the country, although it recognized the virtual absence of Mexican labor in the negotiations and adhered to the idea of an international charter of labor rights. This charter would include the right to organize, the right to strike, collective bargaining, and would seek similar working conditions between the three nations as well as include organized labor in the negotiation and execution of NAFTA.

With the trilateral labor reunion of Zacatecas, which coincided with the reunion of the ministers of commerce of the three nations, the position of the Mexican RMAFTLC became tougher and remained opposed to the treaty until the end of the NAFTA negotiations.

In addition to the CT and FESEBES, which were the official labor organizations that spoke out the most over the NAFTA issue, support was given by the CROC, CROM, the Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Bancarios, the Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana., miners' and metalworkers' unions, and the Social Security union. The rest of the unions did not contribute any new viewpoints to the talks, nor did they have any significant participation in the debate.

### 3. Period of negotiation of the parallel accords by the U.S. Congress.

The close of the NAFTA negotiations coincided with the change of presidents in the United States. The new president William Clinton stated the need for completing the NAFTA negotiations began in February of 1993. The parallel labor accord revived the controversy over the treaty among labor organizations. Once again the forces were divided. In general, the stance of official labor organizations had been against parallel labor accords and the CTM had been opposed to a charter of labor obligations. However, when the Mexican government began negotiations with the United States and Canada, the official labor organizations yielded and participated very little in the controversy except to back their government.

Shortly before the negotiations of the parallel accords began, the CTM and the AFL-CIO met between January 11 and 14 of 1993 to discuss the topics of ecology and labor. This was

the last serious attempt of the AFL-CIO to convince the CTM to form a common front. No agreement was reached at this meeting.

17. On the contrary, on January 21 the CTM declared its opposition to the signing of the parallel accords.

18. After this meeting the relations between these two great organizations cooled off, so much so that on March 16 the CTM accused the AFL-CIO of promoting strikes in Mexico and of subsidizing dissident activists to discourage foreign investment.

This distancing was reiterated in the congress of the ORIT from April 21 to 23, in which NAFTA was unanimously condemned (except by the CTM) as well as the neoliberal adjustment programs in Latin America. In this congress the need for signing a social charter of labor rights was reaffirmed, once again with the opposition of the CTM, which argued that in Mexico such a charter was unnecessary because of the advanced legislation already in existence in the country.

19. On the other hand, the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, which headed the RMAFTLC, had expressed since February 1993, that the parallel accords should include unemployment insurance, retraining programs for displaced workers, sanctions for the companies which paid low salaries and benefit packages to workers for increases in productivity. When the accord had been written, the RMAFTLC declared its opposition. The parallel labor accord could not satisfy the demands of the RMAFTLC because it limited its application to just three aspects of labor relations:

- violations to standards of safety and hygiene
- the hiring of minors
- minimum wage violations.

The issue of child labor does not apply to transnational companies in Mexico; nor is minimum wage a concern because it is so low (around 100 dollars a month). Moreover, only the country would be sanctioned and not the company when there are systematic violations in any one of the three points mentioned, and the sanction would be made through a complicated procedure which would make its applications unlikely.

NAFTA could not be detained by labor action in Mexico. The capacity to act of the RMAFTLC was limited and state control of the parliament easily assured its approval, once passed by the U.S.

Congress. However, the NAFTA controversy left the Mexican civil organizations with new experience.

### The New Trinational Ties

The principal gain of the civil organizations in the NAFTA controversy was the relations established between the three nations which have persisted until now and will make possible reciprocal action and influence in the future, which was evident in the recent conflict in Chiapas (region in the south of Mexico undergoing an indigenous uprising at this time).

#### 1. Transnational Collective Bargaining

Unlike certain traditions in the formation of transnational labor unions between Canada and the United States, in Mexico the labor organizations have been very careful of their autonomy with respect to those of the North. The CTM has a very local vision of union politics and favors its relation with the State and the so called Political Bargaining. Although it has been a member of the

ORIT for some time, the ORIT has little influence in the local politics of the CTM. However, during NAFTA negotiations, a new experience of transnational collective bargaining was discernable between the Farm Labor Organization Committee of the AFL-CIO and the Sinaloa Based National Farmworkers Union (CTM) which signed an agreement for mutual assistance in their contracts with the Campbell Soup Company and to obtain better wages and benefits. This was a result of Campbell's threats to the U.S. union to buy tomatoes in Mexico if it didn't accept their conditions; the labor pact reduce the pressures from the company and created pressure for improving wages and benefits.

As for production chains the conditions are ripe for the formation of transnational labor unions. Some of the areas more susceptible to the formation of international pacts are auto and "maquila" industries. However, two obstacles would have to be overcome: in particular the opposition of the Mexican government and official Mexican labor organizations. The Mexican government has always considered labor politics to be part of its economic policy and would not like to be pressured in the area of labor by external forces. The Mexican labor

organizations have often sacrificed working conditions and wages in concessions to the political system in its practice of "political bargaining".

## 2. The formation of international labor organizations

As a result of NAFTA, international contacts between Mexican labor organizations and those of the United States and Canada have increased, and in some cases pacts of mutual support have been signed and even international organizations have been formed. Such was the case of the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la Republica Mexicana which formed a trilateral federation with the U.S. Communications Workers of America and the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada. A pact of understanding and cooperation was also formed between the pilots' organizations of the three nations, and to a certain point the formation of the Asociaciòn de Sindicatos de la Educaciòn de Am,rica, which includes the rest of Latin America, the United States and Canada. Included in these formal contracts is the cooperation between the FAT and the United Electrical Workers of the United States, which cooperate in organizing workers in the "maquilas".

These new forms of trilateral organization unite the workers of the three nations more closely than the old ways such as those of the ORIT ( ties at the top level without repercussions in the more concrete union and labor relations). They can be developed with greater facility than the Transnational Collective Bargaining, they do not presuppose subordination of one organization to the others and up to this point have been managed with mutual respect and autonomy. They have been practiced on the Mexican side especially by national labor organizations not affiliated with the CTM, from which they maintain a significant amount of autonomy.

## 3. Trilateral Solidarity

This is one of the aspect which presents the greatest development potential, especially if it is not limited to labor unions but could involve organizations of ecologists, human rights groups, etc. This is the part of the new network which is innovative, flexible and involve. This applies to the new organizations of the civil sector which have diversified and multiplied in recent years, a network which is controlled neither by governments nor bureaucratic labor organizations. It is a flexible network which easily reconstructs its connections and which, above all, is consolidated around concrete struggles more than long term projects. This is the nature of the Pro-justice Coalition of the "maquiladoras" Plants, formed in el Paso, Texas on February 11, 1991 by 50 ecological, labor and religious organizations of the United States and

Mexico. It was formed to pressure the transnational companies on the border zone to respect ecological norms, labor rights and working conditions. The coalition defends the principles of non-discrimination, the right to organize, collective bargaining, non-employment of minors, profit sharing and freedom of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Even so, trinational solidarity has at times used the channels of international segmentation of the production process. This was the outstanding example of the solidarity of the workers of Ford in the United States and Canada towards the democratic union struggle at Ford in Cuatitlan (central Mexico). This solidarity was contrary to the antidemocratic line of the CTM in the union, and it achieved important ties between an independent labor movement in Mexico with the autoworkers' unions in the United States and Canada. This struggle demonstrated that above and beyond the new international contacts of the Mexican labor bureaucracies which have had little involvement within Mexico, the most significant dialogue can be achieved between factory or other types of unions in the United States and Canada with independent movements in Mexican labor unions. All this is possible in spite of the disagreements that these relations might cause among the leaders of the large labor organizations, especially the CTM and the AFL-CIO.

## Conclusions

In Mexico, labor mobilization regarding NAFTA was scant. It was limited to the actions and declarations of the RMAFTLC, which includes traditional leftist labor organizations and a large number of non-governmental organizations. Although the mobilization was small in numeric terms, the capacity of the network was evident above all in the organization of numerous forums, seminars and trinational encounters. All of this had repercussions in the mass media, especially in the press. Corporative labor organization in its different manifestations gave its support to NAFTA from the very beginning, but within its ranks two different positions were evident: that of the CTM with its unconditional support to the Mexican government and that of the new corporativism which favored the signing of a charter of labor rights and obligations. In any case, in both tendencies corporativism had no real influence in the NAFTA negotiations. In general the workers were poorly informed and the abundant polemics among the intellectuals did not filter down to the work place.

Even so, the contacts between non-governmental organizations with factory or trade unions in the United States and Canada multiplied, forming networks which still persist and through which more intricate forms of ties may be made between the workers of the three

nations. These new ties may become more important because the politics, economy and labor related problems in Mexico have also come into discussion and resolution in the process of globalization. The traditional governmental nationalism has been abolished in practice; in the economic aspects this has been deliberately promoted by government policy, but also in the political and labor aspects not planned for the government and the Mexican corporative labor unions. Mexico is now being microscopically examined by international networks of every type, ready to evaluate, criticize, make proposals and to keep watch, utilizing international mass media and pressuring the Mexican government in particular, which has been labeled for its political authoritarianism, corporativism and lack of respect for human rights. There is an internationalization in Mexico (encouraged by the signing of NAFTA) of the domestic politics of the country. Corporative labor unions, foreseeing the threat that this internationalization might imply to its domain, opposed the parallel accords. On the other hand, the independent labor movements tried to exploit this internationalization with a noticeable change of posture, seeing as how they had previously shared the nationalistic attitude and rejection of outside intervention. In conclusion, the most significant involvement with the new international networks is not with official labor organizations, but with the independent organizations in Mexico, whether they are labor unions or other types of organizations critical of government policies, especially in the area of labor.

To be more exact, the globalization of Mexican politics which began to form with the NAFTA agreement made its full appearance with the handling of the armed uprising in Chiapas. In this situation, international harassment of the Mexican government demonstrated that it is more vulnerable through international pressure than by internal pressure alone. In this way, the potential of international ties, actions and organizations is strengthened, taking into consideration their real growth capacity:

1. In the aspect of labor the trinational production chains can be the means of connection and organization. The massive flow of foreign capital expected to enter Mexico can pressure the labor unions of the United States, Canada and other countries to become more concerned with labor rights and unions in Mexico. However, it would be a mistake to think that the new international labor relations should be oriented towards the heads of organized labor in Mexico, which would not go beyond being merely formal contacts making sure that others do not invade their territory. Even so, ties with independent movements or official factory leaders may sometimes be possible and could secure the horizontal networks formed during the NAFTA talks.

2. The NAFTA polemics demonstrated that labor problems are not only a concern of unions, and that non- governmental organizations whether or not they are specialized in labor, can and should intervene to form protective shields which labor unions alone are sometimes unable to form.

3. It is also important to mention the significant presence of independent intellectuals in the construction of protective walls around democratic labor movements. Keeping in mind that presently a significant portion of struggles are symbolic, the role of intellectuals in investigation and information becomes increasingly important. They are another link which should not be underestimated in the securing of international ties among workers.

Finally, although NAFTA has opened the way for ties between workers of Mexico, the United States and Canada, economic globalization is a phenomenon which goes beyond North America. In this respect the possibility of new ties should be considered, to and from unions and workers of other regions of the world who are not only concerned with the growth of their own economies, but also in the building of a better world for all.

## Appendix

### Key dates in the approval of NAFTA:

April - June 1990: The Mexican Congress organizes an advisory forum of international relations in five cities of the republic.

June 11, 1990: The presidents of Mexico and the United States announce their intention to sign a NAFTA agreement.

August 1990: The Mexican president presents a formal request to the U.S. president to commence negotiations.

September 1990: Bush informs Congress of his intention to begin negotiations.

February 1991: Bush informs Congress of his intention to use the Fast Track for NAFTA approval.

February 1991: U.S. Congressional committees begin discussions to consider Fast Track.

May 25, 1991: The U.S. House of Representatives approves the use of Fast Track.

May 26, 1991: The U.S. Senate gives its approval.

June 12, 1991: The governments of the three North American nations announce the schedule of NAFTA talks and debates.

August 12, 1992: NAFTA negotiations are concluded.



February 1993: Commencement of trinational talks over parallel accords.

September 1993: Conclusion of parallel accords.

November 17, 1993: U.S. Congress approves NAFTA.

(1) P.C. Schmitter and G. Lehmbruch, Trends Toward Corporatist Intermediation, SAGE publications, London, 1979.

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