

**CHAIRE de responsabilité
sociale et de
développement durable**
ESG UQÀM

Proceedings of Workshop No. 248
“Internationalization of Labour Union
Action in the Americas”
January 27, 2005,
World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil

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Introduction

In the framework of the self-organized activities of the World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, the Chair of Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development in collaboration with Alternatives organized a workshop on the internationalization of labour union action in the context of the Americas. This workshop sought to examine how American labour unions in the American are attempting to respond to the challenges brought about by economic globalization. In fact, capital benefits of an unprecedented mobility, making workers also mobile. Whilst national labour unions are based on territorial jurisdictions, if they want to continue defending workers' interests they must now develop new strategies to internationalize their demands and exert pressure on corporations.

The workshop was chaired by Pierre Beaudet, director-general of Alternatives. The event had three objectives. Firstly, to unearth the difficulties facing national trade unions and determine how they are responding to the transformations advanced by neoliberal economic globalization. Four representatives of Canadian labour unions shared their views on these issues: Sheila Katz of the CLC (Canadian Labour Congress), Jacques Létourneau of the CSN (Confederation of National Trade Unions), Joseph Gargiso of CEP (Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada) and Pierre Séguin from the CSQ (Centrale des Syndicats du Québec-Québec Confederation of Labour). Secondly, to examine how international unions' confederations and federations support demands of national unions at the international level. Cameron Duncan presented the diverse actions advanced by his organization, PSI (Public Services International). Last but not least, the workshop sought to define the strategies that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should adopt to support national union actions. Terry Collingsworth of the ILRF (International Labor Rights Fund) and Hector de la Cueva from RMALC (Red Mexicana de Acciones frente al Libre Comercio, Mexican Network of Actions against Free Trade) described the strategies that they use to defend labour unions and workers' interests.

National unions confronted with the effects of neoliberal economic globalization

Sheila Katz- CLC (Canadian Labour Congress)¹

According to Sheila Katz, the most important challenge facing national labour unions is moving workers' support towards global issues and a broader political programme. It is very important that todays' Northern workers mobilize around international issues in order to defend their own interests. To do this, national labour unions need to educate and sensitize workers about the challenges of neoliberal economic globalization and consequent effects on their working conditions. Thus, workers education about global issues is an essential element

¹ The Canadian Labour Congress has 60 affiliates and represents more than 3 million workers in Canada (CLC, 2005).

in the construction of international solidarity and national unions need to be very active in this area.

As a result of changes in the Canada's labour force composition, CLC has been forced to undergo a reorientation of its strategies during recent years. More specifically, CLC has had to develop new strategies in order to respond to its new members' needs and to reach out to new groups of workers, such as part-time workers, visible minorities, young or aboriginal workers. CLC faces challenges today in incorporating these new strategies that go to the heart of global issues.

CLC draws on the credibility it enjoys (from its members, employers and the Canadian government), in order to build international solidarity between workers and unions in the Americas. For instance, several CLC affiliates have created funds for social and humanitarian justice, giving themselves the necessary financial resources to sensitize their membership about global social issues. The financial autonomy of these unions no doubt facilitates the building of international solidarity amongst workers.

One may wonder why international action has become a CLC priority. Sheila Katz explains that advancing international action is necessary to confront neoliberal policies that are vigorously applied by Canada and other countries in the Americas.

During the last two decades, the Canadian government has left industrial development and job creation to the market. This policy has implied lower corporate taxes, less resources for social programmes, public sector cuts and the creation of free trade areas with its commercial partners. Instead of promoting agreements and treaties that serve the interests of their citizens, Canadian investment and trade policies seek to protect the interests of Canadian companies abroad. As a consequence, economic insecurity of workers and their families greatly increased during the 1980s, when economic growth hit its lowest level and unemployment its highest levels since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

According to Sheila Katz, international action must enable unions in Canada and other countries to regain control of their economies. Canada needs an industrial strategy to protect and create permanent jobs, allowing the expansion of workers' purchasing power, which benefits the country's economy and workers' quality of life. Thus, CLC takes action at the international level so that the diverse countries which have been ruined by free-trade agreements and structural adjustment plans may at last reclaim sovereignty over their industrial development and employment strategy.

Canada's sovereignty has been strongly affected by diverse commercial agreements according to Ms. Katz. The free-trade agreement that Canada and the U.S. signed in 1988 followed by NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement) in 1994 have significantly weakened the capacity of the Canadian government to take care of economic development. Other countries in the Americas are also confronted by this incapacity to guide their own development strategy, stemming from their engagement in free-trade agreements (CAFTA, Mercosur, etc).

For CLC, international solidarity amongst workers and labour unions is built around this common struggle against free trade agreements. In fact, economic integration leads to a diabolical race to the bottom in terms of working conditions. After the ratification of the 1998 free trade agreement, unionized jobs in the manufacturing sector were delocalized from Canada to the South of the U.S. where laws, like those of "Right to Work", make workers' unionization impossible. Since 1994 these jobs have been delocalized to maquiladora areas in Mexico, which are now suffering competition from China.

In fact, promotion of free trade agreements established in accordance with the interests of workers and their families is the top issue for CLC. To address this challenge, CLC deploys various tactics:

By means of the LIPD (Labour International Development Program), and in collaboration with different affiliates and CIDA (Canadian Agency for International Development), CLC gives technical assistance to labour unions and organizations in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, to help them protect and promote fundamental workers' human rights and reinforce equality amongst men and women. LIPD also offers training about 'global solidarity', seeking to sensitize workers on the effects of globalization as well as build economic literacy and alliances.

Also, CLC affiliates raise funds to support other labour unions in the U.S. In particular, some of them have negotiated that a certain amount of their salary goes to a fund supporting international solidarity amongst workers on the American continent.

Several affiliates of CLC participate in the Global Labour Union Federations (GLUF), which regroups labour unions operating in the same sector across the Americas. GLUFs have negotiated framework-agreements with specific transnational corporations. The agreements guarantee the respect of fundamental employee rights in signatory firms. These structures permit workers from companies such as Coca-Cola, Ford and General Motors to meet their employers regularly, develop joint strategies to address specific problems, or negotiate collective conventions.

CLC is also a member of the ORIT (Organizacion Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores-Inter-American Regional Workers Organization)². This affiliation does not preclude CLC from forging direct relationships with other labour unions in the Americas in order to confront neoliberal policies being implemented by different governments. Public sector labour unions affiliated with the CLC are mobilizing specifically against the privatization of public services and resources managed by the public sector

Since the mid-1980s, the creation of alliances and civil society organizations has been the strategy of the CLC to fight against the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States. Thus, Canadian labour unions have been one of the pillars of Action Canadian

² ORIT (Inter-American Regional Workers' Organization) represents more than 45 million workers across the Americas. It is the American branch of the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) (ORIT 2005).

Network, a multi-sectorial coalition comprising religious as well as development organizations, solidarity and women groups. The network was created in reaction to the first Free Trade Zone of the Americas. CLC has also built other coalitions with labour unions and organizations from the United States, Mexico and Quebec.

These tri-national coalitions were at the centre of the 1998 constitution of the Hemispheric Social Alliance. It was created as a result of an initiative by Brazilian labour unions and the ORIT, during the Labour and Social Forum held in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) in parallel to a negotiation round of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). As a result of the support of trade unions and the Brazilian CUT (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores-United Confederation of Workers), the Hemispheric Social Alliance has been a key actor in the continental campaign against FTAA in 2001.

According to Sheila Katz, the implementation of these different strategies illustrates the fact that the workers' movement is turning into a progressive and globally popular movement able to challenge the neo-conservative agenda.

Jacques Létourneau, CSN (Confederation of National Trade Unions)³

CSN has always been engaged in supporting projects for international cooperation and development in the South. This involvement has taken diverse forms, like training projects linked to labour union activism and labour union coordination in Latin America. During the 1970s and 1980s workers in the North sought to support social groups in the South. However, over the last 15 years there has been a noticeable transformation of intervention strategies. The neoliberal-type economic globalization endangers labour rights and working conditions, to the point that workers in the North are now forced to understand the broader dynamic powering economic globalization in order to shape their intervention strategies in the South.

According to Jacques Létourneau, the era of neoliberal economic globalization forces labour unions to go beyond the cooperation domain, shifting to what he qualifies as the political domain. Labour union action is part of a broader reflection on issues related to economic globalization, which in turn will allow labour unions to create large coalition movements and propose options. Moreover, economic globalization engenders a race to the bottom in terms of working conditions, both in the North and South. From now on, labour union actions at the national level must integrate this global trend.

Jacques Létourneau also stated that the Peoples' Summit of the Americas in 2001 was an important event that renewed labour union action at the international level. This summit gave CSN the opportunity to go to different national unions and sensitize workers about the effects of economic globalization. The summit also permitted the mobilizing of Northern workers to confront new global issues, rendering self-evident the need to create strategic alliances with their Southern counterparts.

³ CSN (Confederation of National Trade Unions) affiliates more than 2600 local labour unions across the territory of Quebec, representing more than 275,000 workers in diverse sectors of economic activity.

In summary, mobilisation against free-trade agreements (specifically, La Consulta) has sharpened collective awareness about the local repercussions of economic globalization. This facilitates the implementation of internationally-inspired strategies by national labour unions.

CSN has links with other labour union organisations in the South, mainly in Latin America and the French-speaking area of Africa. Drawing on financial support from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), CSN has assisted in creating exchanges and discussions as well as joint training programs, allowing the circulation of expertise whilst reinforcing labour union movement at the international level.

In Jacques Létourneau's opinion, national labour unions are confronted with major challenges concerning international action. Firstly, they must articulate global issues within a national agenda. To do this, labour unions must inform local workers about the debates that are taking place in international forums to create a link between the national reality and economic transformations arising at the international level. Secondly, they must move labour unions and social movements closer together. This strategy is at the heart of the ICFTU's new approach to which CSN is affiliated. The renewal of labour union practices at the international level is the result of reaching out to social movements (women movements, youth movements, ecologists, popular movements, etc.). Moreover, CSN participates in WSFs (World Social Forums), seeking to reinforce its links with social movements and become a social actor in order to propose alternatives to the current model. WSFs are an opportunity for the CSN to elaborate common perspectives with other groups.

Joseph Gargiso, CEP (Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada)⁴

Joseph Gargiso explains that CEP's main role is to negotiate and implement collective conventions for workers in the communications, energy and paper sectors. International activity of labour unions such as the CEP or the FTQ (Quebec Workers Federation), to which it is affiliated, was marginal fifteen years ago. Nowadays the international dimension of their action has moved to center stage. An indicator of this shift is the fact that international actions were at the heart of debates during the last annual congresses of the CAP and FTQ held during the autumn of 2004.

In the context of the workshop, Joseph Gargiso provided us with concrete examples of activities developed by CEP in the international arena. In the Americas, CEP is the main worker labour union representative in the oil and gas industry. In 2001, CEP unionized the workers of an oil platform in Hibernia situated along the Labrador coast (40 km east) for the first time in Canada. Unionization of workers on this platform was achieved with the support of the U.S. labour union PACE and its network of humanitarian organizations. The

⁴ CEP (Canadian Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada) has more than 150,000 members across Canada, employed in diverse domains, such as pulp and paper, phone companies, communications (journalism, radio, television, graphic arts), hotels, health, etc.

ExxonMobil Chairman, representing the main owner of the platform, finally conformed to the pressure exerted by the international coalition.

Furthermore, this initiative led to the creation of the International ExxonMobil Workers Union Network in November 2004, uniting more than 80 labour union leaders in five continents. As a consequence, workers of ExxonMobil will no longer be isolated and their unions will be able to defend their interests in a more efficient way.

CEP also cooperates with NGOs, specifically with CISO (Centre International de Solidarité Ouvrière- International Centre for Workers' Solidarity) from Quebec, in developing actions concerning worker education. In 2002, representatives of CEP and CISO went to the border city of Ciudad Juarez to meet workers from three Johnson & Johnson factories. During the visit, CEP and CISO united the workers of these plants so that they could negotiate collective conventions together. This networking allowed these plant workers to negotiate more advantageous conditions. Afterwards, Mexican labour union leaders came to Quebec to meet their Canadian counterparts and receive assistance to shape the structure of their movement.

To finance its activities, CEP has created a humanitarian fund devoted to international cooperation to support international solidarity projects. CEP's humanitarian fund receives grants from members that have negotiated a specific clause in their collective conventions (one cent per working hour goes to the fund). Several Canadian labour unions (Les Métallos-Metalworkers Union, CUPE-Canadian Union of Public Employees, Canadian labour unions operating in the automobile industry and CUPW-Canadian Union of Postal Workers) have created similar funds to address the phenomenon of economic globalization.

According to Joseph Gargiso, as capital is now mobile across borders, labour unions have no other choice but to organize at the global level (such as the worldwide enterprise union council set up by the labour unions of Goodyear). The multiplication of this kind of initiative will give an international dimension to the activity of national labour unions.

Pierre Séguin, CSQ (Centrale des Syndicats du Québec - Quebec Confederation of Labour)⁵

Pierre Séguin began by highlighting the fact that the need to create solidarity amongst the working class in all countries is not new. Exploitation of children, women and men in 19th century factories provoked the emergence of an internationalist movement intended to defend the working class. Solidarity thus begun, structuring the labour movement. Along its history, labour unions international action has abandoned the political sphere to concentrate on defending its members' interests and solidarity has taken place along this new orientation by contributing to develop mutual support among labour union organizations. However, the rise of the alter-globalization movement has re-politicized labour union action across the planet. Confronted with the need to grasp economic globalization, several labour union organizations have had to redefine their actions in the new context of a global society rather than within the

⁵ The CSQ (Confederation of National Trade Unions) regroups 170,000 public sector workers in Quebec.

Nation-State framework. These issues have challenged the CSQ and found a place in the agenda of CSQ's triennial congress in 2003.

In preparation for this congress themed "A Whole World of Solidarity", the CSQ started a vast educational project on neoliberal globalization issues. Since the adoption of this congress' resolutions, fighting against neoliberal globalization characterizes actions developed by the CSQ. In fact, this labour union has adopted a political and social project that envisages the creation of a world characterized by solidarity, democracy, respect for the environment and peace. Drawing on these values, the CSN has adopted resolutions guiding its labour union activity at the local, national and international levels.

In the international scene, the CSQ intends to pursue its work with international labour union organizations to which it is affiliated, in order to promote its project and confront globalization that ignores the rights of working men and women all over the world. In summary, the programme guiding CSQ's international action is as follows:

Although broad political guidelines are set at the international level, both in the domains of education and public services, CSQ participates in international fora to promote its members' point of view. The World Education Forum, for instance, is an outstanding place for its international activity. Its affiliation to Public Services International and Education International permits CSQ to bring the voices of workers into the international arena. Since the first Education International Congress, a member of CSQ's board serves also in Education International board. This is part of CSQ's approach to play an active role in the international scene.

The presence of CSQ in international fora relating to issues such as women rights (among them the World March that begun in Quebec or Beijing plus 10) or the environment (most notably the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and its implementation), constitutes one means to develop solidarity and cooperation activities with organizations that share the same orientations (concerning the promotion of a new social model that gives primacy to human rights over economic rights). Trade agreements and its promoters (WTO, GATS, FTAA, NAFTA) will be confronted by CSQ.

Since 1980, international cooperation has been an important component of CSQ's international activity. The first meeting of labour union organizations active in the educational domain in French-speaking countries, an initiative of the CSQ, was held in 1987. It led to the creation of the French-Speaking Education and Training Labour Union Committee (CSFEF), regrouping around 37 French-speaking countries. The committee considers the right for all to an education as a priority.

Since the People's Summit in Quebec (2001), the CSQ has participated in the creation of an International Secretariat on Education. The Declaration of the World Seminar on Education was adopted in 2002 in the framework of the WSF. It defines knowledge as a common heritage of Humankind and recognises sharing and the exchange of knowledge as central issues for nations' and peoples' development.

CSQ is involved in RQIC (Quebec Network on Continental Integration). As a member of RQIC, the CSQ has been particularly active regarding issues raised by NAFTA and the creation of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas).

In concluding, Pierre Séguin mentioned that the amalgamation of the two main international confederations of labour unions (the ICFTU or International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the WCL or World Confederation of Labour) should create greater international solidarity amongst labour union organizations, permitting a greater convergence in international action at local, regional and national levels.

International confederations and federations of labour unions in the era of global challenges

Cameron Duncan, PSI (Public Services International)⁶

Cameron Duncan, from Public Services International, gave a detailed account of the activity developed by PSI to assist national labour unions. PS is an international labour union federation created for public sector services unions (water, education, health, distribution services, social services, etc.). Despite this vocation, PSI also intervenes in private companies to defend the interests of workers employed in sectors such as water, education, etc.

Thus, when the French firm Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux acquired the privately-owned company United Water Resources Inc. in the U.S., one of the affiliates of PSI intervened to obtain legal recognition of the labour union by the new owner. This intervention was successful, leading to a card check agreement in favour of the U.S. labour union.

PSI is campaigning internationally to denounce the persisting impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of crimes against unionized workers in Central America. In Colombia, members of eight local labour unions are regularly hurt or even murdered by the army. To support Colombian labour unions, PSI has networked them with its affiliates in the North that have greater financial resources and means to exert political pressure. Other workers' rights violations have also been occurring in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

PSI created a programme to help migrant workers in the health sector. Specifically, PSI links its Southern affiliates, where these workers come from, with its Northern ones, where migrant workers seek to establish themselves. Networking has been furthered between labour unions

⁶ Public Services International is integrated by more than 600 public sector labour unions across 140 countries, representing together more than 20 million workers. PSI is a labour union international federation comprising public services' labour unions. PSI, in its capacity as a NGO (Non-governmental organization) is officially recognized within the International Labour Organization and it has been accredited by UNESCO, the European Trade Union Confederation and UNCTAD. PSI works also in collaboration with the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) (ISP 2005).

of Caribbean islands and those in Britain and the United States. The implementation of such links intends to decrease the vulnerability that frequently confronts these female workers.

PSI has started reflecting on the strategies required to defend the quality of public services. This examination covers a wide range of topics such as collective negotiations, employers' recognition of labour unions, strategic alliances and links with other organizations of the civil society, transformation of the labour union movement etc. It seeks to re-establish the image of public sector labour unions, which are frequently subject to scathing criticisms due to the nature of their activities.

Another major activity for PSI is the campaign to confront FTAA, in collaboration with ORIT and other labour union organizations, specifically targeting provisions related to public services. According to Cameron Duncan, the fight against FTAA is a significant rallying point among labour unions in the Americas, permitting the creation of an international solidarity network. Moreover, mobilization around this free trade agreement has permitted the inscription of global challenges into the context of every participating country. This constitutes a great leap forward in advancing collective awareness of the impacts of economic globalization on national policy construction.

NGOs and their support for the labour union movement

Terry Collingsworth, of ILRF (International Labor Rights Fund)⁷

Mr Collingsworth began by presenting the ILRFs (International Labor Rights Funds) general approach of instigating lawsuits in order to defend labour unions and workers.

According to him, the situation of labour unions and workers is particularly critical now. The very existence of labour unions could be threatened by economic globalization. Well known free trade zones established in different parts of the world ignore the most fundamental human or workers' rights, whilst transnational corporations delocalise their production activities into countries where labour regulations and environmental legislation are absent in their quest for profit. As a result of pressure exerted by financial institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank) and transnational corporations, vast portions of public services have been privatized and sub-contracting is increasingly adopted particularly in the textile sector (sport apparel) and food and agriculture sectors (tobacco, sugar, etc.). These developments question the legal responsibility of transnational corporations. Thus, to confront these global trends, NGOs and labour unions must unite their actions. Transnational corporations work hand in hand to defend their interests. So too must civil society and labour unions to create a common front.

Several legal actions advanced by the IRLF have successfully concluded for the workers concerned. Terry Collingsworth mentioned the lawsuit against Unocal Corp., on behalf of Burmese workers. This company from California, in partnership with France's TotalFinaElf, contracted the Burmese government (known to be one of the most repressive in the world) to clear out a pathway for the future oil pipeline that the company should build. The Burmese military junta relied on forced labour to accomplish the task. Some forced labour workers were able to escape and take action against Unocal Corp. in the U.S. through the IRLF. In December 2004, after nine years of legal procedures, these workers finally won and a special fund is going to be created to compensate the victims.

Labour unions and workers must try to bring these kinds of cases into the courts, according to Terry Collingsworth. There are always possibilities of lawsuits to legally pursue transnational corporations, even for infractions perpetrated overseas. These lawsuits, once started, permit workers to negotiate other problems locally.

Furthermore, he indicated that IRLF has brought lawsuits against nine transnational corporations on the grounds of human rights violations. The IRLF represents the Colombian labour union of the Coca-Cola plant, whose leaders have been tortured and killed by Colombian paramilitary. DynCorp and Dummoncoal are confronted with similar lawsuits, as a consequence of the murder of two Colombian labour union leaders perpetrated by the paramilitary. Del Monte has also been pursued, as it intimidated and acted violently against

⁷ ILRF (International Labor Rights Fund) is a NGO from the U.S. of lawyers seeking to promote legal complaints on behalf of workers from poor countries, as a way to achieve global respect of human rights.

workers in Guatemala in an attempt to prevent their unionization. A lawsuit has been brought against ExxonMobil too because of its involvement with military and paramilitary in Indonesia. Daimler-Benz is also legally pursued as a result of disappearances during the Dirty War in Argentina etc.

Terry Collingsworth is convinced that these legal actions will end in success. However for that to happen, labour unions must actively cooperate, particularly in the search for evidence. Civil society organizations must also exert pressure on the targeted companies. To illustrate his point that collaboration can bring these lawsuits to a successful end, he returned to the Coca-Cola case in Colombia.

After media broadcasting of the success at Unocal Corp., the labour union of the Coca-Cola plant (Sinaltrainal) contacted the IRLF to raise concerns about the torture or murder of their labour union leaders perpetrated by the paramilitary. The IRLF team visited the area to meet the victims and their families. Following this probe and the preparation of a file containing evidence, IRLF brought a legal complaint before a justice court (the Federal District Court for the Southern District of Florida, No. 01-03208-CIV) in Miami (2001). Back in the U.S., IRLF started an international campaign to pressure Coca-Cola seeking assistance from other civil society organizations. Students against Sweatshops, a network of 150 universities across the U.S., pressured to stop sale of the drinks from this company in campuses. Afterwards, Coca-Cola contacted Terry Collingsworth to ask how much does he demands to stop the legal cases. Following this discussion with the IRLF, managers from Coca-Cola say that they are now considering the requests of Colombian workers.

Following the same script, other actions have been initiated by the IRLF. In the tobacco sector, for instance, a lawsuit will be brought against Phillip Morris for human right violations and employing child labour in Brazil. Wal-Mart will be soon targeted by workers from China, Mexico, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Guatemala, who not only seek to improve working conditions but also the right to unionize.

Thus the IRLF strategy comprises four steps: 1) initiating a lawsuit against a corporation headquarters, on behalf of workers and labour union with limited resources; 2) launching a campaign against the corporation, in collaboration with other actors of civil society; 3) continuing publicly exposing the corporation to exert pressure on it; and 4) engaging the firm in a negotiation phase with the IRLF and the workers that it represents.

Hector de la Cueva, RMALC (Red Mexicana de Acciones frente al Libre Comercio-Mexican Network of Actions against Free Trade)⁸

⁸ RMALC (Red Mexicana de Acciones frente al Libre Comercio) is a network of people and civil society organizations, appertaining to different sectors (agriculture, labour unions, women groups, civil society, etc.). This network has the objective of building a space for reflection and actions for social movements involved with national and international agencies. RMALC discusses, analyzes and proposes alternatives to economic and financial problems taking place at national and international levels.

RMALC is a Mexican NGO that seeks to create links with all groups within civil society. RMALC collaborates with multiple organizations and labour unions independent of their activity sector. During NAFTA negotiations in 1990s, RMALC was involved in the creation of links with U.S., Canadian and Mexican organizations. This NGO has been an important actor in the creation of the *Mexican Action Network* and the *Social Hemispheric Alliance*. At the level of the Americas, labour unions and civil society organizations enjoy a rich 15 year old collaboration experience. Drawing on this experience, challenges to be addressed should now be examined in order to define next actions to be implemented.

To begin with, Hector de la Cueva elaborated on the context of the Americas at the beginning of this century. According to him, firms enjoyed a mobility that they never had before. Moreover, "flexibility" has become the slogan, as any right is now considered a privilege, and pressure is exerted to restrain workers rights, social rights, etc.

This degradation of rights is linked to the wave of privatization surging over all countries in the Americas. In Mexico, for instance, more than 90% of State-owned companies have been privatized during the last decade (i.e. more than 1,200 State-owned firms). Privatization affects sectors that were untouched until now: education, energy, social security, health, culture, water, etc. According to Mr. de la Cueva, we have reached a new phase in this era of economic liberalization. This new wave of liberalization will undoubtedly pave the way for new free trade agreements (NAFTAs plus and bilateral free trade agreements).

At the continental level, we are witnessing the political polarization between countries of the North (Canada, United States, and Mexico) and those of the South. This political right/left cleavage leads to important divergences amongst countries. Nevertheless, we are also witnessing the rise of social movements across the continent. Alliances are being created amongst different civil society sectors (labour unions, rural movements, indigenous peoples, women, etc.), which is a new phenomenon on the continent.

After presenting this context, Hector de la Cueva identified the main problems that should mobilize labour unions and civil society actors. The first is linked to transnational corporations. According to Hector de la Cueva, in order to stop extortion by these companies to the detriment of social rights it is necessary to link workers in the North and the South as well as workers in the South amongst themselves. To do this, it is necessary to focus on linking workers in specific companies so that they can stop the degradation of their rights in the North and improve working conditions in the South.

According to him, the labour union movement also needs a new concept to serve as a cornerstone for its international action. One should no longer think in terms of solidarity but in terms of cooperation. This cooperation amongst workers in the North and the South must target very precise objectives. Labour unions must develop common campaigns that exert pressure on specific companies to sharpen their efficiency.

Hector de la Cueva indicates that this type of cooperation has already been adopted by Mexican and European organizations. European corporations are much more scrutinized and therefore attract a lot more social pressure. He raises the question of why, despite the rich

experience of network building that labour union organizations enjoy, this type of cooperation does not exist in the Americas.

Hector de la Cueva indicates that a campaign against the privatization of public services must become a common struggle for labour unions in the Americas. An educational campaign must be developed by labour unions, to sensitize citizenship across the continent about this issue.

Conclusion

One of the conclusions of the workshop is that the labour union movement on the American continent must define a common action programme. It emerged in the closing discussions that there is an apparent lack of coordination among actions. To succeed in building cooperative relationships, as Hector de la Cueva mentioned, labour unions must choose a set of companies to be targeted by common campaigns and actions (Wal-Mart or ExxonMobil for instance).

Actors questioned the underlying reasons for this lack of coordination. European labour unions seem to already have the capacity to develop concerted actions. It appears that the lack of support from U.S. labour unions could be part of the answer to the question. Cameron Duncan perceives a change in the attitude of these labour unions since the NAFTA negotiations. The lack of support from U.S. labour unions constituted a major problem during the negotiations of framework-agreements with headquarters of U.S. transnational corporations. In fact, negotiations of these agreements must be advanced by a trade union based in the same territory as the transnational involved in the dealings. Given the large number of U.S. transnational corporations, this situation may constrain the multiplication of such agreements.

Canadian labour union representatives mentioned that in order to advance common actions on the political front, it is necessary that labour union unite in their very own territories. Policies implemented by liberal governments have divided labour unions, constraining deployment of concerted actions at the international level.

To wrap up, we warmly thank the speakers that participated in this workshop. We enjoyed the quality of their presentations and the richness of their critical analysis on the internationalization of labour union action in the context of the Americas. The Chair of Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development intends to continue this reflection by conducting further in-depth research on these issues.

Websites of organizations invited to the workshop:

Canadian Labour Congress: <http://canadianlabour.ca>

Confederation of National Trade Unions: <http://www.csn.qc.ca>

Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada: <http://www.cep.ca>

Quebec Confederation of Labour (Centrale des Syndicats du Québec): <http://www.csq.qc.net>

Public Services International: <http://www.world-psi.org>

International Labor Rights Fund: <http://www.laborrights.org>

Red Mexicana de Acciones frente al Libre Comercio: <http://www.laneta.apc.org>

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