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# Building bridges across a double divide: alliances between US and Latin American labour and NGOs

*Mark Anner and Peter Evans*

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*Trying to build alliances that span the divide between trade unions and NGOs as well as the divide between the North and the South might seem a utopian task. But this is exactly what an imaginative new generation of organisers from the Western hemisphere's labour movements and NGOs are trying to do. This paper analyses two very different efforts working to bridge this 'double divide'. The first is a combination of organisations, including unions and NGOs in both North and South, that are focusing on blatant violations of the dignity of workers in apparel export processing zones in the South. This 'basic rights complex' has resulted in important victories. A second complex of organisations, also involving unions and NGOs in both North and South, has raised broad macro issues of governance focusing particularly on the anti-democratic character of current proposals for a free trade area of the Americas. Neither of these complexes is without its weaknesses, but each makes it clear that bridging the double divide should be thought of not as a utopian dream but as work in progress.*

## Introduction

The North–South divide, specifically between the USA and Latin America, has always riven the trade union movement. Workers of the South have, with justification, accused workers in the North of being protectionist and allowing their unions to become instruments of the reactionary foreign policies of their governments. Workers in the South have also been susceptible to nationalist appeals that have led them to support local elites at the expense of solidarity with their fellow workers in other countries. In the USA, especially during the Vietnam War, a dramatic divide came about between the conservative national union leadership on the one hand and progressive social movement organisations (SMOs) and NGOs on the other. In the South, trade unionists have often been unwilling to give space on the workers' movement agenda to the interests of women, informal-sector workers, and marginalised minority groups.

The perversions of Cold War union practices have been well documented, with writers quick to point out the contradictions between the rhetoric of solidarity and union practices. For example, Åke Wedin (1991), in describing the pattern of US and German union policies in Latin America, provocatively titled his book *International Trade Union 'Solidarity' and its*

*Victims*, while Beth Sims (1992) wrote in detail about AFL-CIO activities in Latin America in her book *Workers of the World Undermined*. Nor did Southern unionists always set their priorities along strong international ties with their Northern counterparts. During import substitution industrialisation, many Latin American unions developed a corporatist ideology that made a harmonious relationship with the state rather than class confrontation a priority (Collier and Collier 1991; Murillo 2001; Zapata 1993).

These old problems have not disappeared. Even in some highly globalised sectors, domestic labour strategies often take priority over international solidarity (Gentile 2002). And in cases where labour transnationalism is prevalent, weaker Southern actors find that their Northern counterparts tend to dominate campaign strategies and agendas (Anner 2001). Northern union protectionism remains a concern (Seidman 2001). Nor is business unionism, which deals solely and exclusively with workplace issues, a dead letter (Dreiling 2001). Nonetheless, economic and political shifts from the 1970s to the 1990s have modified many old patterns. During the 1970s and 1980s, Latin American unions fought dictatorships and developed close ties to popular organisations that persist today (see, for example, Moreira Alves 1984). Analysing recent trends in the USA, Voss and Sherman (2000) note how the decline of labour's power there has engendered a shift from bureaucratic conservatism to social movement unionism. Labour unions are also building links to other social movements, albeit with some difficulty. Most notably, labour joined environmental groups and others in the protests in Seattle against the WTO (Smith 2001). Internationally, regional trade pacts such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and international trade institutions such as the WTO have created an incentive for labour to organise across borders (Cook 1997; O'Brien et al. 2000). In some cases where products are made in low-wage countries and sold in high-wage countries, the ties among 'workers of the world' are being replaced by 'workers and consumer activists of the world'. Growing labour-rights campaigns focus on brand-name images (Anner 2002). Combined, these trends create conditions for what Evans (2000) refers to as 'counter-hegemonic globalisation'.

Global neo-liberalism has presented traditional trade unionism with the prospect of extinction if it cannot confront globally organised employers with global counter-organisation. The aggressive ideological unions of the emerging markets of Latin America are essential allies. At the same time, eroding union densities, deteriorating working conditions, and the growth of the informal economy cannot be reversed by formal-sector workers acting alone. 'Social movement unionism', in the practical as well as the ideological sense, must include whole communities, especially women's organisations, if it is to succeed.

We focus here on the USA and Latin America both because the double divide has been particularly debilitating in the Americas and because the Western hemisphere has become the site of a series of innovative efforts. We focus specifically on two complexes of activity. The first we call the 'basic rights complex'. This complex consists of a collection of diverse and differentiated organisations that work in concert to improve the balance of power that workers confront as they struggle to gain basic rights in oppressive, labour-intensive industries in Latin America. Specifically, we explore the set of organisations that is popularly known as the 'anti-sweatshop movement'. The basic rights complex is more than a transnational network, although it is that as well. It is a complex in which the distinctively different capacities of the organisations involved are integrated in a way that gives the assembly much more effectiveness than the sum of its individual parts.

The second complex also entails a dense set of organisational alliances, but its goals are more political and substantially removed from the shop floor. This is the coalition of labour organisations and NGOs that are trying to defend democratic governance in the hemisphere against the anti-democratic threat posed by the neo-liberal governance model embedded in the

FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas, also known by its Spanish acronym, ALCA). The most obvious organisational embodiment of this coalition is the alliance of alliances called the Alianza Social Continental or Hemispheric Social Alliance (ASC/HSA).

Analysing these two very different cases together conveys a sense of the range of actions that new North–South and labour–NGO alliances are undertaking. It illustrates the strengths and accomplishments of the new initiatives bridging the double divide. It also illustrates the challenges that these new constructions continue to confront. Part of the response to these continuing challenges must, of course, be to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the complicated political and organisational dynamics that sustain (or undercut) these efforts. We offer this analysis as a first step towards such an understanding. Despite the difficulties, we find that in several important cases labour is shifting its strategies, and that shift involves broad coalitions and stronger North–South ties. Future relief from the rise in inequality and job insecurity and the decline in real wages, as well as from the unravelling social peace and the destruction of ecological resources, will depend in part on how successful these emerging labour and NGO complexes and alliances become.

### Organisational complexities of securing basic rights

Securing basic rights in the global South depends first of all on the determination, skill, and militancy of workers engaged in local struggles, but the economic power of employers and the repressive role of local governments create overwhelming odds against even the most militant and creative local campaigns. The right structure of connections to the global political economy can help. More specifically, an organisational complex has grown up over the last 10–15 years which, when fully engaged, does seem to improve the odds. It involves at least three elements. Ideologically, as Margaret Keck and Katherine Sikkink (1998) suggest, success requires a set of clear, compelling normative ideas combined with an equally clear causal logic connecting normative evaluation to the possibility of action. Economically, it requires a ‘commodity chain’ that links workers and consumers to gain leverage over companies. Making this work means constructing a complex matrix of organisations playing a variety of roles that work synergistically. Labour–NGO alliances that operate across the North–South divide are at the heart of this organisational matrix.<sup>1</sup>

The Kukdong case is one of the best illustrations of how the matrix can come together. On 21 September 2001 the first ever collective bargaining agreement ever between an independent union and a Mexican *maquiladora*<sup>2</sup> manufacturing apparel was signed by SITEMEX on behalf of the 400 workers at the Kukdong (renamed Mexmode) *maquiladora* in Atlixco, Mexico. This led to an agreement in April 2002 to increase wages and benefits significantly. A wide array of labour organisations and NGOs were involved in this victory, including the Workers’ Support Centre (CAT) in Mexico, United Students against Sweatshops (USAS), the AFL-CIO, and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Solidarity groups included the US Labor Education in the Americas Project (US/LEAP), the Campaign for Labor Rights, Global Exchange, Sweatshop Watch, the European Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the Korean House for International Solidarity, and the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN).

This list of groups gives a hint of the organisational complexities involved in winning the basic right to organise, but really understanding this victory requires a more thorough analysis of the evolution and interaction of the organisations involved. The potential role of traditional trade unions like UNITE<sup>3</sup> is a good place to start.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1970s, UNITE’s predecessor unions watched their membership dwindle as the flow of apparel and textile production to the global South accelerated. The natural response was to try to stem the tide by pushing ‘Made in America’ labels and imposing import restrictions. By

the time UNITE was formed in the mid-1990s, it was no longer possible to prevent the hemorrhaging of jobs or of union membership by trying to insulate the US market from imports. Even the new Democratic administration, which was relatively sympathetic to labour, opposed import restrictions. At the same time, UNITE's members in the garment trades within the USA increasingly were immigrants from the same countries to which the work was being relocated, and therefore they identified with workers in the global South. It made sense to shift to a strategy built around solidarity with workers there who were trying to organise.

The need to have greater flexibility and legitimacy as UNITE and other US unions struggled to overcome their protectionist past led to involving a variety of NGOs and SMOs. Some labour solidarity groups such as the National Labor Committee (NLC) had already been actively involved in international anti-sweatshop campaigns since the early 1990s. The NLC was formed in 1980 by unionists who were concerned about US government policy in Central America. In the 1990s, as civil wars in Central America ended, the NLC changed its focus to the gross violation of labour rights in the region's booming export processing zones. Other US NGOs, such as the US Guatemala Labor Education Project (later US/LEAP), became involved in the anti-sweatshop movement. One of its first major anti-sweatshop campaigns involved workers producing for Phillips-Van Heusen in Guatemala. The anti-sweatshop movement also spread to Canada, where activists formed the Maquila Solidarity Network, while Europeans formed the Clean Clothes Campaign, which has its headquarters in The Netherlands.

Southern actors were generally receptive to forming alliances with these Northern solidarity groups. In Central America, the violent and systematic violation of labour rights in the region during the 1980s had left unions weak and fragmented. Unionists found that traditional organising strategies were not working in the booming global apparel industry. For example, from June 1995 to June 1996 a wave of organising drives in the Salvadoran *maquila* sector resulted in two plants closing and 5044 people being fired. In the end, only 300 workers were successfully organised. Similar problems occurred in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, where traditional organising led to mass dismissals and subsequent blacklisting of all workers involved in trying to form unions. Unionists learned that local organising was much easier when pressure could be put on the brand-name apparel companies, and to do so, workers needed allies in the countries where these products were sold.

In addition to building alliances with groups in the North, these Southern unions developed alliances with local civil society organisations. In the 1980s, many Southern unions had learned that it took strong social alliances to democratise their countries. They grew accustomed to working with women's groups, human rights organisations, and progressive sectors of the church to achieve their goals. In the 1990s, with the boom in export processing zones, the violent abuse of human rights in the apparel sector made these rights a concern for religious and human rights groups. On average, 80 per cent of the workforce was female, and some of the most common rights abuses included sexual harassment, the firing of pregnant women, and denial of maternity leave; gaining these rights thus became an issue for women's groups too. As a result, Southern labour and non-labour groups had an interest in forming an alliance to address the sweatshop problem.

By the late 1990s, Northern students supplied yet another key link in the coalition. The students provided greater legitimacy to the movement and replaced the stereotypical animosities of patriotic hardhats versus long-haired 'anti-American' students. Student activists wanted to help the labour movement fight sweatshop conditions that violated basic human dignity. The character of the 'commodity chain' connecting the students and the sweatshops actually gave students power to change working conditions. As large institutional buyers, universities could influence producing companies, and collectively their advantage was substantial. In the summer of 1997 some of these student activists ended up doing internships

at UNITE. Interaction with UNITE staff helped students think about how they could turn outrage into an effective campaign to actually change working conditions. Over the course of the next few years a national network of campus organisations was built and the United Students against Sweatshops (USAS), which has had affiliates on 180 different campuses, emerged as a major force in the anti-sweatshop movement (Featherstone and USAS 2002).

The combination of North–South and union–NGO alliances produced several success campaigns in the 1990s and early 2000s, including the Kukdong case in Mexico. The movement also successfully organised workers and improved conditions in several plants in the Dominican Republic and in the Kimi plant in Honduras, the Phillips–Van Heusen plant in Guatemala, and the Mandarin plant in El Salvador. However, in several cases the victories were short-lived. In Kimi and Van Heusen, after the unions won recognition and negotiated contracts, the plants closed down. This highlighted the difficulty in sustaining achievements in such a highly mobile industry. One answer was to press for industry-wide standards and monitoring. An early effort to do this resulted in the Fair Labor Association (FLA). But unions, USAS, and NGOs like the NLC and US/LEAP considered the FLA inadequate.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, in 1999 the Workers' Rights Consortium (WRC) was set up, supported by funds provided from for the logo royalties received by what came to be 100 affiliated universities, to provide thorough, credible assessments of cases where there was evidence of violations. In the Kukdong case, the WRC's authoritative reports were crucial in giving broad credibility to the workers' battle for a union.

The American Center for International Labor Solidarity, known as the Solidarity Center, provides another organisational element, as it is an auxiliary to the trade union movement. The top leadership of the AFL-CIO dominates its board of trustees and the AFL-CIO also contributes small but crucial amounts of funding. At the same time, the Solidarity Center has substantial government funding. It competes for grants from USAID as an NGO and gets a yearly core grant from the National Endowment for Democracy. With an annual core project budget of over US \$20 million, its resources exceed those of USAS, the WRC, and the smaller labour NGOs put together. It can afford to maintain a network of 28 offices, with a total full-time staff of about 160 people, in all regions of the global South (and transitional economies). While accepting US government money limits the ability of the Solidarity Center staff to work as international labour organisers,<sup>6</sup> the Center adds a whole new level of organisational resources that ultimately redound to the benefit of the less politically encumbered actors in the basic rights complex. In the Kukdong case, for example, the Solidarity Center's Mexico office was an invaluable resource.

This whole organisational matrix is knit together by a set of internationally oriented labour activists, some of them inside the labour movement, some in the NGO world, many shifting back and forth between the two. The importance of network connections among these activists makes the basic rights complex appear similar to the transnational advocacy networks (TANs) of Keck and Sikkink (1998), but the fact that the complex is rooted in the labour movement gives the structure a different flavour. Unlike the TANs, which are, in theory at least, made up of organisations whose reason for being is to defend 'principled ideas or values', the organisational matrix of the 'basic rights complex' also includes organisations that are directly accountable to (that is, elected by) a constituency with immediate interests grounded in the everyday struggles of hard political realities for livelihood and dignity, as well as long-term and ideological interests.

The fact that the basic rights complex is able to integrate principled ideas and values with everyday interests is arguably its most exciting characteristic, both practically and theoretically. How is this circle squared? First, the key role of activists for whom the pursuit of long-term political and normative goals is intrinsically satisfying in itself needs

to be acknowledged. Even more interesting, however, is the logic of organisational relations—a logic that forces groups and leaders to adopt a broad vision, even those whose natural tendencies might be to pursue their own interests in a more pedestrian, immediate way.

Drawing a schematised version of the relations between UNITE and the rest of the basic rights complex is the easiest way to make this point. UNITE's core mission must be to serve its members' interests and organise new members. Helping textile and apparel workers in the global South in their efforts to organise and to win better working conditions, while obviously in the long-run interest of UNITE's members, is unlikely to have any obvious direct impact on its members' own fights. The idea that UNITE is interested in having workers in the global South get organised because it will somehow lead to bringing the jobs back to the USA is implausible, both historically and theoretically. Indeed, a simple model of UNITE might predict that it should continue to mount protectionist battles, no matter how quixotic such efforts might be in reality.<sup>7</sup> What is fascinating and much more difficult to explain is why UNITE is quietly expending its precious organisational resources to help unions in places like Guatemala, Indonesia, and Mexico.

The answer lies in the larger ideological character of organising in contemporary USA. UNITE's members, who increasingly are immigrants from the very countries of the South that the work is moving to, are likely to identify with the workers whose struggles they are supporting, but there is more going on here than just sympathy and values. Contemporary trade unions are rarely in a position to win gains for their members by shutting down production. Strikes still play a key role, but unless they are embedded in a strategic campaign they are unlikely to succeed. In the apparel industry, the best way of attacking employers is to attack their brand image. The most strategic point for attacking these images is the inhumane conditions under which their goods are produced, especially in the global South. It is an ideological battle, not just an economic one. In this ideological battle, scrappy little unions in the South are key allies, helping to build links between UNITE, Northern NGOs, and organised rich-country consumers, while at the same time they further their own local struggles in the South. The nature of the battle with US employers, which must be fought in terms of ideas and images as much as with picket lines, makes the basic rights complex central to the immediate interests of UNITE's members.

None of this is to say that trade unions, NGOs, and SMOs have discovered a sure-fire ideological and organisational formula. The basic ideological logic is robust, but the organisational ties necessary to make it work require constant creative renovation. For example, new USAS activists could easily view the established WRC leadership as insufficiently responsive to the concerns of their campus base. Conversely, the WRC may feel that USAS (or UNITE) is pushing them too far in the direction of advocacy when its function is to produce credible assessments. UNITE will always be suspected of putting the interests of its members above those of workers in the global South. Tensions are also common within the South, and between North and South. Southern unions often accuse Southern SMOs, particularly women's groups, of attempting to usurp their role as organisers. Women's groups have responded that male-dominated unions are often insensitive to the needs of female workers in the apparel sector, where the vast majority of the workers are women, and therefore women's groups have a right to attend to this sector.<sup>8</sup> On the North–South axis, Southern unionists have at times felt that their Northern allies have pursued targets and established demands without fully consulting them. The very nature of the organisational matrix means that it must continually be renegotiated and trust continuously re-established. At the same time, tensions within the complex can help bring about innovation, generating new organisations and new relationships that will extend success.

Viewed as a whole, the ideological and organisational matrix of the basic rights complex provides an exciting model of how alliances with NGOs and SMOs can facilitate North–South labour alliances and how the combination can help give labour (and ordinary citizens) leverage against the naturally non-egalitarian thrust of global neo-liberalism. It is not, however, the only model. As discussed below, the ideological and organisational matrix of the global governance complex, exemplified by the current hemisphere-wide fight against the FTAA, illustrates a very different model.

## Defending democratic governance: the fight against the FTAA

The complex of alliances that has been constructed around workers' rights enables workers to draw on the reservoir of support among consumers and NGO activists that flows from the ideological legitimacy of the quest for workers' dignity and decent working conditions. For labour–NGO alliances to have a broader impact on politics and policy, they must be able to cohere around shared goals that go beyond labour's immediate interests. Without a strategy for building more democratic forms of economic governance, nationally and globally, shop-floor struggles are at best a finger in the dike. The current union–NGO alliance that has coalesced around opposition to the FTAA demonstrates the possibility of broader alliances built around the larger issue of democratising economic governance.

The degree of political change represented by the alliance against the FTAA is especially striking when compared with the character of hemispheric trade politics a decade ago at the time the fight over NAFTA began. The labour politics of NAFTA initially fell into a traditional mould of job geography. North American trade unionists decried the likelihood of job loss in the USA and the official Mexican Trade Union Confederation (CTM) wholeheartedly supported the treaty. NGO involvement, which focused primarily around environmental issues, found some tactical support from US labour but little sympathy from Mexican labour.<sup>9</sup> There were really three sides to the struggle—labour in the USA, NGOs based primarily in the USA, and labour in Mexico—with agendas that conflicted with more than they complemented each other. Obviously a decade has not erased the concerns of workers in either the USA or Mexico over the effects that trade politics will have on their jobs—whether it is jobs leaving the USA for Mexico or jobs leaving Mexico for China—but these concerns are now embedded in a very different political panorama.

The fight over NAFTA, and then the experience of living under the neo-liberal economic regime reinforced by NAFTA, changed trade union perspectives on both sides of the border. Experience with neo-liberal reforms confirmed the suspicions of some progressive Mexican trade unionists that nationalist strategies built around corporatist ties with Mexican parties were unlikely to improve their wages and working conditions.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, US trade unionists came to realise that building cooperative ties with their Mexican counterparts was not only possible but the only way to increase their bargaining power in the face of the almost universal commitment of US politicians to a corporate-dominated model of global economic governance. Most important, living with NAFTA helped create a new understanding of what 'trade agreements' were really about.

NAFTA's Chapter 11 and the tribunals instituted under the provisions of its 'Investor–State Dispute Mechanism' dramatised the fact that neo-liberal trade agreements are as much or more about replacing democratic governance procedures with corporate-dominated economic governance than they are about facilitating the flow of goods between countries. The experience with NAFTA has made it clear that if the FTAA process is allowed to run its course, an 'economic constitution' for the hemisphere will be created in a way that contravenes the kind of democratic constitutional process that all of the participating governments supposedly

espouse. It will produce instead economic governance in which unelected international corporate lawyers are given the power to decide which economic rules are valid, domestically as well as internationally.

One crystallisation of this learning process was the April 2001 declaration by ORIT (Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores) against the FTAA. It was a document that emphasised the FTAA's undemocratic character and underlined the central importance of preserving the basic rights of all workers, regardless of what country they were working in or what their legal status was. It was not an 'anti-globalisation' document but rather advocated 'a progressive version of economic globalization' that entailed the 'globalization of human, economic, social, labor, cultural, and political rights' but rejected 'confining democracy, participation, and legitimacy to the domestic sphere while technocracies, in the name of States and national interests, negotiate away the rights of the large majorities, exclusively favoring small privileged groups'. In this document, the reasons why the hemispheric labour movement opposed the FTAA paralleled those of NGOs and social movement organisations. In fact, this ideological correspondence had been reflected by the ASC/HSA transnational organisational alliance, which grew out of the Joint Declaration of Unions and NGOs following a 1997 ministerial meeting in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and was officially constituted in 1999.

Building the organisational alliances that form the foundation of ASC/HSA was not an easy task. It marks the first time that ORIT has agreed to establish a structure to coordinate strategies and actions with NGOs. Nor was ideological consensus automatic. ORIT at first preferred a 'free trade with a labor rights clause' approach, while NGOs were quick to take the 'anti-globalisation/No to the FTAA' stance (De la Cueva 2000). The shared position of opposing the FTAA while developing an alternative model of regional integration required lengthy discussions among unions and NGOs. Perhaps the most important factor motivating the formation of HSA was labour's realisation that it did not have the power to defeat the FTAA alone. Broad social alliances became a political necessity.

ASC/HSA is a coalition of coalitions. Most of its members are umbrella organisations, each of which represents a coalition of NGOs or labour organisations. For example, the US member is the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), itself a coalition of NGOs and labour groups.<sup>11</sup> The Brazilian Network for People's Integration (Rede Brasileira pela Integração dos Povos, REBRIP) is likewise an alliance of labour and NGO groups. While ASC/HSA has not been able to find local labour-NGO alliances of the ART/REBRIP sort to work with in every country, it always tries to involve the labour movement in its activities, even when local labour-NGO alliances are not well developed. Thus in Ecuador, where labour-NGO alliances remain weak and CONAIE (the indigenous people's organisation) played a leading role in organising ASC/HSA actions around the November 2002 FTAA ministerial meeting in Quito, labour was still involved.<sup>12</sup>

Making sure that the countries of the South play a central organisational role has been even more important to ASC/HSA's strategic thinking than the focus on labour-NGO alliances. The Alliance's secretariat was first lodged with the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC) but has now moved to REBRIP in Brazil with Kjeld Jakobsen, the international affair's director of the CUT (Brazil's Central Trade Union Confederation), serving as the executive secretary. Seven of the twelve members on the Operations Committee<sup>13</sup> represent organisations from Latin America and the Caribbean. ORIT's representative, Victor Báez, is from Paraguay. Two representatives are from Canada and one from the USA, with a general Women's Committee rounding out the dozen. (Also from the South is the Women's Committee representative, Miosotis Rivas Peña, from the Dominican Republic.) Spanish is the organisation's de facto working language, and steering committee meetings move up and down the hemisphere along with FTAA ministerial meetings.

ASC/HSA has its limitations. While ORIT is participating actively in the Alliance, several of ORIT's largest members—such as CTM/Mexico, CGT/Argentina, CTV/Venezuela, and Força Sindical/Brazil—are not. Indeed, according to one source, HSA has managed to articulate labour–NGO alliances fully and effectively in only four or five of the 34 countries in the Americas. The most active HSA chapters are in Brazil, Canada, Peru, and the USA.<sup>14</sup> HSA activities tend to focus on organising parallel people's summits and protests at presidential summits and ministerial meetings: Belo Horizonte 1997, Santiago 1998, Quebec 2001, and so on. Ensuring that an alternative voice is heard at these events is one of HSA's greatest contributions, but this event-focused strategy has its limitations. Gathering activists from throughout the Americas is costly. Moreover, HSA would greatly benefit if more members were to work actively to influence their governments in between the big summit events.

Yet despite ASC/HSA's limitations, unions and NGOs have made important progress since the first Presidential Summit for Free Trade was held in Miami in 1994. Sarah Anderson (2001:26) writes: 'There is no comparable network on globalization in any other region in the world.' ASC/HSA not only bridges the double divide but is exactly the kind of broad-based conglomeration of civil society groups that one would hope would be involved in any process of creating an economic constitution.<sup>15</sup> While ASC/HSA cannot yet claim to be sufficiently representative to legitimise imposing its own version of an 'economic constitution' for the hemisphere, it has at least as good a claim as the opaque technocratic process that is currently underway. Its 'Alternative for the Americas' document not only parallels the official draft version of the FTAA but in fact provides a more detailed policy analysis to back up its positions than does the publicly available FTAA draft. Equally important, ASC/HAS has been trying to involve ordinary citizens in the debate over its alternative vision through a process of 'hemispheric consultation', which has involved public meetings and a series of referenda. Ballot or petition campaigns are currently underway in Canada, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru. Brazilian organisers have already completed an impressive referendum on the FTAA in which 10 million people participated.

ASC/HSA is a solid demonstration that a North–South, labour–NGO alliance can generate a positive political agenda with respect to governance issues. The question that remains is whether this sort of broad political agenda can generate sufficient mobilisation among rank-and-file union members and ordinary citizens at the community level to make a political difference. Unlike the basic rights complex, which can focus on concrete attacks on the dignity of identifiable individuals, ASC/HSA must convince ordinary people that a set of relatively abstract governance changes constitutes a threat to principles they hold dear.

## Variations and future challenges

Many other examples of bridging the double divide could be added to the two that we have explored here. Some of the most exciting labour–NGO campaigns focus on specific companies or sectors. For example, banana-sector unionists in Central America and in the Andean region joined forces with international organisations such as US/LEAP and the International Union of Foodworkers to force the Chiquita brand to accept a framework agreement that guaranteed respect for labour rights, recognition of international labour standards, and a commitment to improve working conditions.<sup>16</sup> In Brazil, with strong local community support and international pressure, workers at the Rio Tinto mine in Paracatu were able to strengthen their union and make important gains in a new enterprise agreement. The effort was part of a sustained global network of Rio Tinto unions that coordinates information exchange, provides training, and organises transnational campaigns.<sup>17</sup>

Brazil is also home to an innovative NGO–union alliance organised by the Social Observatory,<sup>18</sup> which was formed in 1997 by CUT/Brazil in coordination with several Brazilian labour research institutes.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of the Observatory is to research and analyse the conduct of multinational and national companies with respect to core ILO labour rights standards. The Social Observatory has worked closely with foreign labour centres and received financial support from them, including the AFL-CIO, FNV of The Netherlands, DGB of Germany, LO-Norway, and SASK-Finland. It provides unions and companies with detailed studies on the conduct of multinationals. The unions and companies then discuss the findings and possible solutions. Should the company decline to cooperate, a union may use the findings to organise an international campaign to pressure it to rectify any problems that the research detects. This strategy has begun to show positive results in several cases. For example, at the Danish Hartmann/Mapol factory in Brazil, reports by the Social Observatory documenting labour rights violations led to a visit by Danish unionists, and then to productive collective bargaining between the local union and the company.

Like the basic rights complex and the ASC/HSA movement for democratic economic governance, transnational corporate-based campaigns are difficult organisational constructions, fraught with potential conflicts, sustained only on the basis of continuous imaginative ‘reinvention’, and always vulnerable to the evaporation of the scarce material and organisational resources that nurture them. Maintaining organisational innovations is always a challenge, and maintaining them in the face of powerful economic and political interests is even more daunting.

Efforts to bridge the double divide are even more fundamentally challenged by the way in which global neo-liberalism is shifting the nature of work and employment. Perhaps the biggest single challenge facing the kinds of organisational efforts we have been describing here is how to incorporate informal-sector workers. None of the campaigns we have discussed really addresses this problem. For the informal sector, it is hard to see how transnational corporate connections can be leveraged in the way that the anti-sweatshop movement works for apparel workers. The benefits of corporate campaigns are often limited to workers with jobs in multinational companies and their subcontractors. Yet a very large percentage of Latin Americans work in the informal sector, and even in the USA the process of informalisation is expanding rapidly. Broad coalitions like ASC/HAS must find ways of incorporating informal-sector workers if they are to be politically effective.

Contemplating the problem of informal-sector workers demonstrates how much further reconstruction of North–South, labour–NGO alliances still has to go. But in no way does it negate the accomplishments that have been described here. If UNITE members can be convinced that realising their own economic interests depends on building alliances with relatively small unions in the global South, and a trade union confederation like ORIT can leave its traditional anti-communist past behind to build alliances with environmentalists and community groups across the hemisphere, it would be a grave error to set limits on what organisational leaps the next generation of hemispheric organisers might be able to take.

## Notes

- 1 For an analysis of earlier efforts in which success varied, in part depending on the degree to which the full range of elements described here was present, see Anner (2002).
- 2 A *maquiladora* is a small factory run by a foreign company and exporting its products to the country of that company.

- 3 The Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) formed in 1995 by the merger of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (ACTWU).
- 4 Another important traditional trade element in the organisational matrix, which we do not have the space to discuss here, is the Global Union Federations (GUFs—formerly known as International Trade Secretariats or ITSs). For example, the apparel sector GUF, the ITGLWF (International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation), took over with an organising project of its own in Central America when UNITE decided that it did not have the resources to remain directly involved in organising.
- 5 The FLA's role in the evolution of this complex is an equally intriguing story that we cannot pursue here. On the one hand, had it not been for the opposition of USAS and UNITE, the FLA could have ended up succumbing to its corporate constituency and letting apparel companies off the hook by providing easy certification. On the other, the FLA's prior existence, sanctioned by both government and business (as well as respected NGOs like the International Labor Rights Foundation), legitimised the whole idea of monitoring and, ironically, may have made universities more comfortable signing onto the WRC.
- 6 The Solidarity Center's largest source of funds is the US government, through core grants from the National Endowment for Democracy and USAID—with the unfortunate consequence of evoking memories of the political role of its predecessor, the American Institute of Free Labor Development. The Institute was accused, especially in Latin America, of playing an auxiliary role in repressing militant trade unionists that the US government considered too left wing, and it never escaped suspicions of historical ties to the CIA (cf. Ancel 2000; Carew 1998; Scipes 2000). This historical reputation is a burden that the new generation of Solidarity Center staff works hard to surmount.
- 7 It is hardly surprising that UNITE's political repertoire still includes activities that could be labelled 'protectionist'. For example, faced with a desperate constituency of textile workers in the south of the USA with no hope of finding jobs to replace their disappearing textile jobs, Bruce Raynor, UNITE's president, became a founding member of the American Textile Trade Action Coalition (ATTAC—a completely different entity from the European NGO of the same acronym), a union–business lobby group formed in April 2002. ATTAC has lobbied against providing greater market access to textiles from Central America, the Caribbean, and Andean countries (Rogers 2002). Likewise, after the 11 September 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center, UNITE shifted attention from its newly launched Global Justice for Garment Workers campaign to a Buy New York campaign that supports New York City garment workers (Featherstone and USAS 2002).
- 8 The most notorious conflict between a union and a women's group involved the Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Textil, Vestuario, Piel y Calzado and the Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas 'María Elena Cuadra' in Nicaragua.
- 9 While environmental NGOs were the most prominent, other kinds of NGOs were also involved, including family-farm groups and policy organisations like Development Gap (DGAP) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS).
- 10 To be sure, this experience has still not persuaded the leadership of the CTM to join a hemispheric alliance against free trade.
- 11 Founded in 1991 at the very beginning of the battles over NAFTA, ART was also a very early example of labour–NGO collaboration. It brought the AFL-CIO together with think-tank NGOs like the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), environmental groups like Friends of the Earth, and traditional NGOs like the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).
- 12 Among other activities, the ASC/HSA action provided an opportunity for the Noboa Banana workers, who are confronting a powerful and violent local plantation owner in their

struggle to form a union, to highlight their case at a workshop that was attended by several hundred people.

- 13 This is the committee that oversees ASC/HSA's activities between the meetings of the organisation's governing council, in which 40 networks of organisations are represented.
- 14 Mexico has a very active NGO movement that is part of HSA, but except for the FAT (Authentic Labour Front/Frente Auténtico del Trabajo) and the UNT (National Workers' Union/Unión Nacional de Trabajadores), organised labour in Mexico is not participating. Chile also has active NGO participation, but the Chilean CUT labour centre has expressed scepticism about HSA. In Uruguay, the unions have been active in HSA, while in Argentina, the non-ORIT labour centre CTA (Argentine Workers' Centre/Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos) has been active.
- 15 The contrast between ASC/HSA's efforts to involve a full range of civil society groups and the way in which such groups (with the obvious exception of the Business Forum of the Americas) have been carefully kept at bay by the official FTAA process is stark. A Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society was finally created as part of the official process in 1998 (after ministerial meetings had been taking place for three years). The Committee's efforts, however, consisted essentially of opening up a suggestion box. Korzeniewicz and Smith (2000:10) summarise the results of this effort as follows: 'the fact that the FTAA's civil society committee's final report contained none of the substantive recommendations put forward by the CSOs [civil society organisations] was seen by both "insiders" and "outsiders" as a slap in the face'. More recent official efforts to increase participation have also been superficial. See, for example, the January 2003 complaints of ASC/HAS representatives in response to the First Thematic Meeting of the FTAA on Agriculture of the Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society at [www.aschsa.org/position%201%20reunion%20tematica%20agricultura%20ingles.htm](http://www.aschsa.org/position%201%20reunion%20tematica%20agricultura%20ingles.htm)
- 16 For more information, go to [www.usleap.org/Banana/bananatemp.html#Chiquita](http://www.usleap.org/Banana/bananatemp.html#Chiquita)
- 17 For more information, go to [www.icem.org.br/RioTinto.htm](http://www.icem.org.br/RioTinto.htm)
- 18 For more information, go to [www.observatoriosocial.org.br](http://www.observatoriosocial.org.br)
- 19 Centro de Estudos de Cultura Contemporânea (CEDEC), Departamento Inter-sindical de Estudos Sócios Económicos (DIEESE), and Rede Inter-Universitária de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre o Trabalho (UNITRABALHO).

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