

# **Labour and sustainable development in Latin America: rebuilding alliances at a new crossroad**

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# Thesis

The alliance between social movements and labour at the Latin American level reached its peak during the campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The current crossroads provided by the limitations of what has been called the 'commodity consensus' (Svampa 2011; Lander 2011) and the struggles for sustainable development reinforces the necessity to overcome barriers and re-create decades-old alliances. The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas can play a leading role in this alliance

# Road

- 1- The Commodity Consensus vs. Washington Consensus
- 2- Unions and social movements in the last decade
- 3- Challenges and possibilities
- 4- Conclusion

# 1- CC vs WC

## Washington Consensus

- Structural adjustment programs
- Privatization of public services
- Late 1980s/early 1990s
- Retrenchment of the state
- Low redistribution

## Commodities' Consensus

- 2000s
- Strong state intervention
- Extractive industries are central (agribusiness, mining, oil and gas)
- Redistribution policies
- Targeted social policies
- Low unemployment
- Declining poverty levels
- High environmental impact

# 1- CC vs WC

## Washington Consensus

- Low redistribution
- High poverty- high unemployment
- Increasing export of primary commodities, financialization of the economy
- Informalization of labour force
- Flexible labour markets
- High intervention from IFIs, especially IMF-WB

## Commodities Consensus

- Economic bonanza due to high export prices
- Low IFIs intervention, increasing Chinese investment (75 billion since 2005)
- Real wage increasing
- Flexible labour markets
- Nationalization programs
- Exported-oriented
- Predominantly left-of-the-centre governments

## 2. Unions and social movements in the last decade

- The Washington Consensus produced a split in the labour movement in the region
- Progressive unions were critical of structural adjustment. Alliances with social movements became central to union strategies. Social movement unionism?
- Re-organization of labour, new subjectivities (De la Garza 2001; Celis Ospina 2004)
- Conservative unions negotiated with governments
- Anti-Austerity struggles were carried throughout the continent. Water and Gas wars in Bolivia, anti-privatization marches in Uruguay; Popular referendums in Argentina; etc
- HSA and the challenges to FTAA



Lucas  
Ordonez  
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ALCA  
El Mejor Precio







4 NOVIEMBRE 2005  
RECHAZO AL ALCA



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DEMOCRACIA

WWW.TELAM.COM.AR

## 2. Unions and social movements in the last decade

- After FTAA, “return to labour relations” (Palomino 2005)
- Period of bonanza
- Lower poverty/unemployment
- Social movements gained a voice within governments (sometimes)
- Continent-wide alliances decreased
- Agendas in tension
  - capital-labour agenda (structural power)
  - societal agenda (associational power)

E.O Wright 2000

## 2. Unions and social movements in the last decade

- The commodity consensus and the return to regional alliances

Unions and urban social movements have been supportive of the CC model

- During the neoliberal decades, 18 governments had to step-down due to popular pressure. This is not the case today.

The challenges took place mainly in the rural areas, and increasingly in the urban ones

- The limits of the redistributive model are becoming clear
- The same parties that motivated protests against neoliberalism, were central to de-mobilizing people during the last decade (Boron 2013)

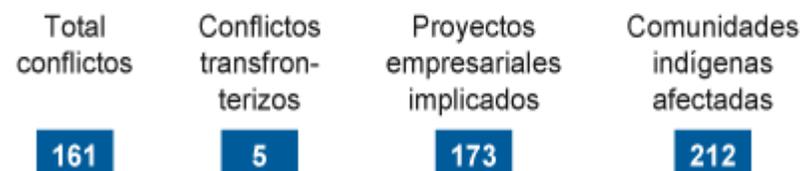
## 2. Unions and social movements in the last decade

- Structural transformations did not take place as expected. - Debates around education, healthcare and public spaces leading to labour-social movement alliances
- Locally-based struggles challenging a regional model of development

“Eco-Territorial Turn of social struggles” (Svampa 2011)

Defending Commons: “spaces of community” (Esteva 2007)

## IMPACTO DE LA MINERÍA EN LAS COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS LATINOAMERICANAS



### ► PROYECTOS, EMPRESAS Y COMUNIDADES AFECTADAS

	Proyectos	Empresas	Comunidades indígenas afectadas
Argentina	31	46	39
Bolivia	7	8	22
Brasil	21	38	34
Chile	28	42	34
Colombia	32	21	20
Costa Rica	3	4	3
Ecuador	5	4	6
El Salvador	2	3	4
Guatemala	4	7	4
Honduras	2	4	2
México	15	19	17
Nicaragua	3	6	7
Panamá	5	7	5
Perú	29	44	32
Rep. Dominicana	3	2	2
Trinidad y Tobago	1	1	1
Uruguay	0	0	1

### ► CONFLICTOS POR PAÍSES

En número



#### Principales problemas

- Violación de derechos y leyes medioambientales
- Contaminación de aguas y suelos por desechos mineros
- Inundación de tierras
- Contaminación por humos
- Amenazas y engaños a la población local

# 3. Challenges and possibilities

## Political Opportunity Structure?



# 3. Challenges and possibilities

- Union-social movement alliance is context-specific
- Historical and social contexts play a significant role. They shape priorities of agendas
- Capital/labour vs societal?
- In times of economic bonanza, most unions (based on the urban population) concentrate on a capital-labour agenda. The crises expand the areas of action

# 3. Challenges and possibilities

- FTAA vs CC
- Unions-environment's complex relationship. Unions ignored in environmental debates, and workers' susceptible to environmental discourses (Rathzell and Uzell 2011)
- The local resistance is already taking place, and should be the main focus of the alliance
- The challenge is to 'regionalize' that struggle, using new framing process, different from the one carried through during the anti-FTAA campaign. Flexible, inclusive identities (Della Porta and Tarrow 2004)?

# 3. Challenges and possibilities

- The spread of neo-developmental state model throughout Latin America (especially in South America) creates a “political opportunity structure” for action
- The experience of the 'blue-green alliance' in the US shows that occupational health and safety extends beyond the factories and implicates the communities (Foster 2010)
- The increasing mobilization around issues like healthcare, public transport and education bring back the opportunity for labour and community alliances
- The local resistance is already taking place. Connecting them is a fundamental aspect of alliance-building
- TUCA's role

# TUCA's role

The role of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA)

Unified union movement, led by progressive unions, includes conservative unions. Created in 2008 in Panama

Experience of Rio+20 People's Summit. MST/CUT alliance at the centre of the protest

Lima Conference of the Parties (COP) summit becomes a central opportunity

# 4. Concluding remarks

- Issue with discourse

The alternatives for clean energy investments, connected with the theoretical set of “Buen Vivir” (good living)(Acosta 2011; Gudynas 2011), can at the discourse level, be linked

- The lack of a comprehensive alternative model is not a mandatory obstacle. Discourse on indigenous people's lives can directly be linked with the need to create decent, sustainable jobs, including a just transition into a more sustainable lifestyle

Ironically, the common vision between labour and social movement is a rejection of the concept (and practices) of the so-called 'Green Economy'. This model is perceived as the further extension of neoliberalism around the world (Moreno 2013).

The history of struggles against austerity policies during the 1990s implies an important base for alliance building.

The current struggles have a less common enemy, and are more complex due to the presence of the state and government

# 4. Concluding remarks

- The capacity of unions to challenge centre-left-governments is a fundamental element to build the current alliance
- Sustaining campaigns implies a continuous, imaginative 'reinvention' (Anner and Evans 2004)
- Social movement unionism remains relevant, despite setbacks in the recent years.

Their predominance (of SMO unions) within the TUCA will be a fundamental aspect in constructing a wider 'blue-green' movement

- Hemispheric Social Alliance's demise has a lot do with lack of organization. The TUCA can overcome that aspect since it has the structure and resources to continue struggles throughout.

The possibility to extend alliances between social movements and labour is central for several aspects:

- challenging an unsustainable economic model
- Extending the capacity of labour to represent broader sectors of society
- Improve social movements' resources and defense mechanisms

## 4. Concluding remarks

- Recreate the 'Multitude form':

“a block of collective action that articulates autonomous organized structures of subaltern classes around discursive and symbolic constructions of hegemony” (Garcia Linera 2008)

To re-create this it is central that SMOs and unions become autonomous from states, even when friendly-parties are in government

The “question of strategy is fundamental” (Boron 2013)