

**SEVERAL SOUTHS:  
THE DYNAMICS OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT  
IN THE AMERICAS**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis is about labour internationalism in the Americas. It examines the impact of the end of the Cold War and of the spread of neoliberal globalization on North-South relations within International Labour Movement Organizations (ILMOs) in the Americas. It is argued that the U.S. hegemony on the hemisphere observed during the Cold War is in decline and that we see increased diversity within labour internationalism in Latin America. Although some Southern unions have withdrawn from ILMOs, others have gained more influence within them, confirming that several Souths now co-exist within ILMOs. It is also argued that the Northern influence has diversified, with a gradual decline in U.S. domination over Latin America and greater influence from European trade unions.

This thesis is based on Critical International Political Economy, an eclectic, holistic and dialectical approach that permits an evaluation of the complex and contradictory nature of ILMOs. This research contributes to putting labour back onto the International Political Economy agenda and to illuminate the processes at work within important although understudied organizations.

Specifically, this thesis looks at the dynamics at work in two countries, Brazil and Mexico, within the Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT), the Union Network International (UNI) and the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF). The thesis evaluates these organizations' evolution since the end of the Cold War, focusing on the process leading to the founding of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), campaigns against free trade agreements and strategies used to confront Multinational Corporations. It relies on the perceptions of union representatives from Mexico and Brazil and suggests that while Mexican unions are now marginalized in these three ILMOs, Brazilian unions have gained much more influence. Domestic, regional and international factors are put forward to explain those differences. The legacy of corporatism and the lack of integration between unions in North America explain why Mexicans have lost their place within ILMOs. In contrast, the greater autonomy of the Brazilian labour movement and its long-standing relations with other unions in the Southern Cone contributes to its influence within ILMOs.

**Keywords:** labour internationalism – trade unions – North-South relations – Mexico – Brazil – Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT) – Union Network International (UNI) – International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) – Critical International Political Economy

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Abbreviations .....	vii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. Background and Research Questions.....	3
2. Methodology and Case Selection.....	16
3. Chapter Outline.....	32
CHAPTER 2. CONTEXTUALIZING ILMOs.....	35
1. ILMOs in Theory: Towards an International Political Economy of Labour? .....	38
1.1. ILMOs as Bargaining Agents .....	39
1.2. ILMOs as Political Agents.....	48
1.3. Critical International Political Economy .....	57
2. ILMOs' History: A Tale of Divisions.....	70
2.1. Early Labour Internationalism: a (Mostly) European Affair .....	71
2.2. Cold War Dynamics.....	83
2.3. ILMOs' Historical Tendencies in the Americas .....	93
3. Conclusion .....	95
CHAPTER 3. UNIONISMS IN BRAZIL AND MEXICO.....	97
1. Mexican Unions: the Uncertainties of Corporatism .....	101
1.1. Mexico's Corporatism .....	102
1.2. Mexican Labour Under Neoliberalism .....	111
2. The Brazilian Labour Movement: Between Corporatism and New Unionism.....	120
2.1. Brazil's Corporatism.....	122
2.2. Brazilian Unionism in Neoliberal Times .....	131
2.3. The Challenges of Power .....	136
3. Conclusion .....	140
CHAPTER 4. ORIT IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL.....	144
1. ORIT Since the End of the Cold War .....	146
2. Mexico and ORIT .....	158
2.1. Cold War Dynamics.....	159
2.2. Mexico and ORIT after the Cold War .....	162
3. Brazil and ORIT.....	170
3.1. The CUT and ORIT .....	172
3.2. Força Sindical and ORIT .....	179
3.3. The UGT and ORIT .....	182
4. Conclusion .....	184

CHAPTER 5. UNI AND THE IMF IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL .....	188
1. UNI in Mexico and Brazil.....	190
1.2. UNI in Mexico .....	196
1.2. UNI in Brazil.....	201
2. The IMF in Mexico and Brazil .....	210
2.1. The IMF in Mexico .....	213
2.2. The IMF in Brazil .....	220
3. Conclusion .....	225
CONCLUSION: SEVERAL SOUTHS .....	229
1. ILMOs in the Americas: Several Souths, Several Norths.....	231
1.1. The launching of the ITUC .....	233
1.2. Free Trade Agreements and Regional Integration .....	241
1.3. Strategies for Confronting Multinational Corporations .....	245
1.4. Conclusion .....	250
2. Understanding ILMOs: International, Regional and National Dynamics.....	251
2.1. Interacting Levels of Analysis .....	251
2.2. A Contribution to an International Political Economy of Labour .....	258
Bibliography .....	265
Appendix.....	278

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Summary of the Variables and Research Questions.....	13
Table 2. ILMOs in the Americas .....	20
Table 3. ORIT, UNI and IMF Affiliates in Mexico and Brazil - 2007.....	24
Table 4. ORIT, UNI and IMF Canadian Affiliates Interviewed for this Research.....	27
Table 4. Summary of the Interviews.....	31
Table 5. Main Brazilian Union Centres, 2007 .....	140

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Structure of Affiliation to ILMOs .....	17
Figure 2. Main Political ILMOs by Ideology Since 1919 .....	77

## **List of Abbreviations**

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIFLD	American Institute for Free Labor Development
AUCCTU	All Union Central Council of Trade Unions
CAT	Central Autônoma de Trabalhadores
CCSCS	Coordinadora de Centrais Sindicais del Cono Sur
CGT	Confédération générale du travail (France) Confederación General del Trabajo (Argentina) Comando Geral dos Trabalhadores (Brazil) Central Geral dos Trabalhadores (Brazil)
CGTP	Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú
CI	Communications International
CIT	Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores
CLAT	Confederación Latino Americana de Trabajadores
CLT	Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho
CNM	Confederação Nacional dos Metalúrgicos
CONTRAF	Confederação de Trabalhadores do Ramo Financeiro
CROC	Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana
CT	Congreso del Trabajo
CTA	Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina
CTB	Central dos Trabalhadores do Brasil
CTAL	Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
CTV	Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela
CUT	Central Única dos Trabalhadores
CUT-C	Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EWC	European Works Council
FAT	Frente Auténtico del Trabajo
FEDERALUZ	Federação dos Empregados nas Empresas de Geração, Transmissão e Distribuição de Eletricidade

FENATTEL	Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Telecomunicações
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FETIGESP	Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Gráficas do Estado de São Paulo
FIET	International Federation of Employees, Technicians and Professionals
FITTEL	Federação dos Trabalhadores em Telecomunicações
FNTIG	Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Gráficas
FS	Força Sindical
FSTSE	Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GUF	Global Union Federation
HSA	Hemispheric Social Alliance
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IFA	International Framework Agreement
IFCTU	International Federation of Christian Trade Unions
IFI	International Financial Institution
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
IGF	International Graphical Federation
ILMO	International Labour Movement Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Metalworkers Federation
IMSS	Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social
INFONAVIT	Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores
IPCTT	International of Postal Workers, Telegraph and Telephone Workers
IPE	International Political Economy
IPEL	International Political Economy of Labour
ISF	International Solidarity Fund
ISI	Import-Substituting Industrialization
ISNTUC	International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres

ISSSTE	Instituto de Seguridad y de Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado
ITF	International Transport's Workers Federation
ITS	International Trade Secretariat
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IUF	International Union of Food and Allied Workers
IWW	International Workers of the World
JCA	Junta de Conciliación y Arbitraje
JFCA	Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje
JLCA	Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje
JT	Justiça do Trabalho
LFT	Ley Federal del Trabajo
LFTSE	Ley Federal de los Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado
MDB	Movimento Democrático Brasileiro
MEI	Media and Entertainment International
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur
MNC	Multinational Corporation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NCST	Nova Central Sindical dos Trabalhadores
ORIT	Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores
PAFL	Pan American Federation of Labor
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PCdoB	Partido Comunista do Brasil
PDT	Partido Democrático Trabalhista
PIT-CNT	Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional de Trabajadores
PMDB	Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira
PSOL	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade

PSTU	Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificados
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores
PTB	Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro
RITU	Red International of Trade Unions
SDS	Social Democracia Sindical
SINTETEL	Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Telecomunicações no Estado de São Paulo
SITIAVW	Sindicato Independiente de Trabajadores de la Indústria Automotriz, Similares y Conexos “Volkswagen de México”
SME	Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas
SNTFMCIA	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Ford Motor Company y de la Indústria Automotriz
SNTISSSTE	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del ISSSTE
SNTMMS	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana
SNTSS	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social
STPC	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de la República Mexicana
STRM	Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana
STUNAM	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
SUTERM	Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TUCA	Trade Union Confederation of the Americas
UGT	União Geral dos Trabalhadores
UNI	Union Network International
UNT	Unión Nacional de Trabajadores
WCL	World Confederation of Labour
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WTO	World Trade Organization

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the origins of modern trade unionism in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, internationalism has been a defining feature of the labour movement. Whatever the ideological current with which a union has been associated (from Marxism, to reformism, to social Catholicism to conservative corporatism), it almost always pledges an attachment – genuine or rhetorical – to workers’ international solidarity. Therefore, studying internationalism allows us to look at different types of trade unionism across different times. It contributes to answering questions central to the study of trade unions: how to achieve the ideal of solidarity among “workers of the world” in the light of the inevitably local and national character of workers’ demands? What types of organizations are best suited to that end? What strategies should workers adopt when confronted with the globalization of capital?

This thesis is about labour internationalism, and more precisely about International Labour Movement Organizations (ILMOs) in the Americas. ILMOs are international institutions set up by trade unions to serve as forums, representatives and tools for action at the international level. Specifically, this research investigates the impact of the spread of neoliberal globalization and of the end of the Cold War on ILMOs’ internal dynamics in the Americas. During the Cold War, the international labour movement was used as a tool to propagate the East-West confrontation among workers. This was particularly the case in the Americas where ILMOs were used by the U.S. labour movement to prevent the development of communist unions in Latin America. At the same time, mainstream ILMOs have been dominated, at the world level,

by their European affiliates, giving the latter a disproportionate influence on ILMOs' policies and orientations.

Neoliberal globalization, characterized by an increase of international trade and by the spread of the neoliberal ideology, is giving rise to a renewal of ILMOs so that a relation of force is re-established between labour and capital. This renewal should also imply a rebalancing of the internal relations of force between Southern and Northern trade unions, in order to make ILMOs more egalitarian and representative of the world labour force. Both activists and observers of ILMOs call this change part of the "New Internationalism" agenda officially adopted by ILMOs.

Therefore, the central research question of this thesis is: to what extent have ILMOs in the Americas become more egalitarian, in terms of North-South relations, since the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization? My hypothesis is that this issue has to be approached from a dialectical perspective. Some kind of rebalancing is happening but Northern domination continues, under different forms, and it is not exerted uniformly across the South. This leads me to conclude that different Norths and different Souths coexist among ILMOs' affiliates, and that this reflects the complexity and dialectic of these organizations.

More specifically, I will be looking at three specific manifestations of both the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization: the process of ILMOs' unification which led to the founding of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and its regional branches; the reaction to free trade agreements in the Americas; and strategies adopted by ILMOs facing multinational corporations.

This chapter will contain three parts. In the first section, I will provide background information that justifies the research questions and the argument of this thesis. Then I will present the methodology used in this research, and justify the case studies. Finally I will outline the structure of the argument about the diversity of North and South inside ILMOs in the Americas.

## **1. Background and Research Questions**

ILMOs' activities do not encompass all of labour internationalism but they are its most visible and institutionalized part. ILMOs are the official embodiment of labour internationalism. They were set up by trade unions in order to exchange information, engage into common activities and to gain a voice at the international level. To a great extent, they are to unions what international organizations are to nation-states. Just as states do not limit their foreign policies to international organizations (IOs), many trade unions also have international activities independent from their ILMO affiliations. Bilateral relations or development projects, for instance, have been going on for as long as ILMOs have. Nevertheless, ILMOs' part in the international activities of trade unions is generally much higher than IOs' part in states' foreign policies. Firstly, trade unions do not have as much funding to devote to this theme, and cannot, like states, maintain a network of embassies, for instance. Secondly, the very topic of international solidarity remains marginal in trade unions' day-to-day work, and it is difficult for them to mobilize members and funds to that end. Therefore, in most cases, ILMOs constitute the majority or the totality of a trade union's international programme; variations depend on the size and the commitment of the union to international activities.

Hence, although poorly known by the general public and even by unions' rank and file, ILMOs are important organizations to be studied. Firstly, they have existed and have been collecting dues from their affiliates for more than a century. Institutions do not exist and survive for nothing. ILMOs should therefore not be neglected, or simply considered as useless bureaucracies, but deserve to be thoroughly investigated. Secondly, they correspond to fundamental historical characteristics of the labour movement, whether socialist internationalism, Christian universalism or "pragmatic" international solidarity aiming at building a relation of force. As such, they have to belong to any exhaustive study of the modern labour movement. Finally, globalization puts ILMOs even more directly under the spotlight. At a time when the increasing globalization of capital raises expectations of a "globalization of labour", ILMOs are part of the answer. The new international political economy gives them even more relevance, but only if they can react to it properly. In that respect, ILMOs concentrate the tensions and contradictions of an "old" labour movement confronting a "new" international political economy.

ILMOs' structures mirror the traditional structures of domestic trade unions. There are two types of ILMOs: on the one hand political ILMOs, whose affiliates are national union centres, and on the other hand sectoral ILMOs, whose affiliates are branch-based unions. The mandate of each ILMO corresponds, at the international level, to the mandates of its affiliates at the national level. Therefore, political ILMOs focus on political representation, mostly to international organizations, and on campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion. Sectoral ILMOs are more concerned with industrial activism,

dealing with topics specific to their branch of activity and having multinational corporations (MNCs) as their major interlocutors.

This dual identity (political and sectoral) is reflected in the literature. While some researchers focus on the political dimension of labour internationalism, and therefore tend to choose political ILMOs as their main object, others concentrate their efforts on the industrial dimension and hence are more inclined to study sectoral ILMOs. The former mostly come from Political Science whereas the latter are often affiliated with Industrial Relations departments. Sociologists can be found in both groups. My approach will aim at bridging those different works, because, as a political economist, I assume that political and industrial activities cannot be separated.

A rapid review of the literature shows that a number of different expressions have been used to label ILMOs: “official labour internationalism” (Moody 1997: 227), “international unionism” (Waterman 2004), “international union movement” (O’Brien 2000a), “global unions” (Harrod and O’Brien 2002) or even “interorganizational structures that promote transnational cooperation” (Gordon and Turner 2000: 80). Neither “international union” nor “global union”, the two expressions most commonly used to refer to ILMOs, is adequate. First of all, in North America, “international unions” refer to unions with locals in both the U.S. and Canada, not to ILMOs.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, talking about “international” or “global” unions when referring to ILMOs is inappropriate because it assumes that trade unions are already “internationalised”, that they have developed genuine union structures at the international level, whereas as mentioned earlier ILMOs correspond much more to a labour version of international organizations

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<sup>1</sup> This is one the very few cases of unions actually organized in more than one country, but it is limited, in spite of its name, to the U.S. and Canada. The United Steelworkers of America or the Service Employees International Union are examples of such “international unions”.

than to an organized and complete extension of domestic trade unions in the international realm.<sup>2</sup> ILMOs have limited staff and visibility. Their activities mostly deal with representation and they are not properly engaged in organizing and bargaining, although some of them have been showing signs of increased involvement in those areas, as we will see later. They also share with international organizations the fact that they are bound by the sovereignty of their affiliates and cannot impose on them a position or a strategy they do not agree with. Therefore, it is more appropriate to talk about ILMOs, as this expression reflects the parallel with international organizations, while acknowledging the fact that these structures belong to the “family” of organized labour. The expression “ILMO” also reflects the “Transnational Social Movement Organizations” studied mostly by sociologists and whose nature and challenges bear some resemblance to those of ILMOs (see for instance Smith 2002).

Until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, each of the main ideological families of the modern labour movement had its own political ILMO. Christian unions were organized in the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), communist unions were found in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and social democratic unions controlled the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). This relatively stable configuration characterized the period from 1949 to 2006 and is the historical product of successive divisions and (re)unifications among ILMOs. It was also the by-product of the Cold War, with one ILMO – the WFTU – following the instructions of Moscow, while another – the ICFTU – was in charge of spreading the U.S. government strategy of containment of the communist threat in the world of labour.

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<sup>2</sup> This is actually one of the reasons for the question mark in the title of Harrod and O’Brien (2002): *Global Unions?*

Although it tried to present itself as the “unaligned” alternative, the WCL never managed to overcome the centrality of the WFTU-ICFTU axis nor to lose its image of a marginal, mostly confessional, organization.<sup>3</sup>

The dynamics of political ILMOs were so dominated by the Cold War that it was inevitable that the end of this superpower rivalry would have a profound affect on their organization and activities. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1991, several events started to challenge the classical configuration of political ILMOs. Not surprisingly, with the decline of its former sponsor, the WFTU saw many of its affiliates lose members and audience, while others decided to leave its ranks. This weakening reinforced its main opponent, the ICFTU, which progressively imposed itself as the hegemonic political ILMO, while the WCL also suffered severe losses.<sup>4</sup> The loss of appeal of Christian unionism weakened WCL’s affiliates and led some of them, who had already given up their confessional identity, to quit the Confederation, generally in order to join the ranks of the ICFTU. In November 2006, the ICFTU and the WCL finally decided to dissolve themselves in order to found a new political ILMO, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

The founding of the ITUC was undoubtedly made easier by the end of the Cold War. Although it was officially the founding of a new organization, it confirmed the hegemonic status of the former ICFTU as the huge majority of the ITUC members come from the ICFTU, and as it retains most of its leadership, assets and initiatives, including the Annual Report on Labour Rights Violations. By becoming the clearly most

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<sup>3</sup> On Cold War dynamics among ILMOs, see Stevis and Boswell (2008: 62-71), Munck (2002: 140-145), Gallin (2002), Carew *et al.* (2000: 165-340) and Gumbrell-McCormick (2000a, 2000b).

<sup>4</sup> The hegemony of the ICFTU was seen by the fact that many former members of the WFTU and of the WCL decided to join its ranks, while previously non-affiliated organizations took the same decision.

representative political ILMO, the ITUC symbolizes the hegemony of social democratic thinking in the mainstream world labour movement.

Nevertheless, the full implications of these changes have not yet been explored. In particular, their impact on the internal dynamics of ILMOs is still unclear. During the Cold War, unions from the North, whether belonging to the Western or the Eastern bloc, dominated their Southern counterparts to the point that the latter almost completely lacked autonomy. They were merely pawns on the Cold War chessboard. This logic should have changed with the fall of the USSR and its allies. At least in its discourse, the international labour movement is calling for a more egalitarian and inclusive internationalism, where the South and the North would finally be treated as equals. Now that the ITUC has affiliates in about 155 countries (it claims to represent 168 million workers in 311 affiliated unions), and that many of its members in the North and in the South can be considered as representative organizations in their own countries, it is an appropriate moment to study North-South dynamics and the ways the labour movement tries to supersede this geographic, economic and political fracture. Therefore, a first research question for this thesis will be: has the end of the Cold War and the founding of the ITUC contributed to a rebalancing of power within political ILMOs in the Americas?

The most important sectoral ILMOs were called, until 2000, International Trade Secretariats. Since then, they have adopted the appellation Global Union Federations (GUFs). Each GUF corresponds to an industry or a profession. Their number has varied across time and their configuration has followed the evolution of the modes of production. The longest existing GUFs represent workers in the traditional, mostly manufacturing, industries, where the modern labour movement was born and

consolidated. Later came GUFs focused on service workers and professionals. Successive mergers led to the current situation where ten GUFs exist, bringing together unions from specific industries at the international level.

Politically, the GUFs have always been close to the ICFTU and then to the ITUC. They clearly belong to the social democratic family. Nevertheless, the GUFs never agreed to be formally affiliated to either the ICFTU or to the ITUC. Actually, many of them were founded far before the ICFTU itself. Also, they have never made it compulsory for their affiliates to be linked to an ICFTU affiliate at the domestic level. Since the early 1950s though, they have maintained an informal division of labour with the ICFTU, which was formalized shortly after the founding of the ITUC by the creation of the Global Union Council, a body responsible for coordinating the actions of the ITUC and of the GUFs. As for the WFTU and the former WCL, they had their own branch-based federations. Following the founding of the ITUC, those of the WCL were supposed to merge with the GUF representing their branch, but thus far this has only happened in the building and wood sector. The WFTU's federations are as weakened as the WFTU itself.

Some GUFs began efforts to establish a bargaining relationship with multinational corporations in the early 1970s but it is only from the middle of the 1990s that comprehensive strategies for facing MNCs were developed by most GUFs, that led to the adoption of Global Framework Agreements (GFAs). This strategy is considered as one of the most advanced reactions of organized labour to the globalization of capital and of the production process. But it also raises questions as to the balance between North and South. Confronting neoliberal globalization implies evident contradictions: how to

protect Northern workers without impeding the development of Southern countries? And how to avoid repeating the historical inequalities between the North and the South in the internal functioning and decision-making process of the GUFs, in particular in regard to GFAs? Hence, a second research question for this thesis will be: have strategies adopted by sectoral ILMOs to confront MNCs contributed to a rebalancing of power and greater equality among ILMOs in the Americas?

There are various reasons for conducting this research in the Americas. First of all, the continent stretches across the geographic and economic North and South. It contains the most powerful economy of the world (the U.S.), other important industrialized countries either “old” or “new” (e.g. Canada, Mexico, Brazil), and developing countries at various stages of advancement (from Haiti, to Argentina, to Chile). It is, therefore, a valid region in which to study the North-South cleavage and its implications for ILMOs. Furthermore, the tendencies observed during the Cold War among ILMOs had a strong impact in the region. In particular, the ways in which U.S. unions used their influence in the South of the continent to contribute to the containment policy of the U.S. government against the expansion of communism have been widely documented (e.g. Herod 2001: 128-196; Jakobsen 2001; Sims 1992) The Americas were the main testing ground of this strategy. Now that the “Red Fear” is gone, the evolution of the North-South relations in the Americas will reveal a lot about the new dynamics among ILMOs. As a region, the Americas have experienced the unification between social democratic and Christian ILMOs through the founding of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), which mainly resulted from the merger between the regional branches of the ICFTU and the WCL. The TUCA is now the official regional

organization of the ITUC for the Americas.<sup>5</sup> As well, the apparent decline of U.S. hegemony in much of the Americas, and the rise of left-wing nationalist regimes in many countries of Latin America, seems to indicate a major shift in power relations with potentially profound implications for trade union internationalism.

In terms of globalization, the Americas represent an interesting site. Not only does the diversity of their economies makes them a relevant space to study North-South relations, but various free trade agreements have been signed between countries of the continent. These agreements can be considered as manifestations of neoliberal globalization as they promote increased international trade and aim at enhancing the competitiveness of their members in a globalized economy. Hence, studying the reaction of ILMOs to these agreements will also be a powerful indicator of their reaction to globalization in general. Similarly, a number of initiatives have been taken at the regional level in order to coordinate the efforts, more or less formally, between unions representing workers in the same MNC. However, the region of the Americas also offers illustrations of neoliberal globalization running out of steam: the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas stalled (partly due to labour movement and social movement opposition), the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) has taken a clearly more social inclination than when it was launched, and other alternative regional groupings have emerged, like the Alternativa Bolivariana por los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA) or the Union of South American Nations.

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<sup>5</sup> A similar process occurred in the two other Global South regions, Africa and Asia-Pacific, although ITUC's regional organizations there are generally considered less autonomous, partly because unionism is weaker in those regions than in the Americas. Europe is a distinctive case where an organization gathering social democratic and Christian unions, the European Trade Union Confederation, has been existing since the 1970s independently from the ICFTU, the WCL or today the ITUC.

Thus, a third research question for this thesis will be: have campaigns against free trade and in favour of alternative regional integration contributed to a rebalancing of power among ILMOs in the Americas?

Therefore, the main variables and issues studied in this thesis are as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of the Variables and Research Questions**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Global Manifestations</b>	<b>Consequences in the Americas</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>
End of the Cold War	Unification of Political ILMOs	Founding of the TUCA	Has the founding of the ITUC contributed to a rebalancing of power among political ILMOs in the Americas?	
Neoliberal Globalization	Free Trade Agreements	Reaction to NAFTA, FTAA, MERCOSUR	Have campaigns against free trade and in favour of alternative regional integration contributed to a rebalancing of power among ILMOs in the Americas?	North-South Relations among ILMOs in the Americas
	MNCs' Expansion	World Councils, GFAs in the Americas	Have strategies adopted by sectoral ILMOs facing MNCs contributed to a rebalancing of power among ILMOs in the Americas?	

The analytical originality of this work mostly resides in the fact that it takes ILMOs seriously. Many works on labour internationalism simply exclude ILMOs or include them as one case among others (e.g. Bieler *et al.* 2008, Harrod and O'Brien

2002). Although valuable for their broad understanding of what trade unions international activities comprise, these studies cannot thoroughly investigate the internal dynamics of ILMOs and tend to treat them as a monolithic bloc. Among those who focus more exclusively on ILMOs, the choice is often between “discard” and “describe”. While the former consider ILMOs as useless bureaucracies, too far from the interests of workers (see Waterman 2001, Moody 1997), the latter often limit the scope of the analysis to a description of these organizations and of their strategies (e.g. Gordon and Turner 2000, Croucher and Cotton 2009). Authors in both categories are often exceedingly normative, evaluating the “efficiency” of ILMOs and of their strategies without considering them as complex and contradictory political organizations, which need to be approached in a dialectical way. They do not look for an explanation, a reason why ILMOs are and behave the ways they do, but plead for what they should be, looking for “best practices” and neglecting, therefore, a genuine critical analysis.

Works located in a critical political economy approach, such as those of Harrod and O’Brien (2002), Munck (2002) or Herod (2001), provide interesting tools in order to conduct a thorough study of ILMOs. Political economy considers work as a political process, as it deals with the production and distribution of wealth. Critical political economy insists on the inherent contradictions of capitalism and on their repercussions on actors, in particular organized labour. Trade unions are perceived as agents of both reproduction of and resistance to capitalism. In a Gramscian perspective, they contribute to maintaining the hegemony of the ruling class, whereas in a Polanyian perspective, they play a central role in regulating the system and limiting the commodification of society. Therefore, these perspectives offer a relevant theoretical framework in which to analyze

the contradictions of the international labour movement facing advanced capitalism, under the form of neoliberal globalization.

The originality of this work is also empirical. As detailed in the following methodological section, the analytical choices made for this research have important empirical implications. Focusing on ILMOs' internal dynamics led me to privilege the national affiliates as the main level of analysis. This differs from most of the work done on ILMOs, which usually focus either only on the global level (interviewing ILMOs' officials, analyzing their policies and strategies at the global level) or on the local level (studying in detail a local initiative and how ILMOs intervened). Therefore, this study distinguishes itself also by systematically choosing the national affiliates as its main level of analysis.

Finally, taking the Americas as geographical framework is another choice making this research innovative. ILMOs are, most of the time, studied either globally or on a very local scale. The Americas are rarely taken as a whole when it comes to ILMOs' studies. Works focusing on the regional dimension of trade union activities deal overwhelmingly with Europe as a region (Hilal 2007, Hyman 2005a, Gobin 2000), but almost never with other regions, in particular the Americas. When a study on ILMOs is located in the Americas, it tends to focus on specific cases, and not on providing a holistic analysis that would include both sectoral and political ILMOs.

Therefore, this thesis is an original contribution to research on labour internationalism. Its object, its approach and its methodology make it a unique analysis of a set of organizations which role is central to the articulation of a workers' reaction to neoliberal globalization. By taking ILMOs seriously, while adopting a critical political

economy approach, and focusing on the region of the Americas, this research will provide an enlightening perspective on the challenges, contradictions and potentials of organized labour in a post-Cold War world.

## **2. Methodology and Case Selection**

The nature of the variables studied here call for a qualitative methodology. Analyzing ILMOs' decision-making processes cannot be done by translating the variables into numerical data. This would lead to an over-simplification of the processes at work, which would be antithetical to the critical approach adopted here. Furthermore, qualitative methods are adopted in major works on the international labour movement.

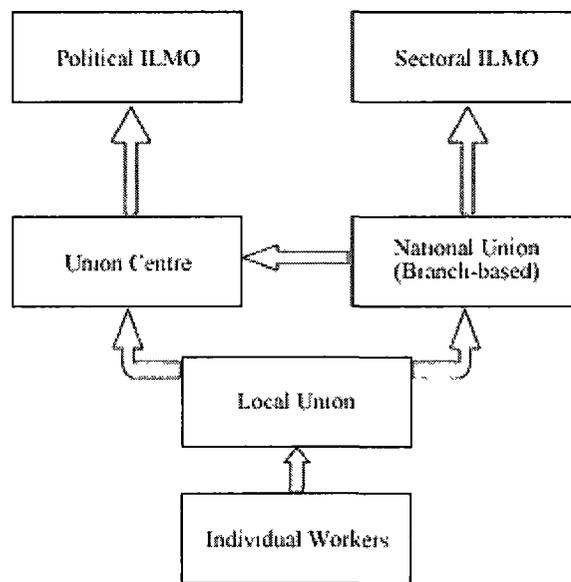
Studying the internal dynamics of an organization such as a trade union, whether it is local, national or international, requires a focus on the affiliates. Indeed, internal dynamics are basically power relations between the components of an organization. In the case of organized labour, these components are affiliates, i.e. individuals or organizations which decide to join the ranks of a broader organization. This distinction has important methodological implications. If one wants to question ILMOs' internal dynamics, it has to be done at the level of their affiliates. And ILMOs' affiliates are, most of the time, national unions<sup>6</sup> (union centres in the case of political ILMOs, branch-based national unions in the case of sectoral ILMOs). Just as an international organization's internal dynamics have to be studied at the level of national governments, ILMOs' internal dynamics have to be studied at the level of national unions, not individual

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<sup>6</sup> Although some GUFs accept local unions as affiliates, as will be seen later in this research.

workers.<sup>7</sup> In spite of differences that may exist between countries and organizations, the structure of affiliation to ILMOs generally matches the one summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Structure of Affiliation to ILMOs**



Key

A  $\rightleftarrows$  B A is affiliated to B

Therefore, the primary level of analysis for this research will be national unions, whether they are political (union centres) or sectoral (national branch-based unions). The international level will also be a level of analysis, but only in relation to ILMOs' decision-making process. I will not investigate thoroughly ILMOs' activities, nor "evaluate" the "efficiency" of their actions, but analyse them from the perspective of their internal dynamics, use them in what they can tell us about North-South relations among ILMOs.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that a thorough analysis of IOs dynamics would exclusively focus on the governments of its member-states, as it would also have to take into consideration other issues, such as the relations maintained by the IO with experts communities.

This leads to the case selection for this research. As seen earlier, there are today eleven major ILMOs: the ITUC is the hegemonic political ILMO whereas the ten GUFs are the dominant sectoral ILMOs. The region of the Americas contains 35 independent countries, in addition to a number of dependencies. Many of those countries have several union centres and several national unions for the same branches. Considering the nature of this research, which intends to explore to a certain level of depth the perceptions of the affiliates and their respective influence on ILMOs, an exhaustive inquiry is impossible. The comparative approach is therefore the most relevant to conduct this research. Between the “most similar cases” adopted by Lijphart (1971) and the “most different cases” favoured by Przeworski and Teune (1970), I opt for the latter.

Lijphart’s choice is motivated by the fact that he considers the comparative approach as the “Plan B” for the social scientist who could not use the statistical approach, because of the “too many variables, too few cases” problem. In his mind, the comparative approach is “the lesser evil” for social science to try to produce general rules, i.e. to reach nomothetic conclusions. Therefore, it has to look for “the most similar cases”, those from which a general rule, applicable to all the others, can be found. I disagree with this view, and favour that of Przeworski and Teune but also Hyman (1998), who applies it to the comparative study of trade unions. In their views, the comparative approach is not the best way to aim at nomothetic conclusions but the best way to *bridge* the gap between the nomothetic approach and its opposite, the idiographic approach. The ultimate goal is not to reach general rules nor to stay at the level of the unique case study, but to propose grids of analysis that allow to understand various cases. Striking this

balance is made possible by using the “most different cases”, which points at the specificities of each case, while putting them in a same pool of comparable cases.

For this research, two sets of cases have to be selected: organizations and countries. As shown in Table 2, eleven organizations form the population studied.

**Table 2. ILMOs in the Americas**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year of founding</b>	<b>Number of affiliated organizations</b>	<b>Number of individual workers represented (in million)</b>
<b>Political ILMOs</b>			
Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA)	2008*	72	30
<i>Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT)</i>	<i>1951 (†2008)</i>	34	25
<i>Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores (CLAT)</i>	<i>1954 (†2008)</i>	35	2.5
<b>Sectoral ILMOs</b>			
International Metalworkers Federation (IMF)	1893	200	25
International Transport's Workers Federation (ITF)	1896	681	4.5
Public Service International (PSI)	1907	650	20
International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF)	1920	348	12
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)	1926	161	0.6
International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF)	1960*	217	10
Education International (EI)	1993*	401	30
International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM)	1995*	467	20
Union Network International (UNI)	2000*	900	20
Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI)	2005*	318	12

*Source: Based on the data provided by each ILMO on its website, March 2009, ORIT (2007b) and ICFTU (2004).*

*Notes: For political ILMOs, data are provided for the Americas exclusively, whereas they cover the entire world for sectoral ILMOs. ILMOs which founding date is marked with an \* were founded out of the merger of several previous ILMOs.*

Out of these, one is a political ILMO (ORIT, latter transformed into TUCA), and ten are sectoral ILMOs (the GUFs). This distinction has to be taken into consideration in the selection, as political and sectoral ILMOs are two exclusive categories, both of which need to be studied as this research explores both political and industrial issues. The ORIT/TUCA is an obvious choice for the political ILMO studied here.<sup>8</sup> As for GUFs, at least two must be chosen, in order to take into consideration eventual variations among them, depending on the sector they represent. A relevant factor is the sector in which GUFs are established. A common sector-based typology is the one distinguishing secondary industry (mostly manufacturing) from tertiary industry (services). It is appropriate, therefore, to choose one GUF in the manufacturing sector and another one in the service industry. For this study, the selection was made of the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF)<sup>9</sup> and Union Network International (UNI). The IMF is one of the oldest GUFs and represents a traditional sector of unionization in all industrialized countries (particularly the steel and auto industries). In contrast, UNI is one of the most recently founded GUFs and represents unions in a variety of service-oriented sectors. It is representative of a tendency of mergers observed in the last decades among GUFs (it was founded out of the merger of five GUFs) and acts in a sector that represents the latest challenge for unions in terms of organization: private services (e.g. financial services, telecommunications or property services). Furthermore, both UNI and the IMF represent a substantive number of individual workers (20 million through 900 affiliated unions and 25 million through 200 affiliated unions respectively) and cannot therefore be considered as marginal cases. Hence, they are two relevant choices in order to conduct this research.

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<sup>8</sup> At the time most of the fieldwork was done, the TUCA had not yet been founded but talks were very much advanced. This allowed me to take the topic of the founding of the TUCA as one of my focus, but I only dealt with affiliates from what was then ORIT.

<sup>9</sup> As the acronym IMF is often used to refer to the International Monetary Fund, I will only refer to the latter by its full name in this thesis. Therefore, IMF will always mean “International Metalworkers Federation”.

In addition to choice of type of organization, it is also important to narrow down the number of countries to be analysed. Since this research aims at focusing on ILMOs' affiliates, it cannot be conducted with all the affiliates of even just the three selected organizations. I chose to focus my attention on Latin American countries for two reasons: firstly, when relations of domination are studied from a critical perspective, the point of view of the subordinate parties is essential. It not only makes it possible to grasp how the domination is lived but also to envision how change is seen as possible by the subordinates themselves. Secondly, in the case of North-South relations among ILMOs in the Americas, the dominant parties have already been quite extensively studied: both U.S. unions' foreign policy in Latin America (Sims 1992, Scipes 2005, Battista 2002) and European unions' external relations, particularly in the context of European integration (Gobin 1997, 2000, Hyman 2005a), have been the subject of thorough research. Furthermore, as the North has historically dominated ILMOs, most studies of their internal dynamics focus on power rivalries between Northern affiliates and tend to overlook the position of the South (Carew *et al.* 2000, Gumbrell-McCormick 2004, Hyman 2005b). When Southern unions' international policies are studied, it tends to be on a case-by-case basis, and it often comes from the organizations themselves, therefore taking a more monographic than analytical form (CUT 2003, Xelhuantzi-López 2003). Comparative studies exist, but they generally deal with the evolution of Latin American unionism's relation to the state or to the structure of the economy, not so much with these unions' place and role in a changing international labour movement (Cook 1998, Bensusán 2000, Alba Vega and Bizberg 2004). Therefore, choosing two Latin American countries for this research is both relevant to understanding North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas and useful to complete the broader literature on unions' international relations.

Among the countries of the Global South in the Americas, Mexico and Brazil stand out as two important cases. First of all, they are the two most populous countries of the region (respectively 110 and 196 million inhabitants out of 569 million Latin Americans) and its two largest economies (with GDPs of respectively US\$1.57 and US\$2.03 trillion out of US\$5.62 trillion for all Latin America). As we will see in chapter 3, they also represent, two different types of unionism, both characteristic of Latin America.

Although the dissertation focuses on Mexico and Brazil, I also relied on interviews with Canadian unions' representatives and officials, involved either at the domestic level or in ILMOs. These interviews do not have the same value as those with Mexican and Brazilian unionists. Canada belongs to the Global North and is in a totally different position vis-à-vis ILMOs than Mexico and Brazil. Nevertheless, contrary to U.S. or European unions, the Canadian labour movement does not have to bear a colonial or imperialist legacy. Although historically close to its counterpart in the U.S., it is generally described as more progressive, or at least more connected to the rest of civil society and other popular organizations (Panitch and Swartz 2003, Kumar and Schenk 2006). In terms of international solidarity, Canadian unions have been significantly involved in ILMOs since the interwar period, and they have shared with their national government (at least up until recently) a positive image in terms of international cooperation. Therefore, the perspective of Canadian unionists on the matters studied here can usefully complement the core material of this research. Nevertheless, Canada will not be considered as a case as such, but as another angle from which to study the recent evolution of Mexico and Brazil within ILMOs in the Americas.

Hence, the sample of organizations to be studied in this research is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. ORIT, UNI and IMF Affiliates in Mexico and Brazil - 2007**

	<b>Mexico</b>	<b>Brazil</b>
<b>*ORIT</b>	<p>*Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM)</p> <p>*Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC)</p> <p>*Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT)</p>	<p>*Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT)</p> <p>*Força Sindical (FS)</p> <p>*União Geral dos Trabalhadores (UGT)</p>
<b>*UNI</b>	<p>Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores y Artistas de Televisión y Radio, Similares y Conexos de la República Mexicana (SITATYR)</p> <p>*Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM)</p> <p>Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores de Areas Gráficas (SITAG)</p> <p>*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del ISSSTE (SNTISSSTE)</p> <p>Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Servicio Postal Mexicano</p> <p>*Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de la R.M. (STPC)</p>	<p>Associação Paulista de Cineastas (APACI)</p> <p>Associação dos roteiristas (AR)</p> <p>*Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores do Ramo Financeiro (CONTRAF-CUT)</p> <p>*Federação dos Empregados nas Empresas de Geração, Transmissão e Distribuição de Eletricidade (FEDERALUZ) / Sindicato dos Eletricitários de São Paulo</p> <p>*Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Telecomunicações (FENATTEL)</p> <p>Federação Nacional dos Empregados Vendedores e Viajantes do Comércio, Propagandistas-Vendedores e Vendedores de Produtos Farmacêuticos (FENAVENPRO)</p> <p>Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Correios e Telégrafos e Similares (FENTECT)</p> <p>Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Gráficas do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (FETIGERS)</p> <p>*Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Gráficas do Estado de São Paulo (FETIGESP)</p> <p>Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Gráficas do</p>



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Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria Metal-  
Electrónica, Mecánica y Similares de la Republica  
Mexicana

\*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros,  
Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana  
(SNTMMS)

Sindicato Progresista de Obreros y Empleados de la  
Industria de la Extracción, Fundición y Fabricación de  
Metales, del Hierro, Autopartes, sus Similares y Derivados  
de la Republicana Mexicana

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Representatives of organizations which name is preceded by an \* were interviewed for this research.

Interviews have been made with representatives of the following Canadian unions:

**Table 4. ORIT, UNI and IMF Canadian Affiliates Interviewed for this Research**

ILMO	Affiliates
ORIT	Canadian Labour Congress / Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (CLC/FTQ) Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN)
UNI	Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)
IMF	United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (United Steelworkers – USW)

The data for this research has been collected using different tools. Archival research, interviews and observations make up the core of the material used for this analysis. Nevertheless, archives are a problematic and delicate material to use when studying trade unions. In contrast to governments, unions do not necessarily keep exhaustive records of their internal discussions and of the debates leading to a decision. When they do, this information is not necessarily public, as unions are not under the same transparency obligations as governments. These elements are all the more meaningful in Latin America where unions tend to be even more secretive about their internal affairs than those in the Global North. This can be due to their clandestine past (like in Brazil), their narrow association with an authoritarian corporatist regime (like in Mexico), or simply because of harsh internal political fights. Also, international affairs are rarely a priority for unions, and the documentation produced on that topic is quite limited.

Beyond the specificities of Latin American unionism, the discourse of organized labour is, whatever the context, always strategic. By its very nature, the labour movement is engaged in political and economic confrontations, mostly with capital and with the state. Therefore, its public discourse is thought of as a weapon in these fights. It should be analyzed in that way, and not taken for granted as a faithful representation of the reality of the organizations. Indeed, internal debates and imbalance between affiliates are often understated when not hidden in order to preserve an image of unity and democratic functioning. This discourse has to be put in context if one wants to understand where it comes from and have a clearer idea of the relations of force that sustain it.

How do these principles apply to this research? First of all I extensively documented each domestic labour movement before going out in the field. Then, I conducted interviews with local experts on trade unions who gave me the necessary additional information to get a clear idea of the context in which workers organizations have evolved. The result of this preliminary research mostly appears in chapter 2, and provides an essential framework to analyse each domestic labour movement's discourse. I then proceeded with the data collection. I gathered official documentation from the concerned organizations, but as mentioned earlier these documents were a limited and problematic source of information.

For these reasons, the primary material for this research is semi-directed interviews. Interviews allow for gathering a greater diversity of opinions inside the same organization, and when they are conducted in a semi-directed way, they give space to the interviewee to go beyond the official line he or she is normally bounded by (see Appendix A for the interview guides). Not only do interviews help to contextualize the

strategic discourse found in the official documentation, they also provide additional information not given in the documentation. To make this material as insightful as possible and to get as a big picture as possible, I diversified the pool of interviewees. In each country, I interviewed representatives from several affiliates of each of the ILMOs studied (with the exception of Brazilian IMF affiliates). I also interviewed representatives from each of the ILMOs themselves. This is shown in Table 3 where an asterisk (\*) appears before the name of all the organizations I interviewed. When I could not, for lack of time, meet with all the affiliates of an ILMO, I used the preliminary research to select the most important affiliates. I took into consideration not only the size of their membership but also, from the information I gathered in the literature and from the local observers, the effective involvement of these unions in their respective ILMOs. I prioritized the unions that were known for being genuinely active internationally and open to external observers. Nevertheless, I also had the opportunity, in some cases, to interview representatives of unions reputedly “closed” to academics and not overly involved internationally. These cases served as control cases, putting in perspective the answers of interviewees from more “open” and “active” unions.

Another way for me to diversify my sources has been to interview both union representatives and staff. Although important differences exist between unions (even of the same country) as to the distinction between those two categories, it is nevertheless possible to differentiate elected officials from staff. The former often give responses in line with the official discourse of their organization, either because they built it, they agree with it or they have to stand by the position of their union. The latter are generally freer to speak because their word does not bind their organization. In both cases,

interviews, when they last long enough, can lead the interviewee to feel greater confidence with the interviewer and to move away from the official line. I should also note that the topic of the interviews, international relations, is not perceived by many interviewees as very controversial. To them, above all when they assume a position not exclusively devoted to international relations, these issues are less contentious than internal politics or the relation to the state, for instance. Therefore, they tend to be more at ease and willing to speak their mind than on other topics. I also had the impression that this confidence was, for some of them, reinforced by the fact that I was a foreigner and a student, and therefore less likely to use this information against them than, for example, a local academic. I have also interviewed former union representatives and staff, mostly retirees, in order to diversify my sources and get different perspectives. These informants are important for two reasons: they are not bound by their position anymore and can therefore speak more freely; they provide the historical perspective necessary to this research.

Although the interviews were mostly focused on representatives of the unions, I also interviewed a few labour lawyers who, without being formal employees of the unions, regularly work with them. This group belongs to both the category of “observers” and that of “actors”, depending on the circumstances. Finally, I interviewed representatives from two NGOs that have been playing a crucial role in ILMOs’ activities in the region: the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, related to the German Social Democratic Party and more broadly to the German labour movement; and the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, which is one the main instruments of the U.S. labour movement’s foreign policy.

Both have offices across the world, and particularly in Latin America. I will comment more extensively on these organizations later in this work.

In total, I conducted 59 interviews between January 2007 and June 2008. The breakdown of these interviews is detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4. Summary of the Interviews**

		<b>Mexico</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Canada</b>
<b>Period</b>		Jan.-Mar. 2007	Sept.-Dec. 2007	Feb.-Jun. 2008
<b>Total Number of Interviews</b>		27	25	7
<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Local Union Representatives</b>	15	15	7
	<b>ILMO Representatives</b>	0	6	1
	<b>Academics</b>	6	0	0
	<b>Labour Lawyers</b>	3	0	0
	<b>NGO Representatives</b>	2	4	0

41 out of these 59 interviews were recorded, with the agreement of the interviewees. The terms of the consent form (see Appendix B), accepted by all the interviewees, also guarantees their anonymity. They have agreed to be referred to, in this thesis, as “a representative of [name of your organization]”. In order to preserve such anonymity, I will systematically refer to the interviewees in the masculine form, regardless of their actual gender, since the small number of female representatives means that female participants might be easily identified. All of the interviews except one were made in the mother tongue of the interviewee (Spanish, Portuguese, English or French) without resorting to an interpreter, in order to minimize the number of levels of

translation between the interviewees and the final research. Interview quotes in this thesis are, when not coming from an English-speaking interviewee, therefore, my translation.

In addition to the interviews, I have also been able to make observations of three events organized by ILMOs studied in this research. During these events, affiliates from various countries were present, therefore providing primary material for an analysis of the dynamics that exist among them. These events were the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Conference of UNI-Americas, held in Mar del Plata (Argentina) from March 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Meeting of the Multinational Banks Networks organized by UNI-Finances in São Paulo (Brazil) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2007; and the meeting of the Gerdau World Council, organized by the IMF in São Paulo (Brazil) on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2007.

### **3. Chapter Outline**

This thesis will be structured in three sections. Chapters 2 and 3 will provide the necessary contextual information to develop the analytical framework. Chapters 4 and 5 will lay out in more detail the results of the fieldwork. Finally, chapter 6 will present the analytical and theoretical conclusions of this research.

In chapter 2, I will discuss the main analytical traditions that have dealt with labour internationalism and explain how I will use elements from several of them while clearly locating my research in a critical political economy approach. I will then present a history of ILMOs since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but focusing on the period from 1945 on, in which I contrast the diverse trajectories of political and sectoral organizations. I identify three historical tendencies of labour internationalism in the Americas: Latin American independence, U.S. domination and European influence. This exercise is

necessary in as much as this research questions historical change and therefore needs to be built on a precise idea of the situation *before* the dramatic changes that have occurred in recent years.

Taking into account each national labour movement's specificities in understanding its international involvement is crucial to this research. That is why chapter 3 will present the different models of unionism present in Mexico and Brazil. It will focus on the recent evolution of those countries' trade unions, particularly on the effect neoliberal globalization has had on their functioning since the beginning of the 1980s. This chapter suggests that Mexican unionism is still framed by corporatism and remains highly fragmented, weakening its position as a political actor. In contrast, the Brazilian labour movement has obtained a lot of independence from the state and exerts significant influence on its society.

Once these elements of context have been set up, chapters 4 and 5 will get into the heart of the fieldwork. Each of them will focus on one type of organization (political and sectoral) and present the data collected in relation to the topics explored here. Each of the two countries will be dealt with successively. In the case of ORIT, chapter 4 will focus on the process of political unification (namely, the founding of the TUCA), and on the strategies adopted against free trade, more particularly against the projected Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In the cases of UNI and the IMF, chapter 5's focus will be placed on the strategies facing MNCs (including World Councils and Framework Agreements) and on internal organizing. Despite variations between the three organizations, these chapters indicate that Mexican unions have been marginalized in ILMOs whereas Brazilian unions have gained more and more influence on them. The

specific nature of each domestic labour movement and the dynamics of regional integration in the various parts of the Americas help to explain these differences.

Chapter 6 will build on these findings, showing how the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization have not led to an opposition between two new “blocs”, the North and the South, but to a diversification of both entities, explained by international, regional and domestic factors. This thesis will be related to the broader literature in critical political economy and included in the progressive elaboration of an international political economy of labour. Finally, I will show the contribution of this research to knowledge, acknowledge its limits and open ways for complementary work. In particular, it will be argued that there is a need for a thorough critical analysis of the U.S. labour movement foreign policy.

By bringing back labour as a research topic for Political Science, this work will not only contribute to a better understanding of workers’ reaction to globalization, but it will also help to challenge some conventional academic walls. Understanding labour properly needs to put together approaches that are generally isolated from each other. Building a genuine International Political Economy of Labour, as called for by Harrod (2002), will need the kind of holistic analysis I am proposing in this thesis.

## CHAPTER 2. CONTEXTUALIZING ILMOs

Internationalism is a central component of most socialist ideologies born with the Industrial Revolution. Beyond the famous “Workers of the world, unite!” concluding Marx and Engel’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the idea that solidarity among workers, regardless of their citizenship or location, should prevail over “national solidarity” between the working class and the bourgeoisie was essential to any broad project aiming at overthrowing capitalism. In the face of an ever more globalized capital, workers had to realize that their exploitation was systemic and worldwide, and thus that they had to organize and react globally too. Marxists always considered internationalism as a goal, not necessarily a reality. Lenin, in particular, was conscious that the “labour aristocracies” he denounced were fomenting divisions within the working class and promoting circumstantial alliances with national bourgeoisies (Howard 1995). Under the leadership of Stalin, the world communist movement would turn to the strategy of “socialism in one country”, following which the cause was better served by consolidating the socialist state in the USSR than by spreading revolutions across the world. Despite their rhetoric, Communist Internationals (both for political parties and trade unions) would become the tool of one national foreign policy: the Soviet Union’s.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century would put labour internationalism to the test on many occasions. The two world wars and the Cold War, in particular, considerably challenged international labour solidarity by fostering nationalisms and exacerbating divisions among unions. Those divisions were particularly harsh between unions from the industrialized world (the “Global North”) where modern unionism was born and flourished first and foremost. The split between communists and social democrats, at the

beginning of the 1920s, would lead the latter to develop their own conception of a non-revolutionary internationalism. Although their action was much more focused on the national level, where they campaigned for the development of the Welfare State, reformist unions maintained international structures in order to cooperate with each other and occasionally build a relation of force facing globalized capital.

In countries from the Global South, the development of modern unionism was hindered by a slow industrialization as well as by colonialism or authoritarian regimes, which both fought the development of independent civil society organizations, including unions. Therefore, North-South labour internationalism has always been inherently unequal. It mostly took the form of development cooperation, the North trying to support union development in the South but also using this dependency relationship to cultivate allegiances and advance its own political agenda, often in contradiction with the original values of internationalism.

The end of the Cold War ended the most significant North-North division and consecrated the hegemony of social democracy as the dominant ideology for trade unions. Meanwhile the rapid economic growth experienced by some countries of the Global South, along with the demise of many authoritarian regimes in the region, led to the growth of independent labour organizations in the “developing world” who now want to play a more significant role in world labour politics. Henceforth, a focus has to be placed on North-South relations when analyzing labour internationalism.

Workers’ internationalism can take various forms. Most national unions maintain bilateral relationships with some of their counterparts in other countries. Few of them (e.g. the German DGB, the AFL-CIO) can benefit from a broad, almost worldwide

network of contacts. Many unions have chosen their privileged partners on the basis of cultural affinities (e.g. French-speaking unions, Spanish-speaking unions) or simply because they belong to the same region. Others may have initially worked together because of personal contacts between some of their staff members or officials, and decided to pursue and consolidate these relations even after the concerned individuals left. Aside from those bilateral links, ILMOs represent the multilateral dimension of labour internationalism. Their universalist ambition (they aim at gathering unions from all the world), their historical permanency (they were born at the same time as modern unionism) and the fact that they actually have affiliates on all continents and from a variety of ideological backgrounds make them a privileged site from which to observe the recent evolution of labour internationalism.

ILMOs are not well known organizations. Not only are they seldom known by their affiliates' members (i.e. individual workers), but they are also largely ignored by the academic literature. Despite their international dimension, most works in International Relations do not even mention their existence. Despite the fact they are labour organizations, they remain marginal in Sociology of Work, Comparative Politics or even Industrial Relations, all still focused mostly on domestic dynamics. Nevertheless, some work has been done, from a variety of perspectives. ILMOs do not belong to a specific discipline; they are under the joint custody of several social sciences.

This chapter aims at putting ILMOs in their theoretical and historical contexts, in order to develop a convincing explanation of their internal North-South dynamics. In the first section, I review the literature on ILMOs, looking more specifically at what has been said about the relations between their Northern and Southern affiliates. I show how the

two dominant approaches (the Industrial Relations approach and the sceptical approach) are incomplete although complementary, and how an eclectic, holistic and dialectical perspective can help bridge them and produce a richer analysis. In the second section, I present the different phases of ILMOs' history, looking whenever possible at their manifestations in the Americas. I come to the conclusion that, across time, three tendencies have characterized ILMOs' internal dynamics in the Americas, with varying strength depending on the period: U.S. domination of the hemisphere; Latin American independence; European influence. These literature and historical reviews lead to a solid analytical framework for studying North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas.

### **1. ILMOs in Theory: Towards an International Political Economy of Labour?**

Although various disciplines look at ILMOs, none of them is homogeneous in its approach. Indeed, some trends of analysis can be represented in several academic fields, whereas some disciplines are very fragmented on this topic. Furthermore, some of the authors active in the field are not always clearly associated with a discipline, either because they are independent researchers not working in the academia,<sup>10</sup> or because they were trained in one discipline but are teaching in another. Therefore, instead of a strictly disciplinary approach, it is more appropriate to structure a literature review according to the role authors give to ILMOs. The two first sections adopt this typology, first reviewing authors who view ILMOs as bargaining agents, and then those who consider ILMOs primarily as political actors. The third section presents a Critical International Political

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<sup>10</sup> This tendency is reinforced by the fact that a significant number of authors writing on ILMOs are former or current activists, not necessarily affiliated with a university but nevertheless invited to contribute to academic publications.

Economy approach as a way to bridge the various perspectives in a holistic, eclectic and dialectic approach.

### **1.1. ILMOs as Bargaining Agents**

The dominant approach to the study of ILMOs in the last two decades has focused on their role as potential global bargaining agents. This tendency is mostly inspired by the relatively newly established discipline of Industrial Relations, although this approach is not exclusively the product of academics trained in or employed by Industrial Relations departments. Initially thought of as a multidisciplinary field of study, Industrial Relations has become an autonomous discipline organized in its own schools, granting its own degrees and above all relying on its own paradigms. The most significant paradigm, developed by John Dunlop (1949), is known as the “pluralist approach”. In this conception, labour and capital, through their respective representatives, are bargaining the necessary conditions for the capitalist system to survive. This system relies on “an ideological consensus, norms and common values that limit the range of conflicts, therefore securing their harmlessness” (Gagnon 1991: 84, my translation). In this context, trade unionism is analysed in regard to its function in the system. It is, first and foremost, a bargaining agent destined to find compromises with employers and to reinforce the common ideological bedrock of the system. The normative content of mainstream Industrial Relations makes it a tool of the status quo, a “problem-solving theory” in the typology put forward by Cox (1986: 207-208). This normativity is reinforced by the proximity of Industrial Relations academics with trade unions, which can sometimes result in cooperative activities and publications aimed at finding “best practices” (see, for example, Bronfenbrenner 2007).

The main challenge posed by globalization to Industrial Relations is the internationalization of capital and the subsequent jeopardizing of the traditional, nationally based, tripartite system. In the absence of a global state and of substantive global trade unions, the balance of the relations of force is broken and the Dunlopian model is imperilled. The title of Croucher and Cotton's (2009) book, *Global Unions, Global Business*, summarizes this idea. The authors argue that

without change in the ways that the international institutions of the trade union movement operate, the existing power dynamics will remain intact and globalisation will continue to operate in negative ways for many workers [...] The work of these organisations [ILMOs] is important in coordinating union responses to longstanding distributive and procedural justice issues that have been exacerbated by globalisation (Croucher and Cotton 2009: 4).

Similarly, central to Gordon and Turner's (2000) study of transnational labour cooperation are the following questions: "What is the point of democratic elections and processes if governments can no longer regulate the economy within their own borders? What power can counter the growing strength of MNCs and the forces of globalization?" (2000: 4). As we will see later, this change is commonly framed by political scientists as "neoliberal globalization", a movement of retreat of the state from social and economic spheres to the benefit of the private sector, combined with a dramatic increase of international exchanges (particularly financial) and a growing influence of MNCs.

This willingness to build a global labour interlocutor to MNCs logically led to an interest in multinational collective bargaining. Ramsay (1997) reminds that first attempts of multinational collective bargaining were made as early as in the 1960s, when some International Trade Secretariats (ITSs, which would eventually become Global Union Federations) tried to implement World Councils as interlocutors of MNCs. This raised a

debate within the academia, some viewing it as a way for the future whereas others were more pessimistic about the outcome. Nevertheless the topic lost attraction for scholars when these endeavours failed. Ramsay's careful observation that "a revival of interest in the prospects for international labour has appeared" (1997: 528) was proven right, as many works on the topic would be published in the following years, matching the revival of multinational collective bargaining. Global Union Federations (GUFs, the most important sectoral ILMOs which gather unions of the same branch or industry) are the central actors in this process, and International Framework Agreements (IFAs) are the most common form taken by this strategy. IFAs are "negotiated at the international level" with MNCs "and require the participation of relevant trade unions" in addition to their corresponding GUF (Fairbrother and Hammer 2005: 416). In terms of content,

they normally include a recognition of the ILO Core Labour Standards, often have further provisions (e.g., a commitment to decent wages and working conditions and provision for safe and hygienic working environments), trade union involvement (in particular that of a GUF), an implementation process as well as the right and a procedure to deal with complaints. Such agreements are not restricted to the signatory company, as there is usually a stipulation that suppliers must also be persuaded to comply with the provisions of the IFA (Fairbrother and Hammer 2005: 416).

Extensive reviews of IFAs have been done (Bourque 2005, Croucher and Cotton 2009), generally dominated by a certain sense of optimism, these agreements being considered the stepping stones to multinational collective bargaining, particularly by paving the way to industry-wide global agreements (Bourque 2005). Fairbrother and Hammer (2005) share the same sentiment when their genealogy of IFAs leads them to conclude that: "the balance of power within trade unions is shifting towards the international level (albeit in an embryonic form) and towards trade unions in their

relations with the seemingly over-powerful TNCs [MNCs] that are dominant in the current moment” (2005: 421).

This trend in the literature, which tends to be more descriptive than analytical, helps clarify what qualifies as an IFA, as distinct from a code of conduct, for example. While the latter are solely the fruit of a company’s initiative (usually following a public opinion campaign against the practices of that company), the former is the result of a formal negotiation between an MNC and a GUF. Also, whereas management clearly controls the monitoring of company compliance with a code of conduct, IFAs provide for a joint process (most of the time through a bipartite committee) in charge of overseeing the application of the agreement. Not all IFAs are equal though. Hammer (2005) proposes an insightful typology, ranging from “rights agreements” to “bargaining agreements”. While the former are negotiated in a generally hostile environment and “are the results of campaigns at local and global level, aiming to secure organising rights in the first place”, the latter benefit from “stronger global networks”, in particular in the steel, chemical, energy and mining industries (Hammer 2005: 512-513). Hammer notes that differences between IFAs are not only visible in the substance of the agreements but also in their scope, reflecting the capacity of unions at all levels to negotiate strong clauses and procedures. While “rights agreements” mostly focus on trade union rights, “bargaining agreements” include clauses on wages, working conditions, health and safety issues or training. Also, monitoring processes are usually stronger in bargaining agreements than in rights agreements.

Aside from wide-ranging studies aiming to catalogue IFAs, case studies analyze in more detail selected agreements. Lillie’s (2004) work on the International Transport

Workers' Federation (ITF)'s agreement for seafarers on flag of convenience ships investigates what can be considered as the "poster child" of multinational bargaining. Lillie shows how the ITF has managed to reach a global agreement with the International Maritime Employers' Committee (IMEC) guaranteeing minimal wages and working conditions standards. Although the form is close to an IFA, this agreement ultimately is closer to sector-wide bargaining, as several companies are involved. Anner et al. (2006), in their study of the industrial determinants of transnational solidarity, also consider the ITF-IMEC agreement the most advanced example of multinational bargaining. They underline how the peculiarity of this industry's workforce (in particular its globalized labour market) and the ITF's successful endeavour to build a strong consensus between its affiliates contribute to the efficiency of this agreement. The authors show how the situation can be quite different in other industries. Taking the case of the auto industry, they present the more "traditional" IFAs signed in this sector, on a company-by-company basis. Here, the competition is not as much between individual workers as between plants within the same company. IFAs aim at regulating this competition, taking various forms, depending, in particular, on the country of origin of the MNC. European firms are generally more open to transnational bargaining than U.S. or Japanese ones. Finally, they explore attempts of multinational bargaining in the clothing and textile manufacturing industries and demonstrate how the volatility of labour and capital in this industry made it extremely difficult for GUFs to reach IFAs. In the end, Northern unions just gave up on this sector as it almost disappeared from industrialized countries or was concentrated in very small companies, mostly relying on recent immigrant workforce and therefore very difficult to organize. Hence, this industry was mostly left to NGOs to try improving the

conditions of textile workers in the South, where they often have more leverage than weak domestic unions. A more nuanced assessment of the situation in this industry is provided in Anner and Evans (2004), where the Anti-sweatshop campaign is seen as a positive example of union-NGOs collaboration and of North-South solidarity. In that case, the assessment of the authors relies more on the capacity of workers organizations to build alliances than on the effective establishment of an internal relation of force with the employers.

Wills (2002) assesses fairly positively the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF)'s IFA with the French-owned global hotel chain Accor known as a "Trade Union Rights Agreement". She considers that it not only opens the possibility for a GUF to monitor an MNC's social responsibility but that it also allows the GUF to have a direct impact on local and national issues of relevance to its affiliates. Thanks to this IFA, "the IUF has greater practical significance to workers on the ground" (Wills 2002: 697). Indeed, this IFA was mostly used by IUF affiliates in various countries to organize new workplaces or to defend the existence of national agreements in favour of hotel workers. The very efficiency of the agreement therefore relies on the involvement of local and national unions, contributing to a "rescaling" of unions activities. This rescaling means that globalization would not simply "shift" the level of union activities from the local/national to the international, but would call for the reorganization of union activities along all three scales and foster interactions between them: "Rather than assume that the international level becomes more important than the local and national in a global economy, it is argued that social actors have to develop a multi-scalar approach in order to tackle the challenges of globalization" (Wills 2002: 696). An IFA, initiated and signed

at the global level, would have an impact on the local, but only if it is genuinely appropriated by local actors.

This analysis of IFAs is in line with Wills' (1996) previous argument on European Works Councils (EWC), whose role in the elaboration and monitoring of IFAs is often crucial. EWCs were established by the European Union in 1994 and made compulsory in all major companies having employees in more than two countries of the Union. Composed of representatives of workers, they have consultative power on the most important economic decisions taken by management. Wills notes that since workers' representatives come from the plants themselves, EWCs contribute to the elaboration of a more grassroots kind of labour internationalism: "such horizontal, unmediated relationships break down the historical hierarchies of the labor movement, providing a social movement alternative to the bureaucracy of traditional trade union structure" (Wills 1998: 127). This reinforces her argument that globalization is a dialectical process and therefore simultaneously opens possibilities for labour internationalism renewal while it also undermines workers' structural power. This concern for labour agency comes from her critical geography perspective, which considers that "union practices are both historically and geographically constituted" (Wills 1996: 370) and therefore that not only economic factors influence labour's attitude but also its local traditions and historic/geographic backgrounds. This latter point lends nuance to Industrial Relations' traditional focus on industrial determinants and opens up the analysis to a broader scope of factors and to a wider range of scales of action.

Therefore, the approach to ILMOs as bargaining agents makes various contributions. It provides an in-depth documentation of GUFs and their major bargaining

activities, IFAs. The literature defines IFAs, distinguishing them from codes of conduct but also pointing at their “soft-law” nature relying not only on labour’s power but also on capital’s compliance. The major research questions leading authors in that field are mostly related to the efficiency of IFAs and to the factors that could make them better. Works that make distinctions between different types of GUFs (depending on the industry they are involved in) or between countries where a GUF is applied, enrich the analysis. They also call indirectly for more cross-national and cross-industrial research on GUFs. Between far-reaching exhaustive reviews and very detailed case studies, there is room for a comparative approach of ILMOs as bargaining agents that this thesis will help fill.

Nevertheless, this literature is not as insightful when it comes to other issues than those strictly related to bargaining. In particular, it overlooks issues of union democracy, internal divisions or inequalities based on gender, race, or tensions in North-South relations. Most of the authors acknowledge that Cold War dynamics paralyzed ILMOs but they also underline that these dynamics had much less influence on GUFs than on the ICFTU and the WFTU. Even more significantly, most authors signal that IFAs are a very European, not to say Eurocentric, conception. One of the most recent accounts of IFAs identifies only 6 out of 61 signed with non-European MNCs (Croucher and Cotton 2009: 58-60). As we saw, EWCs are deeply involved in the elaboration of IFAs and are even signatories to most of them, sometimes along with the national union of the MNC’s country of origin. Fundamentally, EWCs are extensions of a “European model” of industrial relations and therefore provide European trade unions with a structural advantage over their non-European counterparts, as they are more familiar with this type

of functioning. Daugareilh (2006) even talks of IFAs as a “European response to globalization”, based on a “European approach of the globalized firm”, whereas Taylor (1999) evokes a “Europeanization of industrial relations”. This model of European “social dialogue” is rarely critically discussed in the literature, whereas other elements of European trade unionism, such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), were denounced as weak and even as tools of cooptation of the labour movement by the European Union (see Gobin 1997, 2000, Hyman 2005a).

Also problematic is the fact that, in this debate, a voice is missing: that of the Southern unionists. If the processes at stake are Eurocentric, research on them is, too. Methodologically, a major source on which studies on the topic rely are interviews with European trade unionists, in their capacity of GUF’s officer or representative of a European affiliate. There are notable exceptions to this rule, for example Hennebert’s (2008) work on the “UNI@Quebecor” campaign, but it is still limited to case studies. Also, it tends to take union discourse for granted, whether it comes from the North or from the South. Union officials’ testimonies are considered as objective accounts of what happened, not as actors’ representations of their own situation. This methodological issue comes back to the point made earlier about the goal of this approach: evaluating the efficiency of ILMOs as bargaining agents. It does not tackle North-South relations within ILMOs as a political issue but as another variable to consider on the path toward an “efficient” labour internationalism. The proximity of this approach to European and North American labour movements may also make it underestimate the inherent contradictions between the protection of workers from the North and from the South,

leading to a more or less explicit “labour protectionism” in its conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.2. ILMOs as Political Agents**

Another trend in the literature focuses on ILMOs as political agents, i.e. as forming part of a broader struggle between capital and labour, including but not limited to bargaining. From this perspective, ILMOs not only represent workers in their interactions with companies, but should also present an alternative political project to the current neoliberal capitalist order. This vision generally comes from a Political Economy standpoint and is therefore not limited to a single discipline. Political scientists, sociologists, geographers and historians contribute to this debate. They share a holistic approach in which unions’ activities at all scales cannot simply be interpreted as technical negotiations with employers but have to be seen in the broader light of ideological struggles between competing orders. The origins of this trend of the literature lie in critical Political Economy, a broad intellectual tradition that bridges political and economic issues and that is interested in society’s potential to change. It is critical in the sense that it analyzes capitalism as a contradictory process, generating not only domination but also resistance to that domination.

This dialectic can be traced back to Marx’s approach to the capitalist system, and even more specifically to some of his direct or indirect “heirs”, particularly Gramsci and Polanyi. In his plea on behalf of a “sociological Marxism”, Burawoy (2003) shows how “both Polanyi and Gramsci converge from very different Marxian legacies on a similar conception of society as both the container of capitalism’s contradictions and the terrain of its transcendence” (213) although “Gramsci has a theory of hegemony but fails to

provide convincing grounds for a counterhegemony, whereas Polanyi gives us a signpost to an architecture of counterhegemony even as he fails to appreciate the obstacles it must face” (231). Indeed, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony helps to better understand how capital’s order is maintained through both coercion and consent by the subordinated actors. This leads Gramsci to be particularly critical of trade unions, which he sees as potential “consent makers” by opposition to other forms of workers organizations such as workers’ councils. He denounces the incapacity of Italian trade unions to resist capital’s hegemony while picturing U.S. unions as “the corporate expression of the rights of qualified crafts” (1971: 286). This view is reminiscent of Lenin’s conception of trade unions, which opposes their “tendency to reformism” to the revolutionary discipline of the Communist Party. It also reflects how Gramsci’s work cannot be taken out of the context in which it was written: when its author was imprisoned by Italian Fascists and while he was supporting the experiment of the Italian Councils as an alternative form of workers’ representation, closer to the rank and file.

Polanyi’s argument about the commodification of society and the necessary correction of capitalism also includes an analysis of trade unions. Like Gramsci, he points at their internal contradictions, having been founded as craft unions, but eventually promoting revolutionary ideologies while accompanying capitalism by supporting wide-ranging industrialization. Nevertheless, he also shows how they contribute to the “active society” in various ways depending on the historical and geographical context. In particular, he mentions how British trade unionism differs from its counterparts in Continental Europe: “The Continental worker needed protection not so much against the impact of the Industrial Revolution –in the social sense there never was such a thing on

the Continent— as against the normal action of factory and labor market conditions. He achieved it mainly by the help of legislation, while his British comrades relied more on voluntary association —trade unions— and their power to monopolize labor” (Polanyi 2001: 184). He then extends the comparison to the relations between trade unions and political parties, affirming that “on the Continent trade unions were a creation of the political party of the working class; in England the political party was a creation of the trade unions. While on the Continent unionism became more or less socialist, in England even political socialism remained essentially trade unionist” (2001: 184). Therefore, Polanyi provides a solid basis for a thorough political analysis of trade unions, noting their contradictory roles in the enhancement of/resistance to capitalism but also the diversity of forms they can take depending on the political and economic contexts in which they emerge.

The labour movement is not the central concern of either Gramsci or Polanyi, but their respective dialectical macro-theories formed the bedrock for a critical Political Economy approach to trade unions, that highlights both their contradictory functions under capitalism and their internal diversity. Not seeing unions as homogenous entities is central to this trend of analysis. After WWII, most of the works on trade unions focused on national cases, as the nation-state was the predominant level of action for the labour movement at the time. Various typologies and approaches were developed, as I will show in the next chapter in the cases of Mexico and Brazil. ILMOs were clearly overlooked by most political economists during the Cold War because of their manipulation by the two superpowers. The end of the East-West struggle and the spread of neoliberal globalization did reinvigorate the political analysis of labour internationalism.

Nevertheless, this body of literature is not homogenous. Two tendencies can be identified: the first, which can be labelled as the “sceptical approach”, severely criticizes ILMOs and advocates a labour internationalism *without* or *outside* them, and a second, more dialectical approach, which is more concerned with identifying contradictions within ILMOs than praising or criticizing them. I label this latter approach Critical International Political Economy.

The “sceptical approach” is best represented by the work of Kim Moody and Peter Waterman. They take from Gramsci (and, to some extent, from Lenin) a certain mistrust for formal union structures. They share a concern for the hierarchical and intrinsically bureaucratic nature of ILMOs. This point recalls the “iron’s law of oligarchy” Michels (1962) observed, precisely, in pro-labour political parties. “Sceptics” criticize ILMOs for not being sufficiently representative of individual workers but also for suffering from internal imbalance between their affiliates. Therefore, they tackle the issue of ILMOs’ internal politics and North-South relations within them. In order to solve these problems, “sceptics” propose a “New Labour Internationalism”, loosely characterized by “networking and information-sharing communication, new recruiting targets and new concerns for gender and consumer issues, the environment and human rights (...) an opening attitude towards social movements and community groups and, consequently, by the increasing role of the politics of alliances and coalitions” and finally by “a greater concern for rank-and-file needs, bottom-up organization building and the extension of grassroots activity” (Ghigliani 2005: 361). In short, New Labour Internationalism is supposedly more open, political and democratic than the “old” one. As we will see, some

of the supporters of this concept also use it to tackle the issue of North-South divisions. Nuances exist, though, between the main representatives of this view.

Moody (1997), from a more traditional Marxist perspective, is concerned with the conservatism of some sections of the labour movement. In particular, he targets the AFL-CIO and the Japanese union centre Rengo, and points to their significant influence within the ICFTU due to the importance of their membership. He considers Rengo “the embodiment of global business unionism” (232) and the ICFTU as “labor bureaucracy three times removed” (229) which “tends to operate by consensus and those who finance it set the tone of that consensus” (231). They constitute a “conservative padlock” that hinders any progressive move from the ICFTU even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the waning of its anticommunist stand. Consequently, “despite, ‘North South’ dialogues, official international labor has also not dealt with the problems faced by unionists in the South (...) its continued support for the conservative state dominated unions is no help to the development of a labor movement adequate to today’s new challenges” (229). However, Moody puts more faith in GUFs, which he considers “one level closer to day-to-day reality” (234), above all in initiatives such as World Workers Councils which “reach down to include plant-level representatives, bringing them closer to the rank-and-file” (234), although he denounces the fact that “almost all the ITSS [GUFs] are dominated by their European affiliates” (235). Moody’s thinking is framed by an analysis of the new modes of production, which he defines as “a lean world”, i.e. a world where the lean production model has become the absolute standard. In this context, he continues to give workers and their organizations a central role in the resistance to

capitalist expansion. That is probably where he diverges the most from Peter Waterman's work.

An acute observer of ILMOs, Peter Waterman has also developed a very critical perspective on their actions. He was an early voice calling for a new labour internationalism (Waterman 2001) and has since then continued his analyst-militant work in that direction. He shares most of Moody's appraisal of the evolution of neoliberal globalization and its devastating effects for workers, as well as his critique of ILMOs, which he considers "remote from workers on the shop floor, in the office or in the community, who, indeed, are usually unaware of their existence (...) They tend to reproduce the structure and behaviour of interstate agencies. They were and are largely Northern based, led and staffed" (Waterman and Timms 2004: 184). Nevertheless, he makes a distinction between his alternatives and Moody's. Waterman acknowledges that both start from the concept of "Social Movement Unionism", a term coined at the end of the 1980s to describe the tendency of some national unions to adopt a more open, progressive and democratic attitude. Nevertheless, he considers that his "New International Social Unionism" differs from Moody's "International Social Movement Unionism". The latter would simply praise an opening of unions to other social movements while keeping the labour movement at the heart (not to say the vanguard) of social and political transformation. Waterman's point goes further as he considers that unions and social movements should cross-fertilize each other, up to the point of interdependency, without having any "sector" taking the lead over others: "It is such an understanding of the interpenetration and transformation of understandings and practices, the opening-up of movements and movement institutions to each other, and the self-

transformation of the parties thus mutually engaged, that the New International Social Unionism implies” (Waterman 2004: 227). Waterman’s point is reminiscent of Touraine’s (1984) analysis of domestic labour movements: in the face of the growth of “new social movements”, he considers that unions have lost the central position they occupied under the industrial/Fordist era. They are to be “replaced” by movements such as students’, women’s and civil rights groups. This conception of the labour movement as central to the *previous* era but not adapted to the *new* realities of economy and society, infuses Waterman’s argument on ILMOs, except he thinks unions can overcome this discrepancy by cross-fertilizing with New Social Movements.

The New Internationalism praised by “sceptics” is not only a normative wish, it also reflects certain tendencies observed in the labour movement. Other scholars who tried to test the presence of New Internationalism within ILMOs or other international labour initiatives however came back with inconclusive evidence. In his study of an international campaign against McDonald’s led by a GUF (the International Union of Food and Allied Workers), Ghigliani (2005) shows that despite efforts to bring together unions and other social movements, “the gap between trade unions and these other organizations in this case remained unchanged” and that in terms of network functioning “the internet was used more for spreading unilateral information and propaganda than for communicating and establishing links among the participants” (Ghigliani 2005: 378). Hodkinson (2005) takes the case of the campaign led by the ICFTU to include a social clause in the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements in order to show that the Confederation kept functioning along the lines of “Old Labour Internationalism”. He criticizes both the orientations and the strategies adopted by the ICFTU: “by prioritizing

just five ‘core’ labour standards and promoting the neoliberal language of ‘flexibility’ and ‘partnership’, the ICFTU actually abandoned its social democratic model in favour of ‘global business unionism’. The ICFTU also retained its classic high-level ‘dialogue and agreement’ diplomatic lobbying approach throughout the campaign” (Hodkinson 2005: 59). And although he acknowledges that more affiliates have been able to influence the ICFTU’s orientations, he notes that in terms of alliances “the ICFTU’s attitude towards the majority of NGOs remained deeply hostile and suspicious and it continued to choose its alliances very carefully” (Hodkinson 2005: 60). Whether the existence of New Internationalism can be proved or not, the “sceptics” bring important elements to the analysis of ILMOs that help to fill some gaps of the Industrial Relations approach. In particular, they politicize the analysis of labour internationalism, locating it in a broader context than union-employer relations. They consider organized labour as part of the larger ideological fight between diverging conceptions of society and the economy. Nevertheless, they propose a critical approach that, among other things, takes fully into account the consequences of the Cold War and the oligarchic tendency of the labour movement. In that context, they tackle the issue of North-South imbalance and problematize it as a lack of democratic functioning, i.e. as a genuinely political issue, related to the internal relations of force between ILMOs’ affiliates. In offering this political perspective, the work of the “sceptics” could usefully complement the more “technical” work of Industrial Relations.

However, this combination is hard to imagine as both lack a dialectical approach. If the Industrial Relations approach is normative, the “sceptics” also have their own normative biases. Indeed, their work is closer to a description of the “ideal” international

labour movement than a thorough analysis of what it really is. This leads them to be so critical of ILMOs that they often discard them very soon in their work in order to turn to alternative forms of internationalism that fit better into their scheme. These other forms of internationalism are definitely worth studying, but by focusing most of their energies on them, “sceptics” fall short of providing a thorough analysis of ILMOs. Another problematic aspect of their lack of dialectic is their conception of North-South relations. In their will to denounce the undemocratic drifts of ILMOs, they tend to caricature Northern unions and Southern unions, and to present them as two opposing, homogenous blocs. Eder’s (2002) contribution, for instance, makes a number of good points about how globalization actually reinforces the national level of action and can hinder the development of labour internationalism by enhancing nationalist attitudes among unions. Nevertheless, she draws a very schematic portrait of Northern unions as exclusively focused on “bread and butter unionism” while their counterparts from the South “built crosscutting alliances with various religious groups, women’s groups and political parties, and became a credible voice in pushing for democratization and overall opening up of their countries” (Eder 2002: 169). The same can be said of Ramasamy’s (2005) analysis where New Internationalism is associated with the rise of progressive labour movements from the South and the corresponding union decline in the developed world. This view, generally relying systematically on the same three examples (South Africa, Brazil and South Korea), offers a rather Manichean approach to the world of trade unions, and therefore to ILMOs, based on the view of a North almost exclusively devoted to “business unionism”, and a progressive, radical and social movement oriented South. Therefore, in spite of its valuable contributions in terms of acknowledging the political

dimension of ILMOs and their internal relations of force, the “sceptical approach” needs to be completed by a more dialectical framework and by more empirically grounded research.

### **1.3. Critical International Political Economy**

An alternative approach is offered by Critical International Political Economy. ILMOs should be obvious objects of research for International Political Economy (IPE). Indeed, when it was founded at the beginning of the 1970s, IPE aimed at bridging International Relations, a field of Political Science, with Economics. Authors as diverse as Keohane, Nye, Strange and Cox were looking to broaden the scope of political analysis and open International Relations to the realities of international trade and production that were playing an ever growing role in the world order. They expressed, each in their own way, the will of many to go beyond the “realist” framework, and adopt a more inclusive conception of power. In that context, ILMOs would have been a central agent to observe. Just as trade unions have long been a central concern for “domestic” Political Economy, ILMOs are located at the intersection between the political and economic spheres, representing workers’ unions in their struggles with corporations but also bearing a broader political project.

Despite the openness of its founding fathers’ discourses, IPE quickly gave way to the formation of two rival camps that could barely communicate with each other, not to say exchange ideas (see Murphy and Nelson 2001; Cohen 2007). Followers of Keohane and Nye (1972) would progressively gather around the *International Organizations* journal, and form what would become known as “American IPE”. In the line of mainstream U.S. social science, they adopt a strict positivist methodology and favour

quantitative methods over qualitative ones. Their main contribution is methodological, contributing to the incorporation of the tools from economics into political analysis. While they contribute to the broadening of the definition of power, they neither thoroughly challenge the basic assumptions of the field, in particular the central role of the state, nor the conception of social sciences as experimental and aspiring to cumulative knowledge. In that context, it can easily be understood why ILMOs have never been a central concern for American IPE, labour itself playing a marginal role in this school of thought.

The situation has been quite different for what would be known as “British IPE”. Answering Strange’s call to bridge the gap between International Economics and International Relations, “British IPE” scholars would try to expand not only the methodologies but also the scope of the field. Susan Strange, in her seminal 1970 article, mentions “moves towards international negotiation of wage agreements directly between the unions and the managements” (Strange 1970: 312) as one of the new issues on which IPE should focus. Methodologically, Strange calls for an eclectic social science where various traditions would join to provide a genuinely holistic approach. Of course, what she has in mind is primarily bridging Political Science to Economics, but when it comes to ILMOs it is fair to extend such movement to Industrial Relations, Sociology, and even Geography.

Conceptually, Cox articulates best how labour could be brought back in the analysis of world order. By translating substantive parts of Gramsci’s analytical scheme to International Relations, he shows how concepts such as hegemony, historical blocs and social forces can be used to understand world orders but above all change and prospective

for alternatives. Cox's view of world orders puts great emphasis on social forces, namely productive forces, and their relations.

Indeed, Cox coined the famous expression "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose" (Cox 1986: 207, emphasis in the original). He is comfortable with the idea of working in favour of change in the international order and indeed makes of this goal the most important characteristic of "critical theory", which he distinguishes from "problem-solving theories" such as the neo-realist approach in International Relations. Another significant feature of critical theory, for Cox, is its capacity to adapt to the reality it is describing, and therefore to reject the "nonhistorical or ahistorical" (Cox 1986: 209) aspect of problem-solving theory. This leads Cox to put a great emphasis on historical context. Sorting Marxists in two categories, he considers himself along with others like the historian Eric Hobsbawm as a historic materialist, in opposition to structuralists such as Althusser or Poulantzas, whom he reproaches their ahistorical approach and their exclusive focus on classical ("sacred") Marxian texts, in particular *The Capital* (Cox 1986: 214-215).

Historical materialism as understood by Cox has nothing to do with the determinist caricature often made of it. Instead, it is characterized by

framework for action or historical structure [as] a picture of a particular configuration of forces. This configuration does not determine actions in any direct, mechanical way but imposes pressures and constraints. Individuals and groups may move with the pressures or resist and oppose them, but they cannot ignore them. To the extent that they successfully resist a prevailing historical structure, they buttress their actions with an alternative, emerging configuration of forces, a rival structure (Cox 1986: 217-218).

An essential element of Cox's Neo-Gramscianism is the emphasis put on dialectic as a primordial legacy of Marxian thought. Dialectic is defined at two levels. At the level

of logic, it is “a dialogue seeking truth through the explorations of contradictions” and more broadly “the knowledge that each assertion concerning reality contains implicitly its opposite and that both assertions are not mutually exclusive but share some measure of the truth” (Cox 1986: 215). At the level of “real history”, “dialectic is the potential for alternative forms of development arising from the confrontation of opposed social forces in any concrete historical situation” (Cox 1986: 215). This conception of dialectic is missing in both the Industrial Relations and the “sceptical” approaches to ILMOs.

Although Cox started his academic career with a very critical analysis of the International Labour Organization, he then turned to broader issues and away from organized labour as an empirical interest. One of his early graduate students and research partners, Jeffrey Harrod, took up the torch. Harrod calls for a “joining of the two IRs [Industrial Relations and International Relations]” that he considers necessary to bring social forces back in International Political Economy. He criticizes the orientation taken by Industrial Relations since the 1980s that “represents the triumph of the practitioner over the analyst and a further restriction of the academic as one asked to provide a deeper analysis” (1997: 112). He therefore argues that the joining of the two IRs would be the best middle way, as it would “provide a synthesis, a *crisis*, to create an International Political Economy which would be more than just a perception of some economists who had discovered power, or some Marxists automatically extending domestically derived concepts to the global plane” (1997: 110). This needs to go further than a conception of IPE as mere “international economic relations, which starts at the national frontiers rather than with social forces” (1997: 114). In a later contribution, Harrod (2002) therefore called for an International Political Economy of Labour (IPEL) which would be

characterised by its eclecticism in terms of disciplinary references and by its focus on labour as its primary empirical concern. This concern for labour comes from the emphasis put in the original Marxist approach on production process: “Production is ubiquitous in so far as it exists in all places and at all times” (Harrod 1997: 109). Although “Marx has traditionally been seen as the principal author who attempted to place labour and work at the centre of human existence [...] his equal, if not over-riding concern, was the behaviour of capital” (Harrod 2002: 49). Considering the importance of labour in production: “The basic idea of IPEL is to place labour, or producers, and work, or production, at the centre of social, political and historical discourses and to see it as a prime dynamic of human history. An IPEL would be able to explain what happens to labour globally but also how labour affects and shapes global history and economy” (Harrod 2002: 49).

O’Brien (2000b) completes this perspective by pleading for the (re)integration of labour into IPE based on the fact that workers actually have an influence on world order, either by reinforcing it or by resisting it: “Workers are significant not because of a prior theoretical commitment to the relations of production, but because they exercise influence in the global political economy and are shaping the structure of global order” (2000b: 92). He also argues more specifically for bringing back ILMOs to the research agenda because they are “transforming from supporter of U.S. capitalism, to a brake on neoliberal industrial relations, to potentially advocating a different form of political economy in alliance with other groups” (2000a: 553). He identifies the contradictory consequences of the end of the Cold War as both “the collapse of the major ideological cleavage which had split workers’ organizations” but also as a challenge to ILMOs who

now have to build “a new form of internationalism, less polarized by ideology” (2000a: 536). Also, he points at the effect of neoliberal globalization upon labour, which “simultaneously challenges the power of organized workers and offers the opportunity to transcend national concerns” (2000a: 538). One of the major challenges raised by this new configuration is the replacement of “old” divisions (East vs. West, reformists vs. revolutionaries) by “new” ones, namely North vs. South. With the fading of the centrality of the Cold War cleavage, the fracture is displaced along the lines of the international competition under neoliberal globalization.

One issue around which this divide has been studied is the campaign for the inclusion of a “social clause” in international trade agreements, more particularly those of the World Trade Organization (WTO). O’Brien *et al.* (2000) show how organized labour, and more particularly the ICFTU, looked pretty early to the WTO, trying to get heard and defending the idea of the “social clause”. Essentially, such a clause would be a provision included in the agreement that would force the parties to respect the ILO’s core labour standards with the same enforcement measures than trade-related clauses. Nevertheless O’Brien also shows how this position was controversial among the membership of the ICFTU, with many affiliates from the South considering it as hidden protectionism even if “some prominent southern labour organizations such as COSATU support social clause” (2002: 227). Van Roozendaal (2002) shows in particular how, on that matter, the pro-clause position of the AFL-CIO had a significant impact on the ICFTU’s position, whereas Southern affiliates, notably India’s unions, were strongly opposed to it. Anner’s (2001) report on this campaign to the Norwegian union centre LO reaches similar conclusions, pointing at the fact that many Southern unions, although not necessarily

opposed to the principle of a social clause, felt marginalized during the planning phase of the campaign. More fundamentally, Anner argues that these unions insist that a social clause must always come with clear demands for better development policies, so that it does not appear as just another protectionist tool put forward by Northern governments, businesses and even unions. The example of the WTO social clause campaigns therefore offers interesting leads for the study of North-South relations within ILMOs. It shows how a significant aspect of neoliberal globalization “new constitutionalism”<sup>11</sup> reveals the domination still exerted by some Northern affiliates on ILMOs, but also the various reactions of Southern affiliates, ranging from strong opposition to a more nuanced attempt to influence the ICFTU’s position. This tendency needs to be studied in other cases, and the connections between the different domestic and regional dynamics experienced in the South and ILMOs’ internal politics need to be more thoroughly investigated.

Although Cox, Harrod and O’Brien come from a more Neo-Gramscian tradition, Roberto Munck adds a Polanyian perspective to the debate and also places emphasis on the North-South divide in order to understand labour international dynamics. Building on Polanyi’s masterpiece, Munck talks about a “new Great Transformation” the world would be going through by passing from the Fordist era to the globalization era. He proposes an analysis of this phenomenon using Polanyi’s “double movement” whereby “ever wider extension of free-market principles generated a counter-movement of social regulation to protect society” (2002: 2). Therefore, Munck believes that globalization both hinders workers’ traditional protections and opens up new opportunities for unions. North-South

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<sup>11</sup> Defined by Gill (2002) as the institutionalization of a neoliberal order through a “globalization from above”, mostly under the form of international agreements.

relations are central to his analysis as he considers that the new Great Transformation mostly hurt the Northern labour movement by removing its Fordist basis, whereas it gave way to “breakthrough (...) in the semi-industrialised or semi-periphery countries such as Brazil, South Africa and, more recently, South Korea where vibrant labour movements had crystallised in the 1980s” (2002: 123).

Munck makes the link between the dynamism of these movements and the fact that they were all born out of the resistance to an authoritarian or dictatorial regime. This claim is in line with one of his final arguments: that in order to understand the new Great Transformation and its impact on labour, one has to take into consideration not only the global but also domestic and regional levels, without opposing one against the other(s) but looking for interconnections between them: “To pose the local against the global as a simple binary opposition with nothing ‘in between’, as it were, lacks credibility (...) One of the most striking features of the current phase of globalization is precisely the intermingling of all these ‘levels’ in a multiplex and ‘hybrid’ form of interconnectedness” (2002: 169). Nevertheless, the limit of Munck’s work is that he does not apply this principle to ILMOs. He does put forward domestic and regional dynamics (even by alluding to NAFTA and MERCOSUR in the case of the Americas) but he does not use these elements in order to explain changes within ILMOs. The three levels, when it comes to unions’ activities, are treated separately from each other. Although he explains how the globalization era can have related impacts at the domestic, regional and global levels, he does not extend this logic to organized labour, showing how domestic and regional labour dynamics can have a global influence, in other terms how national and regional contexts play a role in ILMOs’ internal politics.

This tendency to treat those three levels as silos is certainly not exclusive to Munck. A good example are the contributions to *Global Unions?*, the book co-edited by Jeffrey Harrod and Robert O'Brien in 2002. Several chapters deal with North-South issues and more specific domestic or regional cases, but they do not evaluate the consequences for ILMOs' internal politics. Lambert comes close to it with his typology of Southern unions' responses to globalization. But he quickly turns to non-ILMO initiatives and therefore falls short of providing an analysis of ILMOs. The same can be said of Eder's "people-centred approach to globalization" necessarily neglects ILMOs as it puts the focus on individual workers rather than on institutions. Stevis' comparison of European and North American integration and their impact on labour is also very insightful but fails to make the connection with ILMOs. Finally, several books were published, most of them edited volumes, tackling at the issue of labour and globalization. But there again, they present a collection of individual national or regional cases, more than a reflection on the articulation between the different levels (Bieler *et al.* 2008, Bronfenbrenner 2007).

One *Global Unions?* chapter though, deals directly with ILMOs. In it, Dan Gallin, himself a former International Union of Food and Allied Workers' official turned observer, evaluates the main challenges facing ILMOs. He stays at the global level and does not consider regional and domestic dynamics, but he does offer interesting leads to build an analytical grid of ILMOs. He draws up a detailed inventory of where ILMOs should be heading in terms of tasks, structures, internal democracy and political programme. He puts forward a programme whereby ILMOs should focus on MNCs, informal work and reinforcing democratic and independent unions. Structurally, he

pleads for a rapprochement, or even a merger, between what was then the ICFTU and GUFs in order to share resources, while decentralizing decision-making procedures in order to reach a more democratic functioning and a higher membership involvement. Finally, he calls for a renewed democratic socialism as ILMOs' political line, based notably on what unions have been doing in South Korea, Brazil and South Africa: "In all three cases, these are trade unions movements which have taken responsibility for the problems of society in general, who have forged strong links with other elements of civil society, in particular communities, and who have political programmes for social reform" (2002: 250).

Gallin's argument can be combined with those of other observers of ILMOs. Gumbrell-McCormick (2000a) also considers that "divisions between ITSs [GUFs] and international confederations [the ICFTU, the WCL and the WFTU] are more serious today than ideological divisions" (2000a: 205, my translation). She also notes that the national level plays a significant role in ILMOs' dynamics (2000a: 202). Richard Hyman is also known for his dialectic approach and his study of ILMOs tends to insist more on historical trends than on recent changes. He showed how ILMOs have always navigated between a "bureaucratic" and a more "activist" poles while also developing a "diplomatic" side, notably in their relations to international organizations (Hyman 2005b). Therefore, he relativizes the novelty of the current situation and places the challenges that ILMOs now confront in their historical context.

Despite the insights these works have to offer, the lack of detailed empirical studies on ILMOs' internal dynamics makes it necessary to rely on other works in order to build criteria for a thorough analysis of North-South relations within ILMOs. Here, Critical IPE

eclecticism allows for resorting to social movement theories where some useful tools for analyzing organizations have been developed. Initially focused on the domestic level, several authors interested in social movement studies have shifted to the international level and produced insightful analysis on the challenges of transnational activism (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Nevertheless, this field has abandoned trade unions as empirical interest since the late 1970s in favour of other organizations, generally associated to “new social movements” (e.g. women’s groups, human rights NGOs, environmental groups). Indeed, major publications on transnational activism do not deal with unions at all (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997).

Nevertheless, some works on the challenge of North-South cooperation within Transnational Social Movement Organizations point at issues similar to those found within ILMOs. For instance, Smith’s (2002) underlines the challenges posed to “bridging the gap” between NGOs from the North and from the South working on environmental, development and human rights issues. She notes in particular how divergences in terms of strategies (the South being more “radical” than the North) make it difficult to reach not only a shared understanding but also a common agenda. This approach is in line with the “resource mobilization” school, who puts emphasis on leaders, funding, strategies and political opportunities in order to understand how social movements work (Neveu 2000). These criteria can be used in order to better understand North-South dynamics within ILMOs.

I propose a set of three criteria with which these dynamics can be approached. The first one is the formal control of ILMOs’ structures: what is the composition of the leadership? Which affiliates are the main contributors of funds and what influence does it

give them? What room is left for Southern autonomy within ILMOs' structures? The second pertains to the ILMOs' positions: to what extent do they take Southern affiliates' perspectives into consideration? Do they tend to build a consensus around contentious issues or do they simply reflect the North's positions? The third focuses on ILMOs' strategies: do affiliates from the Global South influence them? Have ILMOs operated a shift from what they used to do to new ways of practising unionism inspired from the South? These criteria will be used to understand if and how ILMOs' structures, positions and strategies, both political and sectoral, have changed in favour of their Global South affiliates since the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization.

This literature review indicates that critical IPE is the most relevant approach to evaluating ILMOs for three reasons: it is holistic, eclectic and dialectic. Its holism makes it possible to take into consideration both faces of ILMOs' activities: bargaining and political activities, whereas other approaches generally give much more importance to one over the other. Its eclecticism broadens the disciplinary scope to all social sciences, leading to necessary rapprochements such as the one between the two IRs advocated by Harrod, and to the inclusion of historical and geographical perspectives into the analysis. Its dialectic is the counterpart of its eclecticism, as it provides the common ground on which different disciplinary approaches can meet up. In the case of ILMOs, a dialectical approach means that they are considered as complex organizations, and that important events like the end of the Cold War or the spread of neoliberal globalization have contradictory effects on them, creating certain movements as they also generate counter-movements. In other words, dialectic should not only be applied at the macro level (i.e.

society, world economy) but also at the level of organizations themselves, whose internal dynamics respond to contradictory movements.

The relevance of studying the impact of the spread of neoliberal globalization and of the end of the Cold War on ILMOs has been established by all trends in the literature. Whereas the former led to a challenging of the ideological debate that defined ILMOs' dynamics since the end of WWII, the latter posed new threats and presented new opportunities to labour internationalism. In that context, looking at North-South relations within ILMOs is essential to understand those changes. Confronted with an ideological crisis, the international labour movement is pushed by many actors and observers to "look South", at "young" unions who have supposedly managed to renew a progressive agenda by building bridges with other social movements and by getting involved politically. A globalized economy also means an increasing competition between Northern and Southern economies, which is reflected in internal debates within ILMOs as to the positions to be taken facing MNCs or free trade initiatives.

If some authors neglect North-South relations within ILMOs, others, either among the sceptics or within IPE works, take them seriously. Nevertheless, although "sceptics" generally lack a dialectical approach by generalizing the situation of the South or simply overlooking its impact within ILMOs, many IPE authors fail to genuinely make the connection between what is said at the national, regional and global levels. Indeed, it is now generally acknowledged, mostly thanks to critical geographers, that globalization does not mean so much the disappearance of the local/national to the benefit of the global, as the re-articulation of the different levels and the blurring of the borders between them (Herod 2001, Wills 1996, 2002). Nevertheless, when it comes to ILMOs or

labour internationalism more generally, these levels keep being treated separately from each other, mostly by showing how globalization acts on the local or vice versa, but rarely by demonstrating the actual interactions between them, and more specifically how domestic and regional dynamics have an impact on ILMOs' dynamics at the global level. The rare cases when this has been done were dealing with changes made to the AFL-CIO's foreign policy, and marginally looked at their impact on ILMOs. By studying North-South relations within ILMOs and taking seriously the necessity to look at how national, regional and global levels are articulated, there is room for a detailed study of some Southern labour movements, and how their national and regional dynamics interact with recent changes occurring within ILMOs' dynamics. That is the task this thesis takes up.

## **2. ILMOs' History: A Tale of Divisions**

In most accounts, the history of ILMOs starts with the end of WWII. Although the dynamics issued from the Cold War were indeed determining factors for ILMOs, it is necessary to look at the earlier development of international unionism from the time of the Industrial Revolution in order to better understand their current situation. Hence, the first section will outline ILMOs' history until WWII whereas the second section will focus on Cold War dynamics. This review will lead to identify three main tendencies within ILMOs in the Americas when it comes to North-South relations: U.S. domination of the hemisphere; Latin American independence; European influence. These tendencies will contribute to a better reading of the situation since the end of the Cold War.

History is essential to the critical approach developed in the previous literature review. We saw how Cox makes a connection between historical materialism and

dialectic, and how knowing the historical structures at work is essential to explain actors' resistance or consent to the political order. Identifying historical tendencies allows for a better understanding of the dialectic of organizations. Instead of leading to an analysis based on typologies, which generally tends to oversimplify the complexity of actors, the historical approach presents a more heuristic way to grasp the dynamics of change. Hyman (2005b) suggests looking at ILMOs through three tendencies: agitation, bureaucracy, diplomacy. This approach is useful to understand how these three characteristics successfully appeared but then continued to coexist with various intensities depending on the period. I propose to complete this approach by looking more specifically at the historical tendencies of North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas. This will be the basis on which I will then develop a critical approach to this topic.

### **2.1. Early Labour Internationalism: a (Mostly) European Affair**

The history of ILMOs before World War II is mostly confined to the European continent. At that time, the same debates were animating unions at the national and international levels. Among these, the question of the quasi-absence of non-European representatives was not of prime concern. Instead, the relation to socialism and to political parties, issues related to nationalism and war, and later the link to communist organizations were at the forefront of the discussions among ILMOs' affiliates.

The origins of modern labour internationalism essentially rest on two foundations: on the one hand, corporatism, a legacy of medieval trade guilds, led to the founding of craft unions which were the first to set up formal sectoral ILMOs; on the other hand,

socialist internationalism, understood in its broader sense, gave birth to what would become political ILMOs. These two branches have coexisted up until the present, although they went through considerable tensions and structural changes over time.

When founded in 1864, the International Workingmen Association (IWA, the 1<sup>st</sup> International) welcomed all sorts of socialist-inclined organizations, whether they defined themselves as political parties, trade unions, mutual societies or cooperatives. The increasing tensions between its Marxist and anarchist components led to its collapse in 1876. Its most important successor, the Socialist International (SI, the 2<sup>nd</sup> International), founded in 1889, also included both political parties and trade unions in its ranks. Pretty soon though, unions decided to launch their own structure that, although narrowly linked to the SI, would have a certain level of autonomy: the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC). Despite its relative ideological homogeneity in comparison to the IWA, the ISNTUC was divided by various political debates. An important one was the relationship unions should maintain with political parties. On that issue, representatives from the British, German and French labour movements differed considerably (Dreyfus 2000: 30). Britons defended trade unionism and their own strategy of having a Labour Party that would directly represent workers at the Parliament, under the strict control of the unions. German social democracy left much more power to the party itself, and strictly confined the perimeter of unions' activities to labour relations in the workplace. Finally, French anarcho-sindicalism attached great importance to trade unions' independence (from political parties), and to their ability to bring forward their positions on any kind of socio-political issue.

During its first years of activity, the ISNTUC was largely dominated by Germans. Benefiting from “a massive and concentrated working class” and “a powerful and centralized trade union movement under the strict rule of the [social democratic party] SPD” (Dreyfus 2000: 42), German unionists were able to shape the ISNTUC at the image of their conception of unionism: a discreet, mostly administrative structure, that would leave the SI all the space it needed to occupy the political terrain. Although the balance of power shifted a bit during the years, the most influential affiliates remained those of Central and Northern Europe (e.g. Austria, Belgium) defending a similar model of service-oriented, reformist unionism.

The only non-European affiliate to ever join the ISNTUC was the AFL. Although it had maintained relations with the ISNTUC and with some of its affiliates since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it only formally joined the organization in 1910, granting itself the monopoly of representation for North America as it vetoed the membership application from the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers of the World (IWW) and even, although only temporarily, of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) (Dreyfus 2000: 57).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the AFL played an important role in the reshaping of the organization that started in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It consolidated what would become the major orientations of political ILMOs: a reformist, non-revolutionary ideology, an independence from the political parties and a relative proximity to sectoral ILMOs that were put in place at that same period.

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<sup>12</sup> To that end, the AFL used the rule adopted by the ISNTUC in 1902 following which “a single national centre of the trade unions will be recognized for each country and it alone will be admitted to the international conferences” (Dreyfus 2000: 45). This rule was maintained for a long time, and then transformed into the right of any affiliate to veto the application of another union from the same country. The fact that the AFL could stretch this rule to veto the TLC shows the great level of influence exerted by Americans both in the ISNTUC and over their Canadian counterparts.

Indeed, in parallel to the ISNTUC, branch-based unions started fairly early to set up International Trade Secretariats (ITSSs). Focused on industrial issues, they did not have to deal with the same political debates that were plaguing the ISNTUC. Concentrating on international solidarity activities between their affiliates, they were promoting a much more “pragmatic” and “apolitical” labour internationalism than political ILMOs. Although independent from the ISNTUC, they were close to it, in particular because many of their own affiliates were also members of national union centres affiliated to the ISNTUC. There were up to 28 ITSSs by 1914, each representing a sector of the growing industries (Dreyfus 2000: 39).

Industrialization and labour mobility were significant determinants of the way ILMOs developed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The German ascendancy on the ISNTUC can be explained by the fact that this country was at the heart of the European industrial development at that time. The German labour movement, founded on a centralized structure and a large membership, had the material capacity and legitimacy to take the lead. Besides, the geographic position of Germany made it even more susceptible than others to receive massive influx of foreign workers in order to feed its growing industry: “As a rapidly developing industrial country during this period, Germany drew labor from all sides” (Hyman 2005b: 140). This phenomenon was a prime concern for ILMOs and called for international labour solidarity in order to reach equity between those workers (both to improve the condition of migrant labour and prevent potential social dumping), another explanation of the German interest in the ISNTUC.

Those elements, industrialization and labour mobility, can also explain why ILMOs have not reached other continents than Europe. In the case of North America, the

competition between workers from different regions was dealt with by the institution of nation-wide unions in the U.S. and the creation of an original North American invention, so-called “international unions”, in order to neutralize the potential of Canada as a pool of cheap labour. These “international unions” were actually U.S.-based unions with locals in the U.S. and Canada (Palmer 1992, Panitch and Swartz 2003). For decades, they would represent the majority of the Canadian unionized workforce. In 1957, Montague noted that “as far back as membership figures are available, international unions have consistently taken in more than one-half of the total union membership in Canada” (Montague 1957: 71). Despite their name, they cannot be considered as ILMOs as they are not truly “international” but simply “bi-national”.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the North American reality (including the continental size of the countries forming it) and the peculiarities of its labour movement (“international unions”) made ILMOs less of a necessity for North American unions to confront industrialization and labour mobility than it was for their European counterparts. At that time, Mexico was not really considered part of the North American economic space, but we will see that U.S. unions engaged a very similar strategy towards it when it became a more significant economic player.

Despite this distance between the AFL and the ISNTUC, the former had a significant impact on the founding of the latter’s successor, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). Re-launched in 1919, after a false start in 1913,<sup>14</sup> the IFTU was to symbolize not only the renaissance of labour internationalism after the devastating World War I, but also the post War hope of a better world, mirrored in other initiatives

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<sup>13</sup> “International unions” were also frequently accused, in particular by Canadians, of being controlled only by their U.S. affiliates, which makes them even less “international”.

<sup>14</sup> The IFTU was first launched in 1913, following a reform of the ISNTUC’s structures. The outbreak of WWI prevented the new ILMO from genuinely establishing itself. Considering the considerable changes induced by WWI, its affiliates decided to “re-found” it in 1919, although keeping the same name.

such as the League of Nations or the International Labour Organization (ILO). All were threads of a same fabric, supposed to protect the world from another large-scale war but also from the raising “threat” of communism. Just as the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was instrumental in setting up the League of Nations, the AFL’s President, Samuel Gompers, was the kingpin of the reshaping of the IFTU and of the establishment of the ILO: “Both the decision to hold the ILO’s inaugural conference in Washington and the tenor of the Labour Charter clearly reflected the influence of Gompers and the AFL” (Van Goethem 2000: 81). Thanks to Gompers, the labour movement’s discussions were narrowly related to the Versailles Treaty talks, allowing the IFTU to be seen as a major piece of the post-War puzzle being put in place in Versailles. Meanwhile, the AFL was pushing its own agenda, lobbying in favour of national sovereignty (so that the IFTU does not have significant power over its affiliates) but also trying to minimize the influence of Europeans and of “radical” ideas in the international labour movement. Although it partly reached its first goal (limiting the ability of the IFTU to coerce its affiliates), it did not succeed in significantly limiting the European take on the IFTU, and therefore decided not to join the newly reborn political ILMO. There again, the parallel with the U.S. government is striking, as it never joined the League of Nations despite the mark Wilson left on this organization.<sup>15</sup> Van Goethem notes that

the notion that national sovereignty could be subordinated to international agreements was enough to ensure that one of the major sponsors of the League of Nations and the ILO, the United States, refused to join either organization in 1919 (...) The AFL’s attitude towards the IFTU ran broadly parallel to this (...) The notion of submission to a body that would issue binding decisions was simply unthinkable to the AFL. (Van Goethem 2000: 87)

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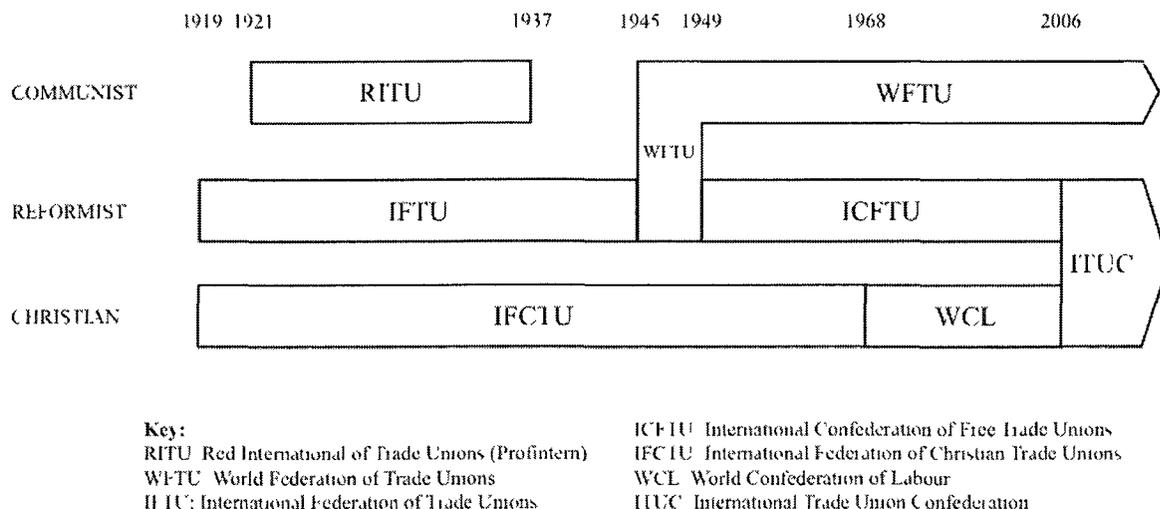
<sup>15</sup> Although in that case, the U.S. officially did not join the League not by fear of not controlling it but because of the Senate’s isolationist views. Nevertheless, the two may be connected.

At the same time when social democratic unions re-launched the IFTU, two other ideological families organized their own political ILMOs. In the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Lenin set up the Communist International (the 3<sup>rd</sup> International, or Comintern) and imposed on candidates for affiliation 21 conditions that led to significant splits in most socialist parties in Europe. A similar movement happened among unions when the Red International of Trade Unions (RITU, or Profintern) was founded in 1921. From now on, social democratic unions would control the IFTU while their communist counterparts would join the RITU.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Catholic unionism, authorized by the Vatican since the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, also launched its own ILMO in 1920, the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU). This three-way split of the international labour movement between social democrats, communists, and Christians would characterize the political ILMOs' landscape for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up until 2006.

**Figure 2. Main Political ILMOs by Ideology Since 1919**

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<sup>16</sup> Eventually, the communist movement would suffer another split between the majority, who stayed aligned on Moscow, and the followers of Leon Trotsky, who would try to defend a more “genuine” labour internationalism, detached from the Soviet foreign policy. In the unions and the communist parties alike, the Trotskyites were quickly excluded by mainstream Communists and had to resort to found their own (marginal) organizations and form minority currents within communist or social democratic organizations.



During the interwar period, the balance of powers in the IFTU shifted from German to British unions, as a consequence of the outcome of World War I. Two important debates in this period were the relationship the IFTU should maintain with the ITSs and the link it should have to communist unions and the RITU. In the end, ITSs became much closer to the IFTU than they were to the ISNTUC, but never formally affiliated themselves to the IFTU. The question of communist unions was never fully solved, as some IFTU's affiliates preached for a rapprochement between the two families, above all facing the rising threat of fascism in Europe, whereas others refused to see any other alternative than communist unions joining the IFTU and therefore accepting its ideological programme –i.e. abandoning communism. Among those recalcitrant to any IFTU-RITU cooperation was the AFL, which, despite the fact that it was not a formal member of the IFTU, still exerted some influence on it, above all when it came to the relation to communist organizations.

Once again, the question of the quasi-absence of non-European affiliates never really became an issue. Van Goethem notes that the IFTU President, Walter Citrine, expressed a significant interest for recruiting non-European affiliates in particular after

German unions were crushed by the newly established Nazi regime and therefore left the IFTU with a considerable lack of resources (Van Goethem 2000: 131). Nevertheless these efforts did not significantly change the situation, as few non-European unions joined the ranks of the IFTU.

The Common Front strategy initiated by Stalin in the mid-1930s had an important impact on the balance of political ILMOs. In 1937, the RITU was dissolved and communist unions were encouraged to closely cooperate with social democrats in order to block at all cost the rise of fascism. They never formally joined the IFTU, but the ties were strengthened. Also, the AFL finally joined the IFTU in 1937, giving to the international labour movement an image of unity it had not enjoyed for a while. But the breakout of World War II would once again put this unity at risk. All political ILMOs returned to the same limbo they were during World War I. The fight against Nazi Germany, particularly from the Operation Barbarossa on, when the USSR joined the Allies, led the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) to multiply its contacts with Soviet trade unions but also with the U.S. CIO, which had always been more open to a dialogue with communists than its AFL rival.<sup>17</sup> It is on the ground of these tripartite talks that the project of a World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was born, a political ILMO

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<sup>17</sup> The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was founded in 1938 when several AFL affiliates decided to split from the Federation in order to promote a different kind of unionism, industrial unionism. Industrial unions organize workers on a workplace basis, contrary to craft unions (AFL founding unions) who organize them on an occupational basis. Industrial unions were generally more inclusive (they accepted unskilled workers) and more progressive than craft unions. CIO affiliates shared a social consciousness and considered that they had a broader social and political role to play than only representing labour in the workplace (Denis 1986). They were therefore more open to socialist ideas in general, and maintained more open relations with communist activists, both domestically and internationally (Abella 1973, MacShane 1992: 97-143). The AFL and the CIO would eventually merge back in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO. Since then, the distinction between industrial and craft unions has become blurrier, most U.S. unions practising a mix of the two both in terms of organization and political ideology.

rallying unions from all ideological backgrounds that could be set up as soon as the War would be over.

During the interwar period, the Americas were quite isolated from what happened among ILMOs. Unions from the Americas had a sparse representation in both the IFTU and ITSS, and other dynamics than the ones taking place in Europe were driving international labour activities in the Americas. On the one hand, the AFL quickly tried to extend its strategy of “international unions”, first implemented in Canada, to the rest of the continent. That was a way for the AFL to “concentrat[e] its international activity on asserting hegemony within the American continent” (Hyman 2005b: 141) after its withdrawal from the IFTU. On the other hand, a significant section of Latin American unions started to organize a movement against U.S. “labour imperialism” and in favour of an independent Latin American labour movement.

These contradictory tendencies led to the establishment of two rival ILMOs in the Americas. In 1919, the AFL launched the Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL) which goal was basically to promote the introduction of “international unions” in Latin America. For many observers, the PAFL was the perfect embodiment of “labour Monroeism”, i.e. a vision where U.S. unions would pursue the Latin American policy engaged by Washington under President Monroe: “For some authors, the PAFL was, in the trade union field, an extension of the Monroe Doctrine. It is very likely that, at least, the AFL would try to use it to organize workers and gain some kind of political representation in Latin America, like what happened in Canada, where a majority of

unionized workers were already affiliated with the AFL” (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 51, my translation).<sup>18</sup>

This Monroe Doctrine initially stated that Latin America was to be preserved from European colonialism, and was later understood as a blank cheque given to the U.S. to intervene whenever they seem appropriate in Latin American countries’ internal affairs (Gilderhus 2006). This latter interpretation was the one driving the PAFL, as it progressively turned into the “guardian” of Latin American unions: “Gompers rapidly began to conceive of the PAFL as the protector of the southern hemisphere against the onslaught of revolutionary socialism. The PAFL would be the great wall against the encroachment of organized European labor; it would be the “Monroe Doctrine” of the hemispheric labor movement” (Toth 1967: 275). Among other things, the PAFL was used to block the expansion of the IWW in Latin America (see Toth 1967: 275 and Herod 2001: 141) or to support the more conservative sections of the Mexican labour movement when it was challenged by a progressive opposition (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 204-207). Although it was a very important tool in the eyes of Samuel Gompers, the PAFL quickly lost steam after Gompers’ death, as his successor did not put as much emphasis on the Americas as he did. By the beginning of the 1930s, it was already considered a fading organization.

Moreover, in 1938, Latin American unions who disagreed with labour Monroeism founded the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL), thus giving the “Latin American independence” trend its own ILMO. Although opposing the AFL and “Yankee imperialism”, the CTAL quickly built a narrow relationship with the newly born CIO, the AFL’s domestic rival and the representative of a more progressive type of

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<sup>18</sup> The author quoted in reference to “labour Monroeism” is Arcos (1964).

unionism (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 212, Herod 2001: 141-142). More broadly, the goal of its founders was to build “a coalition of Latin American unionism to open spaces and gain a presence in the new international scenarios that were showing signs of profound change in the pre-War era” (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 213, my translation). The ideology of the CTAL was in phase with many nationalist and progressive movements in Latin America at that time, some of them so significant that they actually influenced the establishment of quasi-welfare states under corporatist arrangements.

Mexico is an important example, where a progressive corporatist regime was put in place under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, with the support of organized labour (we will come back on that case in more details in the next chapter). Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a major Mexican union leader during the interwar period, was a strong supporter of these policies and one of the main founders of the CTAL. At the same time, he was very close to the international communist movement, attending Comintern meetings and relaying their decisions in Latin America, in particular within the CTAL (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 205-211). This concordance between Latin American left-wing nationalisms and communist orientations led to the consolidation and legitimation of the CTAL, but “while the CTAL was initially quite ideologically diverse, within a short time Communist elements came to dominate the organization” (Herod 2001: 142). Yet, it did not lose its power of attraction for many Latin American unions and its image as the strongest opponent to U.S. labour imperialism in the region. There too, WWII put the brakes on international union activities. Nevertheless, the CIO was quickly involved in the efforts to launch the WFTU, and the CTAL was to become a regional organization of the newly born federation.

Therefore, up until the end of WWII, ILMOs evolved according to different trends at the world level and at the level of the Americas. If the central debates in Europe were the relationship to political parties and later the opposition between social democrats and communists, the driving force in the Americas had to do with U.S. imperialism in the region and its opposition. From the end of WWII on, these tendencies will tend to converge, although the Americas will retain their specificities as a region.

## **2.2. Cold War Dynamics**

The experience of the unified WFTU was short-lived. Indeed, this “false dawn” (Carew 2000: 165) only lasted four years and was filled with internal conflicts and rivalries between the affiliates of what should have been the broadest-based trade union International ever. Yet the early stages were promising. The TUC, the CIO and the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) had managed to gather around their project a substantive number of national trade union centres, who were sharing the hope that “the wartime collaboration that had spanned the ideological divide [between communists and non-communists] would be maintained” (Carew 2000: 168). The WFTU was driven by the enthusiasm following the war and “part of a new global framework of economic and social institutions that would build a better world and eliminate the causes of war” (Carew 2000: 169).

The sceptics, led by the AFL (who never joined the WFTU) and some ITSs, would nevertheless be proven right. Tensions between communists and non-communists would soon reach a breaking point. While some, under the Soviet influence, defended the idea of a mostly political organization, devoted to the achievement of socialism, others, in particular the TUC and the CIO, were promoting a more strictly industrial mandate,

focused on the immediate improvement of workers' life. It became quickly evident to many Western affiliates that the AUCCTU was trying to exploit the WFTU for Moscow's ends, whereas the AFL was working to undermine the new International (Carew 2000: 171-172).

The official reason for the break-up of the WFTU was the Marshall Plan and the position organized labour should take facing it. Although the AUCCTU and its allies were pushing for denouncing the Plan as an imperialist tool, non-communist affiliates were generally supportive of it. The European Recovery Plan Trade Union Conference, held in 1948 by the supporters of Marshall Aid (both inside and outside the ranks of the WFTU) sealed the opposition between the two blocs. Another point of disagreement was the relation the WFTU should maintain with ITSs. Soviet trade unions were proposing to formally incorporate the latter into the former, while others (including most of the ITSs themselves) preferred a looser relationship. Failure to reach an agreement on this issue was the official motive given by the TUC, the CIO and the Dutch union centre to leave the WFTU. They would be quickly followed by more than 30 other affiliates, all from the Western bloc. From then on, the WFTU will become nothing more than the International of the Soviet-inclined labour movement.

Although the story of the first years of the WFTU tends to indicate the strong influence the Cold War had on the international labour movement, several authors underline this was not only a one-way relationship. Tensions between communist and non-communist trade unions existed before the Cold War, and they contributed to "build" the Cold War as much as Cold War politics shaped ILMOs: "the cold war between the former allies simply supplied the context in which old labour movement animosities were

rekindled” (Carew 2000: 183). MacShane even goes a bit further when he argues that “intra-left hostility in the trade-union movement was deep rooted, and it is wrong to argue that it was created, or even resurrected, by the Cold War” (MacShane 1992: 5). Whatever one’s position on this chicken and egg situation, it is fair to say that political ILMOs’ settings matched the Cold War pattern, and even outlived it as they would last until 2006, 15 years after the fall of the USSR.

Now that all non-communist organizations had left the WFTU, the time had come for another political ILMO to appear. The newly founded International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU, the adjective “free” explicitly referring to non-communist) would not be without its own internal dissensions. It did manage to bring back the AFL into the international labour movement (along with the CIO and the independent mine workers’ union, with whom it would share the U.S. representation), but it could not attract Christian unions, which decided to maintain their own political ILMO. The ICFTU was founded against communist-leaning state-sponsored unionism, but its ideological homogeneity stopped there. As early as its first years, heated debates occurred between its affiliates as to the nature of this “free unionism” it claimed to represent. For the AFL and its allies, including the French Force ouvrière (FO, founded out of a split from the communist-led CGT), free unionism had to be understood as broadly as possible, as long as it excluded communist unions.<sup>19</sup> For many European unionists, though, a deeper definition had to be used, which would include a social democratic project and even some degree of openness to communist organizations, at least for a dialogue. This idea was also defended by several affiliates from the developing world, for which the fight against

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<sup>19</sup> FO has often been accused by the CGT of having benefitted from funds from the U.S. government in order to undermine the communist-led French labour movement (see Andolfatto 2007: 28).

communism was much less a priority than the improvement of the economic conditions of their newly independent countries.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these tensions, the ICFTU solved some of the problems the WFTU had been struggling with. Among these, the ICFTU reached an agreement with ITSs as to the rules that should preside over their relations. The “Milan Agreement”, signed in 1951, established that the ICFTU and the ITSs belong to the same “free trade unionism family”, but rejected any hierarchy or formal affiliation between them (Carew 2000: 211, Gordon 2000: 89). ITSs would respect the general principles of the ICFTU but they would keep their autonomy, and their ability to have affiliates who are not necessarily related to ICFTU’s members in their own country.<sup>21</sup>

The beginning of the 1950s was also the time when the ICFTU really established itself as the most representative labour body of the Western world. It gained a voice at the ILO and at the UN, and focused much of its efforts on European reconstruction after the war. In 1956-1957, the ICFTU launched its International Solidarity Fund (ISF), which would become the cornerstone of its activities in developing countries. The fund was destined to help affiliates in difficulty but also to support organizing efforts in the South. The ISF opened what some called the “Golden Age” of the ICFTU (Carew 2000: 271), during which the Confederation carried education and organizing projects in the developing world, progressively enlarging its focus and building genuine international labour solidarity.

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<sup>20</sup> Carew (2000: 197) cites in particular the positions defended by representatives from the Indian, Peruvian and Uruguayan delegates during the founding conference of the ICFTU in 1949.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, the French CGT’s federations for the graphic and entertainment industries were affiliated to ITSs, whereas their union centre was a WFTU affiliate (Régis 2006: 48).

Another important originality of the ICFTU in comparison with its predecessors was its decision to launch regional organizations, in order to get closer to its affiliates and to the rank-and-file workers. To that end, four regional structures were set up: the European Regional Organization (ERO), the Asian Regional Organization (ARO, later to become the Asia-Pacific Regional Organization), the African Regional Organization (AFRO) and the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT, always known under its Spanish acronym). The ERO would follow a peculiar path, to which we will come back later, while the ARO and the AFRO would remain for decades mere administrative relays of the ICFTU's leadership, without real autonomy. ORIT though, constituted an exception. Indeed, it was founded out of a pre-existing organization, launched in 1948 (before the ICFTU itself was born): the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT). The CIT was the indirect successor to the PAFL. Sponsored by the AFL, it belonged to the efforts of the U.S. labour federation to undermine the WFTU, or at least isolate Latin America from the influence of communism and of its objective allies. It was also a way to offer the CTAL some resistance, which was narrowly associated with the newly established WFTU.<sup>22</sup> With this in hand, it was easy for the AFL to exert a considerable influence on what would become the ICFTU's regional branch in the Americas: "the fact that the ORIT's forerunner predated the ICFTU led it to claim a special status among regional organizations (...) In practice it tended to operate on a looser rein from Brussels than its counterparts in Asia and in Africa. In reality it took

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<sup>22</sup> With the launching of ORIT, the CTAL would quickly lose steam. The WFTU acknowledged its disappearance in 1964 and replaced it with the Congreso Permanente de Unidad Sindical de Trabajadores de América Latina (CPUSTAL) whose influence would remain marginal in comparison with ORIT's (see Xelhuantzi López 2002: 87). The strength of the U.S. strategy in the region combined with the persecution of progressive (and particularly communist) unions by many authoritative regimes in Latin America would severely damage the influence the international communist movement enjoyed among Latin American unions during the CTAL era. In Cold War terms, the USSR never had an influence comparable to the one of the United States in the region, with a few exceptions, particularly Cuba.

its lead from the Americans” (Carew 2000: 222). Although the name was changed from CIT to ORIT, the very idea that it should be a pan-American organization, and not strictly a Latin American one, was kept. Also, the membership of ORIT and its functioning were largely taken from the CIT. This would allow the AFL (and latter the AFL-CIO) to keep a firm hand on Latin American affairs, to the displeasure of Europeans. Indeed, strong divergences continued to exist between the two sides of the Atlantic, in particular in relation to the attitude to be adopted facing communist unions. ORIT would become an important theatre for this confrontation.

Another issue narrowly related to this question is the maintaining, by the AFL, of its own “foreign policy” instruments despite the efforts made by the ICFTU to “centralize” assistance programmes. Indeed, the ISF was supposed to be the main channel through which funds would be transferred from the North to the South. But the U.S. labour movement never fully adhered to this idea and kept its own organizations. During the few years it was isolated from the international labour movement, the AFL had already founded the Free Trade Union Committee, devoted to the fight against communist influence in the labour movement. The operations of this committee were maintained when the ICFTU was founded, even with the launching of the ISF. But the real stimulus came when President John F. Kennedy initiated in 1961 the “Alliance for Progress”, a policy destined to fight communism in Latin America after the Cuban Revolution. Aware of the important governmental funds available for international trade union activities in the region, the AFL-CIO established the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). Despite its name, the AIFLD only carried out activities in Latin America, other institutes being founded a bit later for the other regions of the

world.<sup>23</sup> The role of the AIFLD was mostly to channel funds from the U.S. government to “free” (i.e. non-communist) trade unions in Latin America, above all in the form of training programmes. Co-chaired by the AFL-CIO President, it had for other co-Chair a notoriously anti-union businessman, taking the form of a neo-corporatist organization managed by both capital and labour: “In administrative terms AIFLD was a joint labour-management body with senior American businessmen on its board of trustees. Its chairman was J. Peter Grace of W.R. Grace, a holding company with Latin American interests in petroleum, paper, chemicals, transports, banks and insurance companies, and an anti-labour record to boot” (Carew 2000: 315).

Extremely well funded by the U.S. government, the AIFLD was perceived by the ICFTU as a direct competitor to the ISF and as a vector of the U.S. way to deal with communist unions.<sup>24</sup> This meant supporting anticommunist union activists at all costs, even when they were related to violent right-wing dictatorships, or even offering cover to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents in Latin America. In her extensive study of the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy, Sims shows how the AIFLD drew considerable amounts from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a “U.S. government funded (...) grant-making agency that finances pro-U.S. private groups overseas” (Sims 1992: 11) and quotes a CIA agent describing the AIFLD as “a CIA-controlled labor center financed through AID [U.S. Agency for International Development]” (Sims 1992: 55).

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<sup>23</sup> These are the African-American Labor Center (AALC), founded in 1964, the Asian-American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI), founded in 1968 and the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), founded in 1977 to cover Europe (see Sims 1992: 54-61).

<sup>24</sup> Another indirect effect of the creation of the AIFLD was to encourage another ICFTU affiliate, the German Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB), to follow the same path by mandating the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) to conduct a large part of its international activities (Carew 2000: 296, 317). Although the FES activities did not reach the scale of the AIFLD’s and of the other AFL-CIO’s institutes, it will gain a growing influence on which we will come back in later chapters.

Eventually, the AFL-CIO had such control of ORIT that it became almost impossible to distinguish ORIT from the AIFLD's activities. In other terms, and despite the complaints of Canadian unions,<sup>25</sup> the Americas had become the playground of the U.S. labour movement, with almost no influence from the ICFTU. This led ORIT to adopt political positions with which the ICFTU was very uncomfortable, including supporting dictators such as Batista in Cuba, Castillo Armas in Guatemala or Castelo Branco, who led the coup against democratically-elected Brazilian President Goulart in 1964 (Carew 2000: 316). Xelhuantzi López shows how this strategy allowed the AFL-CIO to build strong allegiances in Latin America by consolidating corporatist organizations:

In the pure style of the Cold War (...) these funding were often used to cultivate loyalties, reward discipline, strengthen clientelism and caciques, and to protect the Mexican labour movement against critiques and external attacks. Thanks to this patronage, the Mexican labour movement was seen during decades as a model of stability, concord and social peace. It is very likely that similar phenomenon happened in other Latin American countries, diverting and perverting any improvement of international labour structures in favour of workers (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 233, my translation)

Herod offers another illustration of the AIFLD influence on the continent by documenting housing projects at the local level, and showing how they constituted tools against the expansion of communism in the region: "the programs' goal was to stimulate local economic development in those neighborhoods and locales in which projects were located, thereby to transform the local geographies of union members' and their families' everyday lives, and thus to limit the appeal of Communist ideology in the barrios, slums, and favellas of the hemisphere" (Herod 2001: 162).

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<sup>25</sup> Gumbrell-McCormick relates the complaints made by Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) representatives to the ICFTU Executive Board in the mid-1970s about the AFL-CIO "whose overwhelming presence had long degraded the strength of ORIT and its affiliates" (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000b: 453).

The conflict between the AFL-CIO and the ICFTU culminated in 1969. Partly because it disagreed with the AFL-CIO's international policy, one of its biggest affiliates, the United Auto Workers (UAW), left the union centre. The leadership of the ICFTU did not offer strong support to its official affiliate (the AFL-CIO), and even considered a direct affiliation from the newly independent UAW. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. The AFL-CIO announced its withdrawal from the ICFTU, with which it had been in disagreement for years over the issues of the relations with communist unions and the maintenance of the AFL-CIO's own foreign institutes, in particular in Latin America. The U.S. labour centre would only come back to the ICFTU in 1982. Nevertheless, and to the outrage of some ICFTU affiliates, the AFL-CIO remained a full member of ORIT. Although this was in explicit violation of the ICFTU Constitution, the leadership of the International did not oppose it too strongly as it was hoping the AFL-CIO would eventually join its ranks again. But this led to an even stronger isolation of Latin America and to an even greater influence of the United States in the region.

Having lost one fifth of its membership with the withdrawal of its biggest affiliate, the ICFTU was now dominated more than ever by its European members. In 1968, Christian trade unions decided to change the name of their International to World Confederation of Labour (WCL), a move that was reflecting the deconfessionalization of several of its most influential members, including the French Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT) and the Dutch Nederlands Katholiek Vakverbond (NKV). This movement away from the Church coincided with a relative radicalization of the Christian-inspired labour movement and with a will to get closer to the ICFTU. Despite extensive talks and common actions, the ICFTU and the WCL did not reach an

agreement for a merger. This was due in particular to the opposition of the WCL's Latin American branch, the Confederación Latino-Americana de Trabajadores (CLAT) to any rapprochement with ORIT, which it considered as a reactionary, U.S.-aligned organization.<sup>26</sup> Paradoxically, this happened when the ICFTU had less power than ever over its pan-American organization. As a consequence of the failure of the ICFTU-WCL rapprochement, both the CFDT and the newly formed Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV) decided to leave the WCL.<sup>27</sup>

This disappointing experience combined with the speeding up of the European integration led the ICFTU's European affiliates to make their own move towards Christian unions, outside of the ICFTU. By 1969, the ERO was a dying organization. With the necessity to present as much a common front as possible to the ever more institutionalized European political power, social democratic and Christian unions launched the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) as an independent body, although acknowledging its belonging to the free trade unionism family, represented by both the ICFTU and the WCL. The ETUC even accepted in its ranks the Italian Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), a communist-led union centre that had nevertheless just stopped being a full member of the WFTU. Therefore, the respective evolutions of ORIT and the ETUC symbolize the widening gap between the European leadership of the ICFTU and the Americas, which were left to the influence of the U.S. labour movement.

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<sup>26</sup> The name CLAT, adopted in 1971, reflects this refusal of the pan-Americanism and the rejection of ORIT's philosophy (Xelhuantzi López 2002: 104).

<sup>27</sup> The FNV was founded in 1976 by the merger of the Catholic NKV and the social-democratic Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (NVV). Although it initially aimed at being affiliated to both the WCL and the ICFTU, it finally decided just to join the latter (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000b: 373).

Nevertheless, the ICFTU tried several times to gain back its regional organization. Ultimately, after ORIT reacted very moderately to the Pinochet coup in Chile, the ICFTU launched its own Committee on Human Rights and Labour Freedom in Latin America in 1978. This allowed the social democratic world labour movement to start regaining some credibility vis-à-vis the brutal dictatorships that had assumed power in Latin America. That also marked the beginning of an internal “clean up” of ORIT which would eventually lead to its “redemption” (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000b: 458) when the regional organization would finally move closer to the line defended by the International, including by expelling some of its most controversial affiliates and getting a bit further from the influence of the U.S. governmental agencies.<sup>28</sup> That movement was facilitated and accelerated by the return of the AFL-CIO to the ICFTU and its will to make amends for some of its positions. The relation between ORIT and the AIFLD, in particular, was loosened, and the regional organization started to assume more progressive positions, even by including elements on economic democracy in its programme. This was particularly crucial as Latin America was entering its “lost decade” and its workers would meet enormous difficulties and face tremendous challenges in the next years to come.

### **2.3. ILMOs’ Historical Tendencies in the Americas**

This overview of the history of ILMOs allows us to identify three significant variables influencing North-South relations in the Americas. The first one is “labour Monroeism”, i.e. the tendency of the U.S. labour movement to consider Latin America as

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<sup>28</sup> ORIT took its distance and eventually excluded its affiliates from Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala and Uruguay, which had been involved in activities to support dictatorships and undermine left-wing resistance (see Gumbrell-McCormick 2000b: 458-459).

its zone of influence. Although it was certainly reinforced during the Cold War, we saw that this tendency pre-existed it, and actually reflects the position of an important part of the U.S. labour movement leadership. Nevertheless, this tendency was not always at the same level of strength. After a peak during the golden years of the PAFL, it decreased under the influence of the CTAL, to progressively regain some ground after the War and reach another peak with the AIFLD-ORIT partnership during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s saw a progressive disjunction between the AIFLD and the ORIT, the former keeping its own U.S.-government-influenced activities while the other gained some independence from the AFL-CIO.

A second variable is the will of the Latin American labour movement to gradually earn its autonomy and to represent itself independently on the international labour scene. This tendency is often combined with the sentiment that Latin America should be united, to gain greater bargaining power in the face of both the United States and other regions of the world. The experience of the CTAL was the apex of this tendency, and it quickly lost steam after the breaking up of the WFTU. During the Cold War, the CLAT probably represented the best illustration of “Latin Americanism”, but its reputation abroad went far beyond its effective membership and influence in the region. From the 1980s on, this tendency seems to experience a slow revival.

Finally, the European influence on the region is another variable that has to be taken in consideration. Although probably the weakest of the three, this tendency was important after WWII, when it was represented by the will of the ICFTU to (re)gain control over ORIT. Although the renewal of ORIT in the 1980s mostly reflects the Latin American need to be set free from the AFL-CIO’s influence, we will see that the

European interest in the region may prove to be another strong tendency after the end of the Cold War.

### **3. Conclusion**

In this chapter, we placed ILMOs in their theoretical and historical contexts.

Regarding theory, Critical IPE was considered to be the most fruitful intellectual tradition to study ILMOs for three reasons. Its holism allows for taking into consideration both sides of ILMOs' activities, bargaining and political activities, and thus both types of ILMOs, sectoral and political. Its eclecticism means it draws on a variety of academic disciplines, which combined findings give a more complete picture of the situation, presenting ILMOs' challenges both in terms of relations with capital (e.g. MNCs) and with governments, IOs or other social movements (e.g. facing an international agreement). Finally its dialectical approach acts to prevent some undue simplifications. In the case of North-South relations, some authors in this tradition display healthy scepticism towards approaches presenting either the North or the South as homogenous or behaving the same way towards ILMOs. Consequently, this approach provides the basis for an analysis that considers the articulations between dynamics at domestic, regional and global levels, an approach often preached but too rarely applied when it comes to studying ILMOs.

A brief review of ILMOs' history showed that many of the Cold War dynamics actually had older roots, going back to fundamental divisions between the social democratic/reformist and communist/revolutionary "families" of the labour movement. The Cold War certainly crystallized this cleavage, but the fall of the Soviet Union did not eliminate all ideological divisions within ILMOs. As well, the Cold War did not create,

although it did exacerbate, the tendency for Northern-based unions (particularly those from the United States) to dominate labour politics in the Americas. The U.S. pretensions on the continent, Latin American unions' will to control their destiny, and, to a lesser extent, European ambitions in the region, all pre-existed the Cold War. But there again, the fight between the socialist camp and the "free world" froze the situation, and it is reasonable to expect that a thaw has happened since the 1990s, potentially unleashing movements in all directions.

With those tools in hand, we can start an analysis of North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas. As the approach taken here puts considerable emphasis on domestic and regional dynamics, it is necessary to determine what have been the main dynamics for the labour movement in Mexico and Brazil, both domestically and regionally, in particular since the end of the Cold War. That is the object of the next chapter.

### CHAPTER 3. UNIONISMS IN BRAZIL AND MEXICO

In order to study the involvement of Mexican and Brazilian unions in ILMOs, it is necessary to have a more precise idea of the main characteristics of Mexico's and Brazil's labour movements. Although Latin American unions have much in common, the specific historical trajectories of each country need to be distinguished in order to compare them. In this chapter, I will identify the similarities and differences between Mexican and Brazilian labour movements, in order to better analyze their involvement in ILMOs in later chapters. I will mostly focus on national structures, as these are the direct affiliates of ILMOs, but I will also mention tendencies observed at the local level, as they often reflect orientations given by the national leadership. I argue that despite their similarities due to the legacy of corporatism, Mexican and Brazilian unionisms present important differences that have a significant impact on their international involvement. The Mexican labour movement remains closely tied to the state, fragmented and so ideologically divided that cooperation between its various components is almost impossible. It is also very isolated at the regional level. By contrast, the Brazilian labour movement, although it remains framed by corporatist laws, has managed to get more autonomy from the state and to become an active socio-political actor. Dominated by the CUT but still ideologically diverse, its components are open to occasional cooperation. Regionally, it has developed long-lasting networks in the Southern Cone, which largely contributed to its involvement in ILMOs.

Unions have played essential roles in the construction of many Latin American modern states. Although the economies of those countries were mostly based on agriculture up until the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economic crisis of the 1930s led

to a crisis of the prevailing liberal, export-oriented model. In response, in many of the larger countries of the region, governments began to promote greater industrialization through economic policies known as the Import-Substituting Industrialization (ISI), based on the constitution of a strong internal market fed by locally produced goods (Oxhorn 1998). This strategy was both aimed at developing a Latin American industry and supported by the strong nationalist tone of those governments, keen to free the continent from the domination of the former colonial powers and from the influence of the United States.

In order to put those policies in place, the support of the workers quickly proved to be crucial.<sup>29</sup> Several strategies were used to gain workers' support and to assert state control over the nascent union movement. Two of them would become symbolic of Latin American politics: populism and corporatism. Oxhorn notes "populist coalitions uniting a weak bourgeoisie with a developmentalist state relied on state corporatist institutions to win the allegiance of the growing working class" (1994: 198). Populism is based on the power of attraction of a charismatic leader, often considered as the "father of the Nation" and who would identify his life with the destiny of the country, asking "his" people for support. The support of the burgeoning working class was a powerful political tool to permit populist leaders to displace previous agricultural and military elites.

Corporatism is defined by Schmitter as "a particular model or ideal-typical arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state" (1974: 86). It implies the incorporation of labour and capital to the state apparatus, usually through their representative bodies – unions. This

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<sup>29</sup> Some unions already existed before the 1930s. Most of them were the result of communist and anarcho-syndicalist militants, inspired by the European early labour movement. These unions did not reach a high level of institutionalization, as industrialization came later in Latin America than in Europe.

incorporation was obtained by both consent and coercion (Rouquié 1987: 195-204). In order to get consent, governments adopted legislation securing the position of unions as well as social programmes protecting workers (Lucena 2000, Tamez González and Moreno Salazar 2000). However, at times Latin American states would shift from a populist to a bureaucratic-authoritarian paradigm to crush workers' demands for a better distribution of wealth (O'Donnell 1973). Both military and civilian forms of bureaucratic authoritarianism came to dominate Latin America in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, repressing any attempt at workers' organization outside of the corporatist framework, and nurturing the development of bureaucratized and often corrupt unions.

ISI policies did manage to foster industrialization and generate growth in many countries of the region. Nevertheless, the debt crisis of the late 1970s had devastating consequences in Latin America, putting many countries on the verge of bankruptcy and resulting in a rapid increase in poverty and inequality during what is now known as Latin America's "lost decade". Facing those extreme conditions, many governments of the region turned to International Financial Institutions (IFIs), in particular the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Murillo 2000). The "Bretton Woods Twins" then prescribed a series of neoliberal measures that came to be known as the "Washington Consensus". The package of neoliberal policies included a drastic reorientation of the role played by the state in the economy, in particular through privatization and the shrinking of social programmes. IFIs also advocated wage freezes and measures destined to attract foreign investment, in particular a flexibilization of labour relations (Zapata 2005, Oxhorn 1998). In many cases, neoliberalism shook the very bases of corporatism without replacing these modes of representation with more autonomous ways to protect

workers. In several countries of the region, this period also corresponded to a formal opening of the political regime, mostly through electoral law reforms and transition to civilian power. Nevertheless, in many cases, this “democratization” was denounced as mostly formal but not effective since, in the facts, political power and wealth remained concentrated in the hands of a limited oligarchy (O’Donnell 1998).

Beginning in the 1980s, various labour movements entered into crisis, looking for a *raison d’être* in neo-liberal Latin America. While some would fight, with some success, to keep the corporatist status quo, others would take the opportunity of the demise of authoritarian regimes to launch genuinely independent and democratic unions. Among the latter, many would face both economic difficulties and the obstacles of neoliberal approaches adopted by their governments. Facing the “double transition”, both political and economic, identified by Zapata (2005), several Latin American unions tried to exit corporatism and create another type of representation regime. Oxhorn (1994) observes that the “neopluralism” which seems to succeed to corporatism in several Latin American countries is still loosely defined and not necessarily more democratic or representative than its predecessor.

At the beginning of the new millennium, a wave of left-wing leaders came to power in many South American countries, raising hopes that the neoliberal era was coming to an end and that a “real” democratization, both political and social, could begin. The balance of those governments would prove ambiguous. They did succeed in curbing some international trade talks, (like when they made the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas fail) but were often criticized at home for not breaking enough from the frameworks put in place by their predecessors. In the specific domain of labour laws,

changes towards a better protection of workers have been noted, but they were not radical enough to constitute a real rupture with neoliberal policies (Ermida Uriarte 2007).

This chapter will deal first with Mexican unionism, showing how it corresponds to a specific type of corporatism and underlining the difficulties created by neoliberal policies and a partial democratization for the emergence of an independent labour movement. Then, I will turn to the main characteristics of Brazilian corporatism, and show how its crisis opened different opportunities to organized labour, but also how the electoral victory of the left raised challenges for unions. This will allow me to compare and contrast Mexican and Brazilian unionism, in order to better explain the differences in their form of involvement in ILMOs.

### **1. Mexican Unions: the Uncertainties of Corporatism**

Mexico is one of the purest examples of corporatism in Latin America.<sup>30</sup> Born in the aftermath of the 1910-1917 Revolution, the modern Mexican state quickly consolidated a regime in which unions would play a central role in the political and economic regulation of society. Contrary to many Latin American countries, Mexico did not experience formal military dictatorship in the two last thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, it was continuously run by a hegemonic party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Under its rule, the corporatist system was constantly enforced and consolidated. If the shift to neoliberalism seriously shook Mexican corporatist institutions, the logic of this system still seems to frame most trade unions activities. The Mexican labour movement therefore finds itself in a state of disarray and uncertainty.

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<sup>30</sup> Depending on the author, the most advanced cases of corporatism are either Mexico, Brazil and Argentina (Oxhorn 1998: 210) or Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela (Portella de Castro 2000: 106).

## **1.1. Mexico's Corporatism**

The Mexican corporatist regime takes the form of a pact between unions and the state, in which the former accept to be supervised by the latter (in their demands and practices), in the name of sound economic development and in exchange for the establishment of a social safety net for workers. Its origins are diverse. If the connection with ISI is undeniable (Oxhorn 1998), its roots actually go deeper, as its basic rules and institutional actors can be traced to the formation of the modern Mexican state, in the aftermath of the 1910-1917 Revolution. The movement that overthrew the dictator Porfirio Díaz and later led to a civil war was fed in part by claims for a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and for workers' freedom to organize. However, the diverse class base and ideological heritage of the Mexican revolution meant that more radical leaders and claims were eventually subordinated to authoritarian and bourgeois elements. The benefits won by workers would come with a cost: a narrow control of unions' activities by the state. Bizberg (1990) explains that if unions were initially used as allies by various political factions in the post-Revolutionary period, they became, from the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) on, faithful allies of the Mexican state in accordance with "a national project accepted by both parties, and which granted a central role to a state-led and -stimulated industrialization of the country" (Bizberg 1990: 110, my translation). Compliance with this pact was eased by "nationalism and populism, the foundation of the alliance between unions and the state, [which] allowed the crystallization of a modernizing project" (Bizberg 1990: 112, my translation).

Workers' aspirations to freedom and social security were formalized in article 123 of the Mexican Constitution, adopted in 1917. Not only does the article include the right

of workers to form unions but it also goes far in formally guaranteeing a number of social and economic rights, including the 8-hour working day, a minimum wage as well as the right to housing and to social security (Villegas Rojas 2006). Although these rights often existed more in theory than in practice, article 123 would eventually become the legal foundation of the Mexican corporatist pact:

the adoption of article 123 of the Constitution was historically used, as early as during the 1917 Constitutional Congress, as an instrument to legitimize political authoritarianism. Also, the subjection of workers' activities to the tolerable limits of economic development was a very complex process, which did not find a permanent solution before the end of the 1940s, when the main industrial unions and the CTM were subordinated to the regime (Bensusán 2000: 62-63, my translation)

Healy (2008: 11-21) shows, however, that Article 123 and the subsequent labour laws adopted by the regime enshrine a gendered division of labour dominated by the image of the "caudillo". This analysis demonstrates how the Revolution's legacy was contradictory, concentrating both progressive aspirations and conservative-authoritarian elements.

It is really with the adoption of the Ley Federal del Trabajo (LFT) in 1931, and later with the Ley Federal de los Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado (LFTSE), in 1963, that the main legal instruments of unions' control by the state would be put in place.<sup>31</sup>

Authors who criticize this system generally point to two sets of measures aiming at tightening the state's grip on unions: those regulating the existence and activities of unions, and those regulating their internal functioning.

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<sup>31</sup> The LFT and the LFTSE are the main texts translating article 123 into the law. Interactions happened between them though, as article 123 was modified in function of what was covered or not by the LFT. Since the LFT did not cover public employees, article 123 was progressively modified so a distinction could be made between workers from the private sector (covered by a section known as "Apartado A") and public employees (covered by "Apartado B"). The LFTSE corresponds, under the law, to Apartado B. Generally speaking, dispositions for public employees are less favourable to workers' freedom to organize than those covering the private sector (see Villegas Rojas 2006: 50-55). Nevertheless, the processes used are similar and lead in both cases to narrow control of unions' structures and activities by the state.

The registration process is the first obstacle to the development of an independent labour movement in Mexico. Alcalde Justiniani (2006: 166-168) shows the biases of the formality known as “toma de nota” that requires at least 20 workers to sign up for a union for it to be registered at the Secretaría del Trabajo y de Previsión Social (STPS, the Labour Ministry). This process gives a lot of latitude for the government to decide which unions can actually be registered. Furthermore, the system is so opaque that it is very difficult for workers to actually know whether they have a union, and who controls it: “many workers do not know even the name of their union leader, his address or the basic rules governing their union, and even less the names of their comrades” (Alcalde Justiniani 2006: 168, my translation). It is all the more difficult for workers then to ask for a *recuento*, the official procedure to repeal union leaders or to challenge the legitimacy of a union, as they cannot access the necessary information. Needless to say the *recuento* is, too, under the responsibility of the government.

The state is also free to determine if and how unions can form federations. One of the main criticisms of the Mexican system is that it does not allow for powerful, nationwide, branch based unions, but instead favours local unions, directly affiliated to a union centre. Bizberg (1990) however points out that while traditional industries, mostly composed of small businesses, are indeed dominated by local unions which act to divide any potential opposition, in other strategic branches, such as the oil, mining, telecommunications or electrical industries, workers are represented by one or two national unions. In the case of public employees, the LFTSE even forces unions to have a single national umbrella organization, the Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado (FSTSE). In the latter case, Bizberg argues, having a single national

organization is also a system of control, as the state makes sure that the leadership of this union is subordinated to the government, and acts as a safeguard against any significant movement of opposition (Bizberg 1990: 119-122). Ultimately, state control over unions is not exerted specifically by dividing unions belonging to the same branch or uniting them, but by the ability of the government to choose which design will serve its interests the best. In both cases, the state's interests, not workers', are the prime criteria. As an observer of the Mexican labour movement told me, Mexican labour history is a "history of artificial unions and artificial divisions"<sup>32</sup> (Interview M3, my translation).

Central to the system of control exerted by the state over unions are the Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje (JCA). Founded in 1927, before the adoption of the LFT, but quickly incorporated to the heart of the Mexican corporatist regime, JCAs are officially tripartite organizations, composed of representatives of the government, workers' unions and employers' organizations. Their exact composition is actually determined by the state –the federal government for the Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje (JFCA) and states' governors for Juntas Locales de Conciliación y Arbitraje (JLCAs).<sup>33</sup> Xelhuantzi López notes that JLCAs "have historically been governors' strongholds to exert power and control" and that they have "supported and promoted specific union confederations and some particular union leaders" (2006: 19, my translation). Therefore, JCAs have become one of the central cogs of Mexican corporatism. It is easy for the state to secure their decisions, as the employers' representatives follow the state's orientations and

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<sup>32</sup> In that sentence, "unions" is a translation of "uniones", in the sense of "gatherings", not "trade unions".

<sup>33</sup> Article 73 of the Mexican constitution determines the respective competences of the federal government and of local governments (Carbonell 2003, Durazo-Herrmann 2009). The federal government has exclusive jurisdiction to legislate over most strategic domains such as energy, natural resources, trade, financial services and labour. Therefore, JCAs, whether local or federal, always apply the federal law. But JLCAs are responsible for applying it to domains of local jurisdiction, whereas the JFCA is responsible for applying it to domains of federal jurisdiction.

workers' representatives are systematically picked from among trade unions aligned with the regime. As tribunals, JCAs have the freedom to interpret the law so that it fits the goals of the corporatist regime. They do so as early as in the registration process, when they grant official recognition (mostly to corporatist unions) and favour the same organizations in case of *recuento*. They also intervene in labour relations, imposing settlements between employers and workers, and possess the capacity to declare a strike invalid, i.e. to force workers back to work at any time.<sup>34</sup>

Another important criticism of the Mexican system is the capacity of the state to determine, by law, the internal functioning of the unions. Particularly problematic for the development of an opposition, or for any kind of union democracy, are the absence of secret ballot and the “closed shop” clause. Alcalde Justiniani illustrates how, in a case of *recuento*, “a great violence is exerted against voting workers, who have to vote in presence of the employer, its representatives and the union leader they aim at revoking” (2006: 170, my translation). Bizberg points more particularly at the “closed shop” formula, which he considers “without a doubt, the most important mechanism of union control” (1990: 123, my translation). He explains that a closed shop can take three forms, and that those three forms are made compulsory in Mexican law: the hiring monopoly, following which an employer can only hire a worker who is or becomes a member of the union; the firing clause, which forces an employer to fire any worker who has been excluded from the union; and the monopoly of representation, which imposes that only one union can represent workers from the same company. Although the closed shop formula has historically been considered a factor reinforcing union power in the Anglo-Saxon world, Bizberg shows that, applied in Mexico, it turns into a powerful institutional

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<sup>34</sup> The official designation used by JCAs is to declare a strike “inexistent”.

padlock on union democracy. Union leadership can actually muzzle internal opposition by controlling who can be hired and who should be fired. The monopoly of representation usefully completes the package by making impossible for the opposition to organize in a separate union.

Therefore, Mexican corporatism relies on a sophisticated legal framework which, in spite of its official dedication to workers' rights and freedom, serves to guarantee a narrow control of unions and their activities by the state. Nevertheless, unions' incorporation into this system was not obtained by coercion only but also by effectively providing workers with some of the social protections granted by article 123. Among these, it is worth noting the creation of the two main social security institutions, the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS, for private sector workers, founded in 1943) and the Instituto de Seguridad y de Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE, for public employees, founded in 1960). Housing has been another important domain of state intervention. Again, two separate organizations were put in place in 1972 to assist private sector workers (the Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores, INFONAVIT) and public employees (the Fondo de la Vivienda del ISSSTE, FOVISSSTE) with their housing needs. Corporatist unions are particularly attached to this heritage and present it as the direct result of their efforts. A CTM elected official told me: "Thanks to the CTM, and thanks to this glorious man here [showing a portrait of Fidel Velázquez<sup>35</sup>], the INFONAVIT was born. It was an idea of Don Fidel Velázquez (...) We did INFONAVIT, us, *diputados* of the labour sector" (Interview M16, my translation). The fact that unions were officially associated with the administration of

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<sup>35</sup> Fidel Velázquez was the historic leader of the CTM, which he headed almost continuously from 1941 to 1997.

several of these organizations (in particular the IMSS and the INFONAVIT) reinforced their corporatist dimension (Bensusán 2000b: 257, my translation).

In addition to these universal protections, specific privileges were granted to some sectors of the Mexican economy, creating “zones of high protection, above all among state-owned companies and big private companies” (Bensusán 2000b: 258, my translation), where labour benefited from better working conditions, and unions were therefore more docile. These branches correspond to the sectors identified earlier by Bizberg where workers are often represented by one national union. That system gave way to the creation and consolidation of corporatist unions who both took advantage of the regime and contributed to maintain it. Not only were they directly involved with the state through some of the systems already mentioned, but they were also narrowly associated with the ruling party, the PRI, to which most of them were formally affiliated:

the model of regulation of the relation between capital and labour was articulated to the political system and to its main characteristics: the concentration of power in the hands of the Executive, the formation of a state-led party (PNR-PRM-PRI) and the incorporation of workers as a sector through unions’ collective affiliation to this party (Bensusán 2000b: 257, my translation)<sup>36</sup>

The privileges granted to unions quickly turned into individual advantages benefiting a select union bureaucracy, in particular through the distribution of political positions. For Bizberg (1990: 116), the maintenance of this corporatist bureaucracy is the final touch to the sophisticated system of control, and completes the work of the STPS and the JFCA in maintaining the historical alliance between unions and the state.

Historically, the first organization that came to exemplify Mexican corporatism was the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), founded in 1918, in the

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<sup>36</sup> The PRI was founded in 1929 as the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) and became the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) in 1938, before adopting its current name in 1946.

aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. The CROM was closely associated with all of the early stages of the establishment of the modern Mexican state (Gutiérrez Castro 2006: 21-24). Nevertheless, its most progressive wing, under the leadership of Vicente Lombardo Toledano (who played a crucial role in the establishment of the CTAL –see previous chapter), split from the CROM and founded in 1936 the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM). Although launched in opposition to what many perceived as the CROM's decay and its excessive involvement in post-Revolutionary partisan politics, the CTM quickly became a faithful ally of President Cárdenas and a central component of Mexican corporatism.<sup>37</sup> This tendency was reinforced when Fidel Velázquez would oust Lombardo Toledano from CTM's general-secretariat in 1941 (Gutiérrez Castro 2006: 28-29). Velázquez, who would stay at the head of the CTM for 56 years, until his death in 1997 at the age of 97, came to embody Mexican unionism and its corporatist dimension.

Although it would dominate the Mexican union scene for most of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the CTM never benefited from a genuine monopoly, contrary to some of its counterparts in other Latin American corporatist regimes, such as the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV) or the Argentine Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT). First of all, the law forces public employees to join their own independent federation, the FSTSE, and therefore forbids the CTM to organize them. Even in the private sector, the CTM is not the only player. Although it lost its dominant status, the CROM continued to exist. Furthermore, the Mexican government made sure

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<sup>37</sup> Along with labour, the PRI also had satellite organizations for the agricultural and popular sectors. The counterpart organization of the CTM for peasants was the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC, founded in 1938) and the one for popular organizations was the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP, founded in 1943).

that the CTM did not become too powerful by encouraging the creation of “rival”, although still corporatist, confederations. One of the most significant examples was the founding of the Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC) in 1952, which could be barely distinguished from the CTM in terms of positions and organization (Guevara 2005: 124-128). The CROC and other minor corporatist organizations responded much more to the ambition of some union leaders to have their “own” organization than to genuine ideological divergence with the CTM.

Although this dispersion was encouraged by the Mexican state, it also wanted to keep corporatist unions under control. To that end, it encouraged the launching of the Congreso del Trabajo (CT) in 1966, in order to reinforce the alliance between the state and corporatist unions in a period of relative economic growth (Bizberg 1990: 114). The CT became the umbrella organization for all Mexican corporatist unions, both confederations and branch-based national unions. Nevertheless, international relations would be the exception to this apparent “corporatist diversity”. That domain would be exclusively reserved by the Mexican government to the CTM, as we will see in more detail in chapter 4. Both at the ICFTU and at the ILO, Mexican workers were represented solely by CTM officials. This would project a distorted image of what Mexican organized labour actually was, and give a sense of homogeneity that did not actually exist. It also gave the CTM a prominent position that it did not even enjoy domestically and later made even more difficult the arrival of alternative Mexican labour voices in international fora.

Despite the apparent hegemony of corporatism, opposition existed, although it remained marginal. The most significant examples were probably the Sindicato

Mexicano de Electricistas (SME), which, despite its official membership in the CT, defended a more progressive and democratic form of unionism (Sánchez 2005); the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT), founded in 1960 by progressive Christians and other radical unionists (Robles *et al.* 2005), but whose international reputation has always been stronger than its actual influence in Mexico; and university workers' unions, most notably the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (STUNAM), founded in 1977. All these organizations tried to cultivate alternative union practices to those of mainstream CT members. Despite their attempts, both within and outside the CT, to challenge the official corporatist unionism, they did not manage to seriously jeopardize the domination of the CTM and its allies up until the debt crisis and the adoption of neoliberal policies by the Mexican state.

## **1.2. Mexican Labour Under Neoliberalism**

According to de la Garza, Mexican corporatism

had to be nourished by a broad exchange system within the rank and file in exchange for social order, support for public policies regarding economic, political and social issues, and the vote for the PRI [...] These exchanges included wage and economic benefits, which until 1976 were on the increase, and an extension of social security and differentiated favors for workers in the work place (De La Garza 2003: 208)

As we saw earlier, the corporatist regime was not only imposed through legal coercion but also by generating consent among workers through social protection and decent wages. During what was labelled the “Mexican miracle”, those three decades of inward-looking growth between the 1940s and the 1970s, the state had the necessary resources to fulfil its part of the exchange and therefore to maintain the system (Gutiérrez Castro 2006: 30-33). When the economic crisis struck in the second half of the 1970s and turned

into the catastrophic “lost decade” of the 1980s, however, the government found it increasingly difficult to do so (Macías Vázquez 2005: 125-131).

As elsewhere, the IFIs proposed a retreat of the state from many sectors of the economy, a weakening of social protections and a shrinking of public spending, all parts of the Mexican state corporatist toolbox (Macías Vázquez 2005: 139-140). By reducing the number of public employees and encouraging the privatization of state-owned companies, they also weakened some of the most significant strongholds of Mexican unionism. Therefore, “by no longer inducing demand, the neoliberal state affected some of the main forms of exchange that enabled corporatism to reproduce” (De La Garza 2003: 209). The outward-oriented economic development model adopted by the Mexican government, led to a drastic transformation of the country’s industrial fabric. In particular, it led to the flourishing of the maquiladoras, the exclusively export-oriented assembly plants mostly located on the U.S.-Mexican border. These plants employ low-skilled and low-waged labour and “genuine unions [are] virtually non-existent” (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 233).

The climax of this era was probably reached during Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s presidency (1988-1994). Under his leadership, the Mexican government not only continued to systematically apply neoliberal policies (Macías Vazquez 2005: 197-198, Cook 1995) but also signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and the United States, ““locking in’ market economic reforms. The sudden loss of protective barriers for Mexican businesses led to closures, which in turn affected employment” (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 240). The signing of NAFTA was indeed, for the Mexican government, a political decision more than an economic one, designed to

comply with the “Washington Consensus” and in the line of neoliberal policies adopted since 1983 (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 36-37). NAFTA would, in particular, foster the development of the maquila, without significant positive impact on the Mexican economy as the inputs would increasingly come from other countries and the output would be immediately exported (Ruiz Nápoles and Moreno-Brid 2006), and wages were held very low. Whereas the U.S. and Canadian labour movements strongly opposed NAFTA because of the risks it posed to employment (Ayres 1998, Stevis 2002: 139-145), Mexican corporatist unions

supported, as usual, the position of the government and of the PRI, endorsing the signature of NAFTA. Some independent unions did too, but for other reasons, as they believed that they could gain some benefits from a greater economic integration with neighbour countries (Jakobsen 2000: 216-217, my translation)

The CTM support for the Mexican government was so strong that when the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas started its uprising against Salinas’ policies in general and NAFTA in particular, “Fidel Velázquez said that the solution to the conflict ‘was not in dialogue, but in the extermination of the EZLN’” (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 82, my translation).

Union resistance to NAFTA did exist in Mexico, but it was marginal. Led by the FAT, it took the form of a coalition of social groups named Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC), which soon established durable links with similar coalitions in the U.S. and in Canada. Nevertheless, it has been shown that the RMALC was largely inspired and encouraged by U.S. and Canadian activists and did not reflect significant opposition to NAFTA within Mexican trade unions, at least at the leadership level (Ayres 1994: 124-125, Xelhuantzi López 2002: 242-245).

It was also under Salinas leadership that “protection contracts” blossomed in Mexico. Considered “simulations of labour contractual agreements between a company and a union actually serving the company” (Bouzas Ortiz 2006: 115, my translation), they are basically “fake collective agreements” signed with “fake unions”. These unions are put in place by the employers with the complicity of the state, using the flaws of the LFT. Workers are not even informed that a union actually “represents” them and they cannot ask it to be replaced because of the LFT provisions. The phenomenon has been so widespread that ILMOs launched a campaign against it, as we will see in later chapters.

Salinas also tried to take advantage of divisions that began to appear among corporatist unions in the 1980s (Aguilar García and Vargas Guzmán 2006: 46-92). Facing the crisis of the corporatist pact, certain union leaders had decided to challenge the authority of the traditional structures of Mexican labour in order to promote a “new unionism”.<sup>38</sup> This “new unionism” was mostly defined by a greater openness to internal democracy and strategies “that would rely less on political exchange and more on cooperative collective bargaining” (Bensusán and Cook 2003: 241). Productivity-related bonuses were a central piece of “new unionists” bargaining demands. This orientation matched with Salinas’ will to promote industrial peace through productivity incentives in order to reorient the Mexican economy towards exports. Therefore, the country entered a period of “neoliberal corporatism” with a significant increase of the number of collective agreements incorporating productivity bonuses and a declining number of labour conflicts (De La Garza 2003: 210-211).

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<sup>38</sup> Healy (2008: 117-150) documents the case of the Volkswagen union where Salinas supported the union’s executive decision to leave the CTM and join a newly formed independent federation in sync with Salinas’ objectives.

The two main unions involved in this “neoliberal pact” were the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM) and the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE). The STRM represents the employees of Telmex, the once public telecommunication monopoly, privatized by Salinas in 1990. Under the leadership of Francisco Hernández Juárez, who has been at the head of the union since 1976, the STRM accepted the process of privatization, rather than stall it, as was the case in most other Latin American countries (Rendón Corona 2005: 71-86). Meanwhile, Hernández Juárez, once heir apparent of Fidel Velázquez who had become estranged from the corporatist constellation, democratized many of the STRM’s internal procedures and ultimately withdrew the union from the CT. Known as Latin America’s largest union, the SNTE represents all Mexican teachers. Its leader, Elba Esther Gordillo, also used to be a faithful PRI cadre but began to challenge some of the traditional practices, representing a hope for those supporting democratic change among Mexican unions (Rendón Corona 2005: 87-97). She led her union to break away from the FSTSE, an important gesture of defiance toward the traditional public sector unionism (Rendón Corona 2005: 138-142, Leyva Piña *et al.* 2004).

Salinas’ policies proved disastrous for the Mexican economy. In 1994, a few months after he left power, Mexico went through one of the worst crisis of its history, known as the “peso crisis”.<sup>39</sup> Salinas’ successor, Ernesto Zedillo, had to abruptly devalue the Mexican peso, leading to a broader economic meltdown, with devastating

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<sup>39</sup> The economic situation left by Salinas was so bad that Zedillo had to abruptly devalue the peso, leading to a regional monetary and economic crisis. It would eventually be contained by loans from the U.S. government and international institutions. Although the immediate causes could be found in reckless expenses made by the Salinas government right before the presidential elections, the crisis was analyzed as the consequence of neoliberal economic policies and monetarism and their potential effect on economic stability (Altwater 2009).

effects on employment. For many observers, the crisis was the indirect consequence of Salinas' neoliberal policies, which had destabilized the Mexican economy (Macías Vázquez 2005: 199-203, Gutiérrez Castro 2006: 39). The attempt to establish a "neoliberal corporatism" died with the failure of these policies, as the PRI went back to its old alliances.

The 1980s and 1990s were not only the years of neoliberalism for Mexico but also the decades during which the country began its "democratic transition", i.e. gradually opened up its electoral system in order to allow genuine competition for public offices. Zapata (2004) shows how the electoral reforms of the late 1980s, above all the establishment of an independent electoral register (the Instituto Federal Electoral, or IFE), made the electoral process more transparent. This led to a more open and pluralistic political system, notably after the founding of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in 1989, by progressive activists and left-wing dissidents from the PRI. Ultimately, these reforms gave way to the election of the first non-PRI President of the Republic in more than 70 years, Vicente Fox, in 2000.

Meanwhile, the STRM continued its efforts to build a long-lasting alternative to the CT. It entered into various kinds of alliances with other CT dissidents, as well as some elements of the "historic resistance" such as the SME and the STUNAM. These successive efforts led to the founding of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT) in 1997 (Bizberg 1998: 152-155, Leyva Piña 2005: 303-305). The UNT would become the most significant nationally organized opposition to the CT and the CTM. It brings together both former CT members (the STRM and the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social, or SNTSS, which represents IMSS employees) and

historically independent unions (the STUNAM, but not the SME). Although it is not a formal affiliate, the FAT has supported the UNT since its inception.

This diversity is also the UNT's Achilles' heel. In order to preserve its affiliates' autonomy, the UNT has no real national executive, but a collegial leadership composed by its three biggest unions: the STRM, the STUNAM and the SNTSS (Xelhuantzi López 2006: 29-32). The weakness is also material, as the UNT does not maintain its own headquarters or have its own staff. Meetings are held in one of the affiliates' buildings and administrative matters are shared between the members of the collegial leadership. For some observers, this way of functioning prevents the UNT from taking firm positions and from acquiring visibility within the labour movement and among the population in general. Nevertheless, the UNT does represent a break from the traditional orientations of the Mexican labour movement. It developed a platform calling for democratization of the labour relations system by making the registration process more transparent and by reforming the JCAs. It also cut all formal links to the PRI and encouraged its affiliates not to join any party. In order to renew the relation between unions and the state, the UNT has also been proposing the creation of a social and economic council, where labour, capital and other civil society representatives would sit, on the model of similar councils already existing in Europe (Leyva Piña 2005).

Although he was a candidate of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Vicente Fox, who was elected President in 2000, raised hopes even among the left that he could reform the system and break away from the PRIista<sup>40</sup> regime. In the domain of labour relations, this hope was formalized by the mandate given to his Labour Secretary, Carlos Abascal, to conduct a thorough reform of labour laws. The "Abascal Reform"

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<sup>40</sup> "PRIista" is the adjective used to refer to supporters of the PRI.

project led every interested group to develop a platform to present their claims. The UNT and the PRD projects shared many elements, including an independent union register modelled on the IFE and the suppression of the JCAs (Villegas Rojas 2006). The reformists' hopes were eventually disappointed however, as no consensus could be found among the various actors involved. The PRI, corporatist unions and representatives of the employers were diametrically opposed to the UNT and the PRD. PRIistas and their unions basically promoted the status-quo, whereas business groups saw an opportunity to ask for even more flexibility in labour laws. As Abascal was known for his closeness to business groups, he did not want to make any concession to labour-friendly organizations without getting them to support some form of flexibilization. That, combined with PRI's defence of the status-quo, led to a deadlock: the Abascal Reform never saw the light of day (Alcalde Justiniani 2006: 44-47, Bensusán 2006). That failure was a major disappointment for those seeing the alternation in occupancy of Los Pinos<sup>41</sup> as a sign of the end of corporatism.

Another disappointment has been the Mexican government's action against the leadership of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMS or Sindicato Minero, the main union representing mine workers) since 2006. The president of the union, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, had begun to oppose mining companies more forcefully than before, he had given locals more autonomy, and introduced more democratic practices within the union. In response, the Mexican government accused him of embezzlement and removed him from the leadership of the union (Alcalde Justiniani 2006: 48-50). This created a huge internal crisis, with most cadres and rank-and-file of the SNTMMS siding with "Napoleón".

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<sup>41</sup> Los Pinos is the official residence of the Mexican President.

Although he was forced into exile, Gómez Urrutia remained the “legitimate leader” of the union.<sup>42</sup> This attack against union freedom would be loudly denounced by the International Metalworkers Federation, and it remains the major issue on which this GUF is working in Mexico.

When many major Latin American countries were shifting to the left (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009), the 2006 Mexican Presidential election turned into another political crisis. The PRD candidate and former Mexico City mayor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, once favoured in the polls, lost very narrowly to the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderon. The margin was so thin that López Obrador and his supporters contested the result and entered into a civil disobedience campaign, designating themselves as “Mexico’s Legitimate Government” (Quintana S. 2006, Magar and Romero 2007). Both during and after the campaign, the CTM stuck with its historical support for the PRI (whose candidate finished third) and vigorously denounced López Obrador’s reaction to the election. The UNT timidly supported López Obrador during the election campaign, but dissociated itself from the “Legitimate Government” initiative, pleading that it had to maintain a link to the government that actually had power.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> It was proven later that the documents used to remove him from office were forged, but he stayed in exile as accusations were still pending against him.

<sup>43</sup> This conflict could be witnessed at the occasion of the “Marcha de la Tortilla”, organized on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007. This demonstration was meant to protest the rise of the price of the corn-made tortilla, considered as the basis of Mexicans’ diet. Led by unions and agricultural workers’ organizations, the march was also supported by the PRD who intended to have López Obrador speak at the meeting to be held at the end of demonstration. In the negotiations leading to the event, the CTM and the CROC made their participation conditional on the fact that the PRD would not be associated to the event. The UNT then played a role of broker between the two parties, finally reaching an agreement following which the PRD would not be visible in the procession and would hold its rally after the union rally, clearly separating the two events. Despite this agreement, neither the CTM nor the CROC showed up at the march. After the main union rally, the crowd had to make a 90° turn on the right in order to face another scene, where López Obrador would finally give his speech. During the union rally, PRD supporters could be heard shouting “charros” at some UNT leaders. “Charro” is a Mexican pejorative term used to refer to corrupt, corporatist union leaders.

After two alternations in presidential power and despite the undeniable crisis of various elements of the PRI regime, the Mexican labour movement is in a deep state of confusion. Its most corporatist components, the CT and the CTM, have both lost credibility among the workers and political leverage with the state. Nevertheless, they retain a relatively privileged position toward the Mexican government as this contributes to maintenance of the status quo and avoidance of a thorough reform of the labour laws. At the same time, democratic and independent unionism does exist, and the UNT is probably one of the most successful attempts of federation between these forces in Mexican recent history. Nonetheless it remains structurally weak and it is limited to certain sectors of the economy, particularly public employees, formerly public companies and some foreign multinationals. Therefore, there is a risk of isolation of independent unionism, which could lead to an even harsher segmentation of the labour force.

## **2. The Brazilian Labour Movement: Between Corporatism and New Unionism**

Although both were shaped by corporatist laws, Mexican and Brazilian unionisms present important differences, with decisive consequences on their international involvement. Brazilian unions' historical trajectories, and in particular their relation to the corporatist state, made them more independent, politicized and regionally integrated than their Mexican counterparts. These characteristics, in turn, made them better partners for ILMOs to implement their policies in Latin America and contributed to their involvement in international structures, at the same time as Mexican unions withdrew from them. Defining the main features of Brazilian unionism will therefore contribute to contrast it with its Mexican counterpart and demonstrate that these differences matter when it comes to ILMOs' activities in the Americas.

Strongly influenced by a corporatist regime put in place during the period known as “Estado Novo” (the “new state”, 1934-1945), the Brazilian labour movement experimented several phases of radicalism but also went through tough times, in particular under the military dictatorship (1964-1985). Democratization occurred much earlier in Brazil than Mexico. After the long night of the military dictatorship, new forces appeared, presenting themselves as the “Novo Sindicalismo” (the “new unionism”), but, as in Mexico, they have been struggling to thoroughly replace the structures and practices put in place under the corporatist era. Since the adoption of a new Constitution in 1988, Brazilian trade unions have been alternately considered as among the most progressive and dynamic in the world and as bureaucratic machines, incapable of breaking away from their corporatist heritage. As in Mexico, the Brazilian state adopted neoliberal reforms that adversely affected unions. In contrast with Mexico, however, a trade union leader, Lula da Silva, was eventually elected President, and Brazilian unions maintained a strong opposition to neoliberal integration schemes like the FTAA. Brazilian unions have also been able to use regional integration (MERCOSUR) as a forum to advance their alternative projects and build links with other national labour movements. Although diverse ideologically, the most dynamic parts of the Brazilian labour movement are gaining stability and influence, both domestically and regionally. Its relative independence from the state and the strategies it follows correspond to the type of unionism privileged by ILMOs. The Brazilian labour movement’s capacity to put aside its internal dissensions and to build networks with other unions in the region also gave Brazilian unions more political leverage within ILMOs.

## 2.1. Brazil's Corporatism

The development of Brazilian unionism presents similarities and differences with its Mexican counterpart. Both were strongly influenced by labour laws adopted in the 1930s that preceded the consolidation of the labour movement. In both countries, the adoption of these laws was part of a nationalist project of industrial development aimed at transforming a mostly agricultural-based economy into an industrialized one. In the case of Brazil, the economy was particularly centred on coffee plantations, and landowners, mostly based in São Paulo, were the ruling oligarchy (Fernandes 2006). As in Mexico, this developmentalist project came with a formal commitment for social justice and the improvement of workers' conditions. The similarities stop here however, as the conditions in which those measures were put in place differed and this contributed to the development of a different type of unionism.

The building of Brazil's ISI regime is associated with the figure of Getúlio Vargas. Then governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Vargas gained power through a coup in 1930, with the support of the military and the growing industrializing bourgeoisie (Pazzianotto Pinto 2007: 25-27). He led Brazil from 1930 to 1945 and from 1951 to 1954. Although he came from a liberal background, opposed to the Old Republic dominated by the coffee planters oligarchy, he soon imposed an authoritarian regime that would eventually lead to a real dictatorship.

The second phase of Vargas first 15 years in power is known as the "Estado Novo". During this period, from 1934 to 1945, Vargas put in place the legal basis of his regime, following the adoption of a new Constitution (French 2004: 10-16). Virulently anticommunist, Vargas was inspired by Fascist regimes in place in Portugal, Spain and

Italy at the same period. He was also a populist leader concerned with securing the support of the working class by granting them social protection and decent conditions of living. That latter characteristic would even earn him the nickname of “father of the poor”. Those two aspects of *varguismo* (authoritarianism and populism) were the pillars of the central piece of legislation adopted under Vargas: labour laws. Gradually put in place during the 1930s, they were combined in a central labour code, the *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (CLT), in 1943. Similar to the Mexican labour laws, the CLT combines progressive social protections (minimum wage, 8-hour working day, compulsory holidays) with legal instruments guaranteeing state control over unions’ existence and activities (Lang and Gagnon 2009). Largely inspired by the Italian labour code put in place by Fascist leader Benito Mussolini,<sup>44</sup> the CLT goes further than the Mexican legislation and more explicitly gives the state the right of life and death over unions. In fact, “it was the State that guaranteed unions’ organizational survival, not the workers” (Lang and Gagnon 2009: 252).

As in Mexico, Brazilian state control starts with the system of union registration, which is totally controlled by the state, via the deliverance of the “*carta sindical*”. This document can only be granted following strict conditions and requires detailed information about the union’s finances and elected officials. The CLT also frames unions’ activities by imposing on all workers the “*imposto sindical*” (literally the union tax, later renamed “*contribuição sindical*” or union contribution), compulsory dues

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<sup>44</sup> It is common for historians of Brazil’s labour laws to present tables comparing word by word the Mussolinian and Varguista labour laws in order to point at the almost exact similitude of some key sections of the two texts. See Pazzianotto Pinto 2007: 34 and French 2004: 15.

deducted from every workers' pay to fund union activities at all levels (local, state<sup>45</sup> and national) as well as the Ministry of Labour. Nevertheless this money is to be spent on specific activities, dictated by the CLT, which are related to the social welfare system put in place by Vargas. They could not, therefore, be used for bargaining or even less political activities.

The bargaining process, although made compulsory by the CLT, is also very tightly controlled to avoid labour conflicts. In fact, both strikes and lockouts were strictly forbidden in the original labour laws instituted by Vargas. The right to strike was later given back to the workers, but with strict limitations. In order for it to be legal, a strike had to be approved by the state. When bargaining is reaching a dead end moreover, the parties have to resort to the *Justiça do Trabalho* (JT), the labour courts. The JT is one of the most powerful and omnipresent systems of labour justice in the democratic world. It intervenes at all steps of the labour relations process, either collective or individual, and employs more workers than any other branch of the Brazilian justice system.

Beyond the regulation of union activities, it is the scheme of representation imposed by the CLT that prevented the development of an independent and militant labour movement. A key principle of the CLT is the “unicidade sindical” –in other terms, the monopoly of representation. Contrary to many countries where monopoly of representation exists, including Mexico, however, Brazilian unions are not organized by workplace but by municipality and by socio-professional category. Therefore, only one union can be accredited to represent all workers from the same socio-professional category in one municipality. For instance, bank employees from São Paulo are all

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<sup>45</sup> Brazil, like Mexico, is a federation. When referring to administrative levels, “state” therefore refers to federated states, by opposition to the central, national or federal government.

represented by the same union, just like retail workers from Rio de Janeiro or metalworkers from Porto Alegre. The CLT does allow unions to group together several municipalities, but the state has to authorize this through the “carta sindical” process. Although some famous cases exist, such as the metalworkers from the ABC,<sup>46</sup> they remain the minority. Local unions then have to be affiliated to a single state federation, gathering all unions from the same socio-professional category in the state. These federations are themselves placed under the umbrella of a single national confederation, representing all workers from the same socio-professional category in the country. Negotiations are normally done between unions and employers’ associations at the municipal level, although when they have enough leverage, unions try to obtain the right to bargaining at the state level, and (in some rare cases) even at the national level. As a union’s activity mostly occurs at the municipal level, no union activity is actually authorized in the workplace as such. Brazilian unionism would therefore be considered for a long time as “factory door unionism” because “from the door of the factory inward, the destiny of the worker was in the hands of the employer” (Moreira Cardoso 1997: 105, my translation).

Therefore, the Brazilian “unicidade sindical” went further than union monopoly usually goes. It applied not only at the local level but also at the state and national levels. It is one of the best examples of how Brazilian labour laws found their inspiration in Fascist Italy, genuinely embodying “corporatism” as it really aims at organizing society into “corporations”, in other terms by socio-professional categories, as defined by the state. By forcing affiliation to unique federations and confederations, it kills any attempt

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<sup>46</sup> The expression “ABC” designates, in Brazil, the industrial belt around São Paulo. The letters ABC stand for the names of the main cities composing this region: Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo and São Caetano do Sul.

at pluralism within the labour movement, and puts institutional safeguards around and above local unions whose leadership might attempt to practice a different kind of unionism. Also, the CLT explicitly forbids any form of inter-professional structure at any level –i.e. it forbids the very existence of union centres. This is a central characteristic of Brazilian corporatism that has had a deep impact on the Brazilian participation in ILMOs –or lack thereof. Whereas Mexican corporatism favoured the development of rival (although state-aligned) union centres and discouraged the establishment of national branch-based federations, Brazilian corporatism did the contrary: compulsory federations by industry and no union centres at all.

All of these corporatist elements led to the development of submissive, inactive unions and to the corresponding type of union leader, the “pelego” (Pazzianotto Pinto 2007: 59-62). “Pelego” is a pejorative term used in Brazil to designate union officers subordinated to the state and incorporated in clientelist networks, either at the local, state or national level, who obtained their “legitimacy” as union cadres from the state, not from the workers themselves (Lang and Gagnon 2009: 252). Those unions were so inactive that in some cases they did not even engage in the compulsory process of collective bargaining but rather the state legislated wage increases.

A sign of the centrality of unions in Vargas’ political strategy is the fact that the party he found in 1950 to compete in the elections, the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), fit in a “labourist” category and made extensive use of the “pelego” networks maintained during the “Estado Novo”. Pazzianotto Pinto illustrates this when he states that

the memory attached to Vargas, and that remained engraved in the people’s mind, is the one of the author of the labour laws and the architect of unions’ structures

that would resist all the changes Brazil and the world would go through during more than half a century (Pazzianotto Pinto 2007: 35)

Therefore, pelegos were central pawns of Vargas' strategy and the CLT was the cornerstone that held the system together.

As a result of the limitations imposed by the CLT, few attempts were made to federate unions at the national level up until the 1980s. When Vargas was removed from power in 1945 by the same military that had supported his coup fifteen years before, there were hopes for a genuine democracy. Although his direct successor was a military officer, Brazilian society gradually opened up and freedom of expression and organization began to appear. The Brazilian Communist Party repressed by Vargas took advantage of the democratic opening that followed Vargas' demise, and gained greater influence within the labour movement. Although limited by the CLT, it launched a national and cross-sectoral organization, the Comando Geral dos Trabalhadores (CGT<sup>47</sup>), which, although it was not officially recognized as such, played the role of a union centre for communist-leaning activists. During the mandates of Presidents Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961) and João Goulart (1961-1964), unions gained some autonomy and contestation intensified (Riethof 2002: 55-62). The latter contributed to the conditions which precipitated a military coup in 1964 leading to a military dictatorship based on much higher levels of repression than Mexico ever experienced.

The Brazilian military ruled the country from 1964 to 1985 and repressed all major democratic and popular forces. The regime had its own official party, the Aliança Renovadora Nacional (ARENA) and tolerated only one opposition party, the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB). With regard to the labour movement, every form of

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<sup>47</sup> Not to be confused with the Central Geral dos Trabalhadores, founded in 1986 and also labelled CGT, to which I will return later.

activism was crushed, particularly during the first phase of the dictatorship (Pazzianotto Pinto 2007: 82-96). Many left-leaning unionists went into exile while others joined the clandestine resistance to the regime. The military did not have to develop new labour legislation to achieve its goals: a strict application of the CLT was enough. It gave the latter total control over unions and crushed any attempt to organize a more politicized, cross-sectoral, unionism. “Pelegos” were the perfect basis on which to build this domination, and official unions worked as a transmission belt of the regime for years.

The level of repression declined during the second phase of the dictatorship, known as the “abertura” (1974-1985). The regime relaxed the restrictions on political and labour freedom, tolerating some opposition movements, although the latter remained officially illegal (Dos Santos Barbosa 2003). Within organized labour, a movement appeared called “Novo Sindicalismo” (New Unionism) whose founders aimed not only at contesting the military dictatorship but also to challenge the basis on which unionism had developed in Brazil since the adoption of the CLT (Antunes 1995). They wanted a more politicized, grass-roots, activist unionism. Nevertheless, divisions quickly appeared between “novos sindicalistas” and other activists.<sup>48</sup> The issues at stake mostly related to the structures of official unionism: should the rupture happen from within or outside of them? Should “real” activists use official unionism to transform it or should they build their own structures, independent from the existing system?

In the end, “Novo Sindicalismo” prevailed: it used the official structures, at least at the local level, but also founded its own structures, in particular at the national level, even though the law did not permit them at that time. Hence, the most vocal

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<sup>48</sup> The steelworkers union of the city of São Paulo is particularly representative of these debates, as almost all the tendencies were represented in its ranks (Nogueira 1997).

manifestations of “Novo Sindicalismo” occurred at the local level, and came from official unions that had been taken over by “novos sindicalistas” (Antunes 1995). The strikes organized in the ABC region<sup>49</sup> by metalworkers at the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s are the “poster children” of labour mobilization in that period – among other reasons because their leaders included Luíz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, who would become President of Brazil in 2002 (Dos Santos Barbosa 2003).

In parallel to this local activism, “novos sindicalistas” launched their own organization, in order to defy the established official structure. The clearest example was the founding of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) in 1983. Launched two years before the end of the military regime and five years before the adoption of a new constitution, the CUT not only defied the dictatorship but also the prohibition against union centres, a cornerstone of the CLT. Initially, the CUT brought together union resistance to the military regime. Although its core was mostly composed of left-wing activists, ranging from Trotskyites to social sectors of the Catholic Church, at its founding the composition of the CUT was extremely diverse and its real cement was opposition to the military (Martins Rodrigues 1990). This crystallizing of the opposition to corporatism did not happen in Mexico where the regime specialized in cooptation and therefore did not lead to such a wide-range movement of resistance. As we saw, the attempts to challenge the regime came from various constituencies of organized labour (including “former” corporatist unions) and they still encounter great resistance to form a federation.

Another characteristic of the CUT is that it was born with a “Siamese twin”: the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers’ Party). Founded in 1980, the PT also benefited

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<sup>49</sup> See note 46.

from the “abertura” and it really took off after the founding of the CUT (Guidry 2003). In response to democratization, the MDB then became the Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB) and other democratic parties started to compete with it, including the PT. Surfing on the wave of “Novo Sindicalismo”, the PT became associated with the progressive wing of unionism, and in the political field held the space occupied by the CUT in the labour movement: a heterogeneous organization where most left-wing fractions could be represented.<sup>50</sup>

This heterogeneity quickly led to internal disputes, and eventually to schisms and competition. In 1986, the most conservative elements of the labour movement founded a rival organization, the Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores (CGT). Despite its acronym, this CGT did not have any link with the communist-led, pre-military regime. It was composed of moderate union leaders who, despite their opposition to the dictatorship, were not as much in favour of a radical rupture as CUT’s leaders. In particular, the CGT was in favour of the “imposto sindical” and of other elements of the CLT, while promoting the right of workers to join a multi-sectoral organization (Antunes 1995: 35-38). The CGT was the main representative of conservative unionism at the national level until a split occurred in 1991, giving birth to another union centre, Força Sindical (FS), discussed below.

After political power was returned to civilians, a new Constitution was adopted in 1988 which modified some elements of the labour laws. In particular, it made easier to have a union recognized by the state and gave public employees the right to organize while granting all workers the right to strike (Lang and Gagnon 2009: 254). This

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<sup>50</sup> At the CUT’s third Congress, in 1988, 90.9% of the delegates declared that the party they felt the closest to was the PT (Martins Rodrigues 1990: 80).

certainly helped democratic unions but it also made it easier for “pelegos” to found any type of union, just for the sake of getting the “imposto sindical”. This phenomenon, close to the Mexican “protection contracts”, is called “paper unionism” in Brazil, as these unions effectively only exist on paper (Lang and Gagnon 2009: 254). Many prominent elements of the CLT were left in place, including the “unicidade sindical” and the “contribuição sindical”. Therefore, the pillars of the “pelego” order were not really shaken, although some space was left, within the official structure, for more militant groups. The CLT remained, then, one of the most stable legal institutions in Brazil.

## **2.2. Brazilian Unionism in Neoliberal Times**

In contrast to Mexico, where neoliberal reforms started before the opening of the political regime, the consolidation of the civilian rule preceded the adoption of market-oriented policies in Brazil (Bensusán 2000: 3). This allowed the independent labour movement, born clandestinely under the military dictatorship, to consolidate and play a role in the democratization of the Brazilian society. In particular, the alliances it had to build with other social movements in order to gain political leverage in the elaboration of the 1988 Constitution contributed to making it a central political player. The historical alliance between the CUT and the PT also gave the CUT a prominent position in the political debate, even if its allied party would not win the presidential election until 2002. In contrast, Mexican unions remained mostly isolated from other social movements. When some tried to break away from the PRIista regime, it was to support the neoliberal turn of the state, not to oppose it. In this sense, the Mexican regime, based on cooptation and consent, was more efficient than the repressive Brazilian regime in maintaining corporatism in the longer run. Whereas independent unions in Brazil were quickly

associated to the democratization process, Mexican unions remained associated with the corporatist era and did not participate in, or benefit from, democratization, as the latter favoured the conservative camp and its party, the PAN.

The modifications made to the Brazilian labour laws allowed for a development of democratic unionism. CUT's unions were able to be present in some workplaces through the development of "comissões de fábrica", or workers councils, authorized in bigger companies (Moreira Cardoso 1997: 106-107). Also, the adoption of the right to unionize for public employees made the part of this constituency grow significantly, while greater flexibility regarding the right to strike combined with a moderation of JT powers opened the way for more militant activities (Jakobsen and de Freitas Barbosa 2008: 130, Zapata 2005: 149). The CUT began to develop national structures to represent its unions in the same branch and to reach nationwide agreements. Therefore the labour movement had time not only to consolidate its structures but also to secure some social and economic gains for its members before the neoliberal wave reached the country.

The first phase of Brazil's market-oriented reforms came later, led by President José Sarney (1985-1990), considered as "heterodox" in relation to the "Washington Consensus" (Bensusán 2000, Riethof 2002: 79-94). While its "Plano Cruzado" aimed at stabilizing the economy and the currency, it also contained measures in favour of workers. The real neoliberal turn came later, in 1990, with the election of President Collor de Mello, who had the support of all major conservative parties. Collor's plans, clearly aligned with the Washington Consensus, were however abruptly stopped by his controversial fall from power.<sup>51</sup> Neoliberal policies would only return to the centre of the

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<sup>51</sup> Collor was accused of corruption and impeached by the Brazilian Parliament only two years after his election. His Vice-President, Itamar Franco, completed his term as President.

agenda with the election of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1994, the candidate of the right-wing Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB).

Cardoso's "Plano Real" applied classic monetarist and market-oriented policies, including privatizations, shrinking of the public sector and "foreign investment incentive regulations", which often meant deregulation of the labour laws.

The Real Plan – launched in 1994 – must be interpreted as much more than a mere stabilization plan. In fact, it involved a strategy that at its inception combined fiscal adjustment, monetary reform and a dollar peg, with the real appreciating as foreign capital flowed in, eager for financial gain (Jakobsen and de Freitas Barbosa 2008: 119)

Under Cardoso's presidency, important reforms were conducted or attempted, including attacks on public employees' job security, pension reforms and large privatization initiatives in the energy, mining, telecommunication and banking industries. All of Cardoso's projects were strongly opposed by progressive social and labour movements, although with varying success (Jakobsen and de Freitas Barbosa 2008: 130-133, Riethof 2002: 143-164). Public employees could not block the reform concerning their status, but the CUT, which agreed to negotiate with the government, was able to significantly curb the pension reforms and save some elements of the old system.

This is not to say that all unions actually opposed the application of neoliberal recipes to Brazil. On the contrary, a group of union leaders headed by Luís Antônio de Medeiros (mostly affiliated with the CGT), expressed support for most of the neoliberal measures. Presenting themselves as the representatives of a "unionism of results", they founded a new union centre in 1991, Força Sindical (FS), who quickly became the second most important union centre of the country after the CUT (Nogueira 1997, Antunes 1995: 38-41). For some observers, FS is the "neoliberal union" by excellence (Giannotti 2002), although as in many cases the political orientations of its rank and file are less radical

than its leaders (Martin Rodrigues and Moreira Cardoso 1993: 115-154). In addition to promoting labour-capital partnerships and accepting many elements of the Washington Consensus, FS advocates “multipartism” among unions. In fact, its leaders are opposed to CUT’s support to the PT and recommend their members join any party but the PT.

Generally speaking, Brazilian unions are considered to have been more successful in resisting neoliberal reforms than their counterparts in other Latin American countries. As Jakobsen and de Freitas Barbosa note, “when we assess the implementation, from the 1990s onwards, of neoliberal policies, we realize that Brazil, after all, was one of the countries in Latin America where they were less easily internalized” (2008: 136). As noted above, this is in part due to the fact that social movements in general, and unions in particular, had the time to consolidate during the first phase of the democratization (Bensusán 2000: 17). Therefore, even if they were not always successful, they maintained the legitimacy and political leverage they had acquired during the 1980s. The close relationship with the PT also helped to maintain the CUT at the forefront of the political debate, as the party’s presidential candidate reached the second position at every election since 1989, and ultimately won the 2002 and 2006 elections.

Another explanation of Brazilian unions’ relative success lies in regional integration. Regional economic integration belonged to the neoliberal toolbox used in Brazil, and in the Southern Cone in general. As a matter of fact, when Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay signed the Treaty of Asunción in 1991, thereby founding the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the four countries were led by presidents with neoliberal inclinations. In favouring free trade, MERCOSUR followed the Washington Consensus (Bensusán 2000: 4). Nevertheless, in contrast to NAFTA,

MERCOSUR also represents one of the most recent attempts at Latin American integration, continuing a tradition of Pan-Latin Americanism opposed to the domination of the continent by U.S. interests. In that sense, since its inception the MERCOSUR has been both criticized and seen as a political opportunity by the labour movement (Portella de Castro 2000: 111-113). Unions were so keen to try and influence MERCOSUR that they had launched their own regional organization even before MERCOSUR was born. In 1986, union centres from Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Chile founded the Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur (CCSCS).

The CCSCS was born out of two concerns: the remaining dictatorships in the region and their impact on labour, and the debt crisis (Portella de Castro 2007: 68-72). Unions from the region saw the necessity of joining together to support their colleagues in Chile and Paraguay, in particular, where authoritarian regimes were still in place at that time. They were also concerned that, among ILMOs, the debt crisis was no real concern, at least in the ICFTU, and that there was need to develop a reformist discourse on that issue (Portella de Castro 2000: 110).

When the MERCOSUR was launched, the CCSCS saw itself as the natural labour interlocutor of the newly founded regional institution. In fact, it quickly became the bearer of many social movements' demands to MERCOSUR and its action led to the adoption by MERCOSUR of a "Social and Labour Declaration" in 1997 (Portella de Castro 2000: 119-122). Later, the MERCOSUR would put in place official mechanisms of consultation of the civil society, in which the CCSCS would play the role of labour representative. Although it has been supported by ORIT, the CCSCS is independent from it, and has always accepted non-ORIT affiliates among its ranks. We shall later see that

this experience had a significant impact on Brazilian involvement in ORIT. While MERCOSUR progressively took a more social orientation than its original vocation,<sup>52</sup> the existence of the CCSCS also contributed to a much more positive perception of regional integration by organized labour than in North America. Instead of isolating domestic labour movements, as was the case with Mexican unions under NAFTA, regional integration contributed to rapprochements and networking among union centres from different ideological backgrounds in the region. In contrast, despite sporadic links between U.S. and Canadian unions and some independent Mexican unions (mostly the FAT), NAFTA did not lead to durable integration of North American unionism. On the contrary it materialized the rupture between U.S./Canadian labour and the mainstream Mexican organized labour. In terms of social outcomes, it only gave birth to a weak labour side agreement, and is still considered as a purely free trade agreement with no social dimension and no progressive political goals.

### **2.3. The Challenges of Power**

The election of Lula to the presidency in 2002 represented both a tremendous victory and a considerable challenge for the Brazilian labour movement. In their assessment of union activities under Lula, Radermacher and Melleiro (2007) identify the successes and failures of organized labour. The Lula governments, particularly the earlier ones, appointed many former CUT officials to positions related to labour issues. Lula also stopped the privatization process and the mobilization of social movements allowed them to obtain from the Planalto<sup>53</sup> minimum wage raises and modifications to the tax system. Soon however, the CUT would face its first dilemmas. By accepting the

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<sup>52</sup> That shift was due in part to the election of progressive leaders in its member states.

<sup>53</sup> The Planalto Palace is the official residence of the Brazilian President.

government's proposal to reform public employees' pensions, the CUT alienated part of its base and even lost a group of unions, who formed a rival union, Conlutas. Yet it was the labour law reforms that rendered the situation explosive.

The PT had promised to reform the CLT in line with CUT values: more independence from the state, facilitation of union activities in the workplace, and above all putting an end to the pillars of the pelego system: unicidade sindical and the imposto sindical. To carry out this reform, Lula created the Foro Nacional do Trabalho (FNT), a tripartite structure in charge of reaching consensus on those issues between unions and employers. Whereas the FNT could present a consensual project in 2004, unanimity cracked during the process leading to its adoption by the Congress. This failure was due not only to the reversal of the employers' organizations but also to the opposition of the most conservative elements of the labour movement (pelegos unions) and the more radical left wing, inside and outside the CUT. Plagued by a corruption scandal (the "Mensalão") and without the unanimous support of unions and employers, the government had to give up the whole reform.

The Brazilian government then tried to pass elements of the reform package on a piecemeal basis. It only managed to have one element approved by all major unions and accepted by the Congress however: the legalization of union centres in 2007, which ended one of the most significant and ancient pieces of Brazilian corporatism. Union centres had existed *de facto* since the founding of the CUT, but they were considered merely as NGOs, with no official status as unions, and no funding other than the voluntary contributions of their affiliated unions. With the reform, all union centres who

would match certain criteria of representativeness would automatically receive 10% of the imposto sindical paid by their affiliates.

Despite this relative victory, the CUT continued to suffer from internal divisions for what appears to be its unconditional support of the Lula government. In 2006, a few unions decided to leave the CUT and to either join or work in collaboration with Conlutas, forming a more radical labour pole outside of the CUT. Shortly after, in 2007, unions close to the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) also left the CUT, which they had formed a faction of since the 1990s, to form a new union centre, the Central dos Trabalhadores do Brasil (CTB). Although less radical than Conlutas and actually quite inclined to collaborate with the CUT, the CTB did bring with it up to 20% of the CUT affiliates. Thus, for Radermacher and Melleiro, the CUT “is confronted for the first time with a left-wing opposition within the labour movement, at the same time when its traditional internal diversity is reduced” (2007: 139, my translation). As illustrated by the split of CTB unions, there are signs of a “partidización” of the labour movement. In other terms, the wheel seems to have turned: whereas unions used to influence the partisan scene (such as when the CUT influenced the PT), the dynamics within and among political parties now dictate the evolution of the labour movement.

A recomposition also occurred in the more conservative sectors of the labour movement, mostly under the influence of new legislation that gave union centres access to the imposto sindical. Pelegos unions, the most faithful representatives of Brazilian corporatism, founded the Nova Central Sindical dos Trabalhadores (NCST) in 2005, mostly to gain political leverage in the debate on labour law reform and eventually to take advantage of the imposto sindical. In 2007, a more significant movement occurred

when the CGT, together with two smaller union centres, merged to form the União Geral dos Trabalhadores (UGT), bringing with them some previously non-affiliated unions as well as some dissident unions from FS, in particular the powerful São Paulo Sindicato dos Comerciantes and his influential leader “Patah”. The latter would eventually become the leader of the UGT. Whereas its founders officially mention the merger between the ICFTU and the WCL as an inspiration,<sup>54</sup> Radermacher and Meilleiro (2007) believe that the UGT was launched primarily because none of its components could achieve the necessary level of representativeness to be considered an official union centre, and thus get access to the imposto sindical.

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<sup>54</sup> The CGT was an ICFTU affiliate whereas the two other union centres were WCL affiliates.

**Table 5. Main Brazilian Union Centres, 2007**

<b>Years of activity</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Split from</b>	<b>Political Orientation</b>	<b>Closest Political Party</b>
1983-	CUT	-	Left-wing	PT
1986-2007	CGT	-	Moderate	-
1991	FS	CGT	Moderate/Conservative	PDT
1995-2007	CAT	-	Moderate/Conservative (Christian)	-
1998-2007	SDS	FS	Moderate/Conservative	PSDB
2003	CONLUTAS	CUT	Left-wing	PSTU/PSOL
2005	NCST	-	Conservative	-
2007	CTB	CUT	Left-wing	PCdoB
2007	UGT	Merger of CGT, SDS, CAT and some FS elements	Moderate	-

Brazilian contemporary unionism therefore remains mostly framed by an outdated, corporatist legal framework. This not only makes it possible for “pelegos” and other “paper unions” to proliferate but also represents an obstacle for unions to tackle pressing issues such as informal work and unemployment. Nevertheless, and despite their relative fragmentation, the independent and democratic sectors of the Brazilian labour movement have managed to gain legitimacy and political leverage since the democratization of the regime. The CUT, in particular, is still networked with other social movements and present in a wide range of sectors, including agriculture.

### **3. Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to identify the similarities and differences between Mexican and Brazilian unionisms, particularly since the application of neoliberal policies and the questioning of corporatism. Comparing these two cases confirmed the dialectical impact of neoliberal globalization on domestic labour movements. The comparison is

also essential in order to understand their international involvement. A first conclusion is that, in both countries, legal frameworks inherited from the corporatist era proved to be remarkably resistant to reform during the period of democratization. Most labour laws remained unchanged, allowing traditional forms of corporatist unionism (Mexico's "charrismo" and Brazil's "peleguismo") to survive. When changes were introduced, they opened the way to the worst forms of "false unions" (Mexico's "protection unions" and Brazil's "paper unions"). The survival of this corporatist framework represents a significant obstacle for unions to act on the pressing issues of informal work and unemployment.

Nonetheless, independent unions do exist in both countries, although the contrast here is more startling. Mexico's independent unions are still very weak and dispersed and have not yet managed to establish a solid and visible union centre to represent them. The fact that many of their member unions come from a corporatist heritage sometimes put them at odds with other social movements, and their connection to agricultural workers is still in development. In contrast, and despite the challenges posed by the electoral victories of the PT, the democratic sectors of the Brazilian labour movement are now consolidated, rooted in the socio-political landscape and well connected to other movements.

This contrast can be explained by the sequence of actions between political democratization and the application of neoliberal policies. Whereas this later policies systematically weakened organized labour, the fact that political liberalization occurred earlier in Brazil than in Mexico helps explain why Brazilian unions could resist more efficiently than their Mexican counterparts. It is worth noting that where corporatism was

imposed through both coercion and consent (Mexico), the transition to a more independent and democratic type of unionism seems more difficult than where it was imposed mostly by coercion (Brazil). The type of unionism developed in Brazil, independent from the state and proactive in bargaining, corresponds to the values put forward by ILMOs since the end of the Cold War. Brazilian unions are also able to cooperate on international issues, which give them more leverage to influence ILMOs, since they come as a block and not as separate entities. In contrast, Mexican unionism is still largely associated with corporatism, a form now rejected by ILMOs. It also suffers from serious internal divisions that weaken its position vis-à-vis ILMOs.

The fact that Brazil belonged to the wave of Latin American countries electing a pro-labour government at the beginning of the 2000s, while Mexico continued to live its democratic opening under conservative leadership, contributes to the easier development of independent unionism in Brazil than in Mexico. This Mexican “exceptionalism” also applies to its relation to regional integration. Although they were inspired by the same neoliberal philosophy, NAFTA and MERCOSUR evolved differently and thus did not have similar effects on union integration. NAFTA certainly contributed to isolate the Mexican labour movement from its counterpart in its “economic region”, North America. In contrast, regional integration in the Southern Cone helped Brazilian unions to build long lasting ties with their regional partners and to play a prominent role in the way economic integration was done in that area. These different levels of regional integration also contribute to the different ways Brazilian and Mexican unions are involved in ILMOs. Networked with other unions from the same region, Brazilian unions bring with them a successful experience of regional integration and a practice of labour

internationalism that makes their incorporation into ILMOs easier. In contrast, Mexican unions' isolation in their own region, North America, makes it even more difficult for them to influence ILMOs where U.S. and Canadian actors still play a significant role.

As we will see in the next chapters, differences between Mexican and Brazilian unionisms, both at the domestic and regional levels, are important factors to explain the differences in their international involvement. Just like corporatism, democratization, neoliberalism and regionalism have not been applied the same in all Latin American countries, their international involvement is not uniform, therefore proving that several Souths coexist within ILMOs.

## CHAPTER 4. ORIT IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL

In the previous chapter, I established that the specific institutional arrangements adopted by Mexico and Brazil contributed to the development of two different types of unionism, despite their shared legacy of corporatism. Whereas Mexican unions remain largely divided and subordinated to the state, Brazilian unions are better coordinated and have acquired more autonomy and capacity to influence public policies. The following chapters will bridge the conclusions of the chapter 3 to the broader research question of this thesis: to what extent do the differences observed between Mexican and Brazilian unionisms reflect on their involvement in ILMOs? I argue that, despite some variations between unions, the differences observed between Mexican and Brazilian unions also affect their involvement in the ILMOs. Whereas Mexican unions have become estranged from ILMOs, Brazilians have gained significant influence in these organizations.

In this chapter, I deal with political ILMOs, whereas the next chapter focuses on sectoral ILMOs. As the most representative political ILMO in the Americas, the Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT) will be the prime focus of this chapter. As noted in chapter 2, ORIT brought together reformist unions and was strongly associated with the fight against communism in the hemisphere. Since the middle of the 1980s, however, it has adopted a more independent discourse, gradually becoming the representative of progressive Latin American unionism. Following the merger of the ICFTU and the WCL into the ITUC, ORIT merged in 2007 with its former Christian rival, the Central Latino Americana de Trabajadores (CLAT) to form the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA). Both because it represents the main tendency of unionism in the hemisphere (social democratic reformism) and because it was strongly

influenced by the dynamics of the Cold War, ORIT is an important organization to study if one aims to understand the situation of ILMOs in the Americas after the Cold War.

This chapter presents the results of the fieldwork done on ORIT and its affiliates in Mexico and Brazil. It lays out the perceptions of Mexican and Brazilian unionists of the dynamics animating ORIT since the 1980s. These can be divided into two categories: internal functioning (decision making processes, democratic structures) and policies and strategies (political positions and means used to achieve them). We gain insight into the first category by examining the way the merger between ORIT and CLAT to form a new hemispheric organization, the TUCA, played out in both countries. As this issue is directly related to the end of the Cold War rivalries between the different political ILMOs, it will serve as a lens through which to analyze how the end of the East-West struggle affected ILMOs in the Americas. I approach the second category by looking at the role of ORIT with regard to the issues of free trade and regional integration, in particular the different forms they took in the Americas and the consequences they had for unionism. As regional integration has come to be associated with neoliberal globalization, this category provides insight into the way ILMOs' dynamics were influenced by neoliberal globalization.

The first section presents the main dynamics of ORIT since the 1980s according to ORIT representatives and observers I interviewed during my fieldwork. The second section focuses on the relation between ORIT and Mexican unions and the way this has evolved since the end of the Cold War, while the third section turns to the Brazilian involvement in ORIT. Findings in this chapter allow us to compare and contrast the ways Mexican and Brazilian unions were involved in the ORIT. There is virtually no academic

literature available on the events and processes discussed in these chapters, and the primary documents available are often unreliable, so I rely heavily on interview evidence in these chapters. Further analysis will be developed in chapter 6.

## **1. ORIT Since the End of the Cold War**

From its inception up until the 1980s, ORIT operated primarily as an agent for U.S. anticommunism in Latin American. Dominated by the AFL-CIO, it encouraged any union opposed to communism, up to and including supporting ghost unions and the military regime behind them. ORIT began to change however in the 1980s. Here Luis Anderson, General Secretary from 1984 to 2003, played an important role. Anderson, a Panamanian and originally a member of a U.S. union in the region of the Panama canal, was initially considered as a “man of the AFL-CIO” (Interview M27). Nevertheless, he instigated the process of making ORIT a more genuinely worker oriented organization. Several current ORIT officials express this well: “Luis Anderson has the merit to have transformed ORIT into a real labour centre from what it was before: a blockhouse of the Cold War” (Interview B25, my translation). For another,

This ‘man of the AFL-CIO’ turned out to question the AFL-CIO’s agenda and the AIFLD. This man, who came from this school [The AFL-CIO], turned out to challenge this way of thinking unionism in the region and to act as spokesman for the necessity to have a unionism that would better match Latin America’s reality (Interview B4, my translation)

This shift really took form in 1989 with the adoption of “socio-political unionism” as the backbone of the new ORIT identity. As one ORIT official put it,

Political unionism is going further than the factory, the company, the office, in order to get involved not only in what is happening inside the factory, but also in what is happening in society as a whole and push for change because the worker does not live in the factory. He or she and his or her family live in the society. Therefore, themes such as education, health, public services etc... lead us to a

vision much further than the company. This is the original meaning of socio-political unionism. (Interview B25, my translation)

This new orientation would have consequences for ORIT's positions and strategies. For instance, ORIT decided to put free trade, which was becoming one of the central issues in the hemisphere after the end of the Cold War, at the heart of its agenda, with the aim of "democratizing" commercial agreements through the establishment of a "labour forum" within their structure.<sup>55</sup> The position was hotly debated in ORIT (Interview B4) but eventually those supporting opposition to free trade won. That led ORIT to more strongly oppose free trade agreements, particularly the project of a Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) modelled on NAFTA (Interviews B4 and B25).

According to one ORIT official I interviewed, the watershed moment was the 1997 Belo Horizonte Summit of the Americas (Interview B3). During this Summit, ORIT became very closely involved with other social movements of the Americas. This cooperation would eventually lead to the founding of the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), a coalition of popular groups across the Americas opposing the FTAA project and proposing instead a "peoples' integration", whose basic principles were brought together in a document entitled "The Alternatives for the Americas".<sup>56</sup> Another ORIT official (Interview B4) underlined how ORIT and the HSA influenced each other: the radicalization of ORIT's position on free trade was strongly influenced by its participation in the HSA, but at the same time ORIT was instrumental in the launching of

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<sup>55</sup> The first free trade agreement discussed at ORIT was NAFTA, against which it positioned itself, in particular under the influence of its Canadian and U.S. affiliates. In 1996, ORIT launched its Grupo de Trabajo sobre Integración Hemisférica (GTIH) which became the place where ORIT's position on economic integration would be defined. ORIT initially promoted a "democratic FTAA", first by the inclusion of a Labour Forum to counterbalance business influence on the process. It then demanded the inclusion of a "social clause" into the agreement, but in 2000 it finally opted for a total rejection of the FTAA, having lost any hope of making it acceptable to workers (see ORIT 2007a).

<sup>56</sup> The HSA was mostly composed of national coalitions set up in Canada, the U.S., Mexico and Brazil to fight the FTAA. In addition to labour unions, these coalitions also included human rights, international development, women's and students' groups (see Massicotte 2004).

the HSA. The ORIT officials I interviewed considered that socio-political unionism is visible both in terms of positions (broader interest for socio-political matters, opposition to free trade) and in terms of strategies (alliances with other social movements, mobilizing instead of lobbying).

Therefore, the shift of ORIT's position against free trade is associated with other strategic shifts, the first of which is a policy of alliance with other social movements. An ORIT official explained to me that these other movements, in particular those of agricultural workers and aboriginal people influenced ORIT's positions (Interview B4). According to him, in some regions, these non-labour civil society groups are providing direction to the Alliance, as is the case with aboriginal organizations in the Andean region. Such alliances became crucial to ORIT because the organization recognised that it could not tackle bigger issues (such as free trade) alone (Interview B4). Its position of socio-political unionism called for broader alliances in order not to stay in a "union ghetto" (Interview B3, my translation). This strategic shift is also seen by an interviewee as a transition from lobbying to mobilization and organization (Interview B3). Whereas both ORIT and the ICFTU could be considered to be pursuing "labour diplomacy" in advocating the incorporation of social clauses into trade agreements, ORIT officials envisaged a shift to a more grassroots oriented and activist mobilizing strategy, that would get workers involved. In contrast with the analyses describing ILMOs as mostly bureaucratic (Moody 1997, Waterman 2004), this new orientation would represent a shift towards a internationalism "closer" to the workers.

Luis Anderson also engaged ORIT in democratization of its internal procedures. Even though a current ORIT official qualified Anderson's leadership as "centralized"

(Interview B3), Jakobsen notes that it is during his term that ORIT reformed its own structures, leading to a more collegial leadership. From 1997 on, ORIT was headed by a Secretariat, elected at its congress, instead of a single General Secretary (Jakobsen 2001: 377). This model of leadership would actually become the trademark of ORIT that it would try to “export” to the ICFTU, in particular by asking that a collegial executive, representative of the diversity of the ICFTU membership, be elected at the Congress.<sup>57</sup>

Another innovation of the 1980s was the creation of the Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur (CCSCS) in 1986, launched with the support of the ORIT. This made it possible to unite a large number of organizations from the Southern Cone to fight dictatorship and the debt crisis, regardless of their other ideological orientations, but it did not necessarily fit with ORIT’s positions at the time, which remained quite marked by the Cold War. Founded outside of ORIT, the CCSCS accepted members that were not affiliated to the ICFTU, and even some who were affiliated to the WFTU. Anderson was not very comfortable with the CCSCS (Interview B3). He refused to reproduce the experience of regional coordinations in other parts of the hemisphere, even in Central America where it could have helped to fight the chronic weakness suffered by unions (Interview B3). His opposition was mostly motivated by the fact that U.S. unions were themselves opposed to the high level of autonomy and political openness practiced by the CCSCS. An ORIT official noted that Anderson “told me a lot about the AIFLD opposition to the founding of the CCSCS” (Interview B25, my translation). He also explained that until 1995, the representative for the Southern Cone

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<sup>57</sup> Jakobsen (2001: 373-374) explains how this attempt failed at the 1996 ICFTU Congress in Brussels and at the 2000 Durban Congress. Previously, in 1994, a group of unions from the South and some Europeans had already tried to have Luis Anderson elected as ICFTU General Secretary but lost to Bill Jordan, a British unionist supported by the Northern unions traditionally leading the ICFTU.

to ORIT was actually an ICFTU representative, coming from the European headquarters, because ORIT was too sceptical of its own affiliates in the Southern Cone. This indicates that the CCSCS, an independent initiative coming from the Southern Cone unions, was viewed with considerable mistrust by ORIT, despite the official support the latter granted to the former. It therefore illustrates how ORIT was, at that time, still more worried about keeping its affiliates under control than responding to a common concern among South American unions.

The second phase of the ORIT's reform came when Luis Anderson was replaced by Victor Baez, in 2003. Baez had been Secretary for Social and Economic Policy since 1997 – ORIT's "number 2", a position created with the adoption of the collegial leadership. A Paraguayan, he started his labour career in the mid-1970s as leader of the banking workers union and opponent of the violent dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (Interview B25). As head of ORIT, Baez aimed at deepening the reforms started under Anderson. According to an ORIT official, he "changed the model of leadership, making it even more collegial and more transparent" (Interview B3, my translation).

Formally elected at the 2005 ORIT Congress in Brasília,<sup>58</sup> Baez was given by ORIT membership the political directions that would inform the organization's activity. Essentially, ORIT reaffirmed its opposition to U.S.-style free trade agreements while supporting regional integration in Latin America. It also accepted political diversity within its ranks while promoting the unity of the labour movement wherever possible (Interview B3). As a result, Baez not only changed ORIT's relation to the CCSCS but also promoted the implementation of similar coordinations in all the regions of the

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<sup>58</sup> Baez had replaced Anderson *pro-tempore* between 2003 and 2005 because of Anderson's sudden death in 2003.

hemisphere (Interview B25). Thus in 2004, ORIT supported the launching of a coordination in Central America, and in 2006 in the Andean region. They would follow the same expansive principle as the CCSCS: non-ORIT members were welcome to join.

An ORIT official explained the reasons for this open attitude:

We bring unity. And if you want to bring unity, you have to open yourself as an organization. But just opening yourself, without a clear political direction, could lead to internal problems (...) but if you are open and you have a political direction, this opening will reinforce your organization and the labour movement in general (Interview B25, my translation)

Regional coordinations were also thought as a way for weaker affiliates to be heard. Several ORIT officials I interviewed presented the Americas as having two strong extremes and a desert in between (Interviews B3 and B25). In other words, the United States and Canada on the one hand, and the Southern Cone on the other, benefited from having relatively solid domestic unions, even if they suffered from neoliberal policies too. Yet the centre of the hemisphere was characterized as possessing a “very weak, very fragmented” labour movement (Interview B25, my translation). This weakness explains ORIT’s commitment to workers’ unity. Even while acknowledging that the design of the organizations should ultimately be decided by the workers in each country, ORIT officials I interviewed clearly preferred unified organizations, at least at the branch level

If we have two affiliates in one country, and one is in favour of a process of unity whereas the other is not, we are not going to treat both the same way. We will favour the one working towards unity. (...) We need to go further than company-based unionism, but even worse, in some countries, there are several unions in the same company! (...) We have to go towards branch-based unions, not company-based unions, and if we can’t go that far, then at least we must build federations (Interview B25, my translation)

ORIT called this strategy of promoting unity “union self reform” (“autoreforma sindical”, Interviews B3, B5 and B25): in this perspective, to look beyond their corporatist interests, unions have to unite, federate, and see the “bigger picture”. Regional coordinations play a

key role in that process as they encourage unions from the same region to work together and build a position reflecting the realities of their own region. To give weight to the regional coordinations, ORIT gave them statutory seats at its Working Group on Regional Integration, previously exclusively composed by members of ORIT executive (Interview B25). This way, the different regions' voices could be heard on the topic at the heart of the ORIT's new agenda, free trade.

This led to the development of a core document, the "Labour Platform of the Americas", written by ORIT collaboratively with its regional coordinations and launched in 2005 (Godio 2007, Interview B25). This document not only included claims traditionally associated with the labour movement, such as better working conditions and wages, but also presented a political analysis of the situation of the hemisphere. It reiterated labour's opposition to free trade agreements and laid out a full political programme for the socio-economic development of the region and, ultimately, the establishment of inclusive societies. It is also noteworthy that the platform was developed by both ORIT and non-ORIT affiliates, and thus gave voice even to the weakest organizations of the hemisphere. This makes the Platform one of the first genuine manifestations of labour unity in the Americas (Interview B3).

The work done around the Labour Platform is intrinsically linked with one of the main challenges ORIT had to confront in the last few years: the founding of the ITUC and of its regional organization in the Americas. Wachendorfer (2007) exposes the main issues at stake in this process for ORIT. He argues that Latin American unions were virtually absent from the debate over the launching of the ITUC but that the issue was very much debated in the region. If the merger between the ICFTU and the WCL was not

seen as problematic from a European perspective (the two had already adopted a common European regional organization since 1973), it was certainly not as easy in Latin America, where the relations between ORIT and the CLAT had been troubled for decades. The CLAT, which represented a much lower number of individual workers (2.5 million vs. 25 millions for ORIT, according to ORIT 2007b), feared it would be simply absorbed by ORIT (Wachendorfer 2007: 39-40). It was also concerned for its assets in Latin America.<sup>59</sup> Finally, it wanted to preserve the strictly Latin American identity of the new regional organization, and promoted the full incorporation of the regional coordinations, instead of maintaining their existing status as autonomous bodies.<sup>60</sup>

An ORIT official close to the negotiations told me that the process was delayed in the Americas precisely because of the CLAT's suspicion, or even opposition, to the process of unification (Interview B3). He confirmed the issues identified by Wachendorfer (2007) and explained that they were being solved. The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) would be founded a few months after I completed my fieldwork in Latin America (in March 2008). The structures and positions adopted largely reflected ORIT's original bargaining positions: the headquarters are located in São Paulo, in the former ORIT's headquarters, the geographical span of the TUCA covers the entire hemisphere, the regional coordinations maintain their autonomy and serve as bridges with as yet non-affiliated organizations.

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<sup>59</sup> Despite its size, the CLAT employed much more employees than ORIT, in great part thanks to the financial support of the WCL's European affiliates

<sup>60</sup> These apparently formalistic divergences hid more fundamental divisions. The CLAT's attachment to a strictly Latin American organization was the expression of its rejection of U.S. influence, which it considered worse than European influence. ORIT rejected this idea of seeing in Europe a more acceptable form of capitalism than the one practiced in North America (see ORIT 2007b). Also, CLAT's will to formally incorporate regional coordinations to the future organization showed its suspicion toward unions that were not yet affiliated, often more radical, whereas ORIT was very attached to building bridges with those organizations.

This concern for rallying previously non-affiliated union centres was central to ORIT. Even if it was less than enthusiastic about the idea of merging with the CLAT, it did see in the launching of the TUCA an opportunity to reach previously non-affiliated union centres. Wachendorfer (2007) underlines that in several countries of the region, non-affiliated union centres were either the only union centres (Bolivia, Uruguay), the most important ones (Peru, Colombia) or significant players (Argentina). All the ORIT officials I interviewed insisted on the importance of reaching out to the non-affiliated to consolidate the new TUCA. One of them even considered that the new organization should be first and foremost a “common front” of the labour movement in the Americas and should therefore be as inclusive as possible (Interview B3). They were satisfied that the launching of the ITUC made it possible for the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA) and the Central Única de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT-C) to join the new organization. At the same time, they regretted it was not possible to convince the Uruguayan Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (PIT-CNT) or the Confederación General de Tabajadores de Perú (CGTP) to join. As a result, the work of the regional coordinations will remain essential to keep working with those organizations who have already been quite involved in previous projects, such as the Labour Platform (Interviews B3, B4 and B25). Wachendorfer (2007: 42) also underlines that these non-affiliated unions happen to be among the most progressive of the hemisphere, and would therefore contribute to strengthening the new directions taken by ORIT.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Similarly to the Brazilian CUT, most of these unions are from the left but did not want to play the game of either the ICFTU or the WFTU and therefore remained non-affiliated internationally during the Cold War.

Another fundamental change in the region has been the election of progressive governments in almost all major countries (Lula in Brazil, Kirchner in Argentina, Bachelet in Chile, Morales in Bolivia, and Chávez in Venezuela). ORIT officials generally expressed critical support for these leaders. One of them emphasized that the new direction taken by ORIT is associated with greater autonomy of the labour movement from governments and political parties, although “independence is not indifference, autonomy is not neutrality” (Interview B3). These governments are seen to contribute to a recomposition of the labour market favourable to unions and tend to decriminalize social movements. Another ORIT official however warned against the temptation of just relying on these governments to achieve workers’ goals, although he clearly made a distinction between the left-wing ones and the others: “we are never going to say that Lula is the same as Uribe”<sup>62</sup> (Interview B25, my translation).

In the case of Venezuela, ORIT officials generally remain prudent. They recognize in Chávez a progressive leader, and tend to agree with his position regarding U.S. influence in Latin America (Interviews B3, B4 and B25). Nevertheless, they are concerned about labour rights and union independence under his regime, and they protest against the Venezuelan intervention in the affairs of the ORIT’s affiliate, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV). At the same time, they also rejected the participation of the CTV in one the coups attempted against Chávez and advocated unity between the CTV and the newly formed pro-Chávez Unión Nacional de Trabajadores. An ORIT official summarized the position: “between Uribe in Colombia and Chávez in Venezuela, without a doubt we are with Chávez, despite Chávez’s anti-

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<sup>62</sup> Álvaro Uribe is Colombia’s President. He is known for his conservative policies and his support for U.S. foreign policy in the region.

union discourse, because Uribe's anti-union discourse is much worse" (Interview B4, my translation).

Overall, the ORIT officials I interviewed felt that two external actors influenced the evolution of ORIT in the last decades. The first is that of European unions, who early on supported the socio-political unionism orientation (Interviews B3 and B25). The CCSCS was also strongly supported by Europeans and still is, as can be seen on its website where the two main sponsors mentioned are the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foundation of the Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.), one of Spain's main union centres. In addition, the shift in the AFL-CIO foreign policy adopted after the election of John Sweeney at the presidency of the Federation in 1995 played a role: "The more visible change happened when change started to happen at the AFL-CIO, with the election of Sweeney" (Interview B3, my translation). The reform of the Federation's foreign policy was at the forefront of Sweeney's programme. In 1997, he ordered the dismantling of the AFL-CIO's regional institutes, and their replacement by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. This shift corresponded with a break from Cold War policies. From this point on, the AFL-CIO would aim at supporting a more diverse and independent labour movement than the corporatist ones which it had been allied with for decades because of anticommunism. The AFL-CIO would favour those unions that would challenge corporatism the most, even if they did not totally break away from it. That change was in phase with the new orientations taken by ORIT.

Despite the support given by the European unions in several of the directions it has taken in recent years, ORIT has reaffirmed its will to be an autonomous organization within the ITUC. That position, already expressed at the 2000 ICFTU Congress

(Jakobsen 2001: 373), is linked by ORIT officials with the question of Eurocentrism.

They believe that in order to rebalance the internal relations between ITUC affiliates, unions from the South need autonomous structures, but they also have to use them.

According to one senior ORIT official:

We are co-responsible for Eurocentrism (...) Because we left a vacuum. So, for Eurocentrism to disappear, we have the responsibility to build capacities, make proposals, follow-ups, and debate at the international level about all the themes, international or regional. We have to feel that we belong to the ITUC and that its politics also reflect the aspirations of the labour movement in the Americas and in Latin America in particular (Interview B25, my translation)

Another ORIT official noted that one of the positions adopted at the 2005 Brasília Congress was that no distinction should be made between U.S. and European capital despite the persistent “myth” in the region that European investment is better than the American (Interview B3). This theme has also been at stake during the negotiation between ORIT and the CLAT regarding the founding of the TUCA. The CLAT had defended the position that a distinction should be made between the two, in favour of Europeans (ORIT 2007b). Overall, ORIT officials considered that the changes adopted in the last decades by the ORIT were made easier because of the support of Europeans and later by the shift in the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy. Nevertheless, these changes both aim at a rupture with the AFL-CIO domination (by breaking away from Cold War dynamics) and at an independence from directions given by the European leadership of the ITUC. Once the symbol of U.S. imperialism on Latin America, ORIT turned into a forum and a channel for Latin American unionists to express their views and act on them. I now turn to the relationship ORIT has maintained with its affiliates in Mexico and Brazil in order to investigate how these changes were received in these two major Latin American countries.

## **2. Mexico and ORIT**

As we saw in chapter 3, Mexico is a typical corporatist state. Its labour movement has a long-standing tradition of submission to the state, especially under the most authoritative phases of the regime. Disciplined and concerned with “social peace”, official Mexican unions have contributed to containing the expansion of communism in the country, and were therefore very much in sync with ORIT’s Cold War orientations. Their alignment with the government also led them to fully support NAFTA, a decision which began to alter their position toward ORIT. Studying Mexican unions’ involvement in ORIT therefore contributes to understanding the position of traditional corporatist unions towards ILMOs. It gives a broader sense of how ORIT has been working with this kind of union, fairly widespread in Latin America, and to what extent this relation has changed since the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization.

The relation between the ORIT and its Mexican affiliates has gone through several phases since the establishment of the structure of Cold War trade unionism in the Americas at the end of WWII. Dominated for a long time by the privileged relationship between ORIT and the corporatist CTM, Mexico-ORIT relations started to deteriorate at the end of the 1980s. The arrival of new, independent unions raised expectations for a renewed relationship between ORIT and its Mexican affiliates but the movement towards this renewal is made difficult by the legacies of corporatism.

This section will present an overview of the prevalent dynamics between ORIT and Mexico during the Cold War period and will then elaborate on the changes that have happened since the end of the 1980s, again drawing on the interviews with the different actors. It will examine the evolution of Mexican involvement in ORIT through the lens of

two key issues: the unity of the international trade union movement and reactions to free trade.

## 2.1. Cold War Dynamics

The first important characteristic of Mexican involvement in ORIT is the fact that until 2002, the CTM was the sole Mexican affiliate to ORIT. CTM's monopoly of representation of Mexican workers in international fora also applied to the ILO. CTM has held this monopoly even though it has been dominant but never monopolistic within Mexico. CTM representatives are proud of this historic position and quick to note that ORIT was launched at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City and that Fidel Velázquez was among its founding fathers (Interviews M16 and M19). They also point out that from 1961 to 1989 ORIT had its headquarters in the CTM building, symbolizing of the strong link between ORIT and the CTM during the Cold War.

This situation undermined the ability of other independent Mexican unions to maintain international activities. As a UNT representative explained, the CTM monopoly discouraged other unions from tackling international issues or joining ILMOs (Interview M9). Nor was CROC involved internationally for decades because of the CTM veto (Interview M11). This monopoly was exclusive to the ICFTU and ORIT however, and it did not apply to the WCL and the CLAT. Yet the CLAT never really established itself in Mexico. The FAT was affiliated with the CLAT from its founding to the 1970s (Interviews M14 and M1) but after it left,<sup>63</sup> the CLAT was represented in Mexico by an NGO, the Centro de Promoción Social (CENPROS), funded by the CLAT itself

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<sup>63</sup> The FAT was kicked out of the CLAT because it was suspected of communist acquaintances and because its flexible structure bothered the CLAT leadership (Interview M8). Robles *et al.* (2005) also mention the strong support provided by the Christian labour movement when the FAT was founded in 1960, but that it would eventually be kicked out of the CLAT in the 1970s because of its Marxist inclination.

(Interview M14). In the 1980s and 1990s, three small Mexican unions would formally join the CLAT but were not very actively involved in the organization (Interview M8). For decades, the FAT was among the rare Mexican unions other than the CTM to actually maintain international relations, which would lead to its role in the NAFTA debate, as we will see later. However the CLAT weakness meant that most of Mexican unions' international relations were concentrated in ORIT and its affiliate, the CTM.

Nevertheless, the strong historical link between the CTM and ORIT is not necessarily a sign of the former's strong involvement in the latter. As put by a representative of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center based in Mexico, there was a "trade off" between ORIT and the CTM: ORIT would be hosted in Mexico in exchange for ORIT and its "sponsor", the AFL-CIO, not interfering in Mexican affairs (Interview M5). In fact, the AIFLD did not maintain an office in Mexico as it did in other countries of the region, in contrast with its strong interventionist role in Brazil and in Central America (Interview M5). This is in line with a defining feature of the Mexican labour movement: its nationalism, which is a legacy of the Mexican Revolution shared by all unions (Interviews M2 and M6). It makes unions sceptical of any foreign intervention in their internal affairs.<sup>64</sup> We will see that this feature still appears in contemporary union discourse.

Another explanation for the non-interventionism of the AIFLD and of ORIT in Mexico during the Cold War is the fact that Mexican corporatist unions, and the CTM in particular, took on the role that ORIT and AIFLD usually played in other countries of the region: containing communism. One observer recalled that the communist elements of

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<sup>64</sup> In her analysis of a labour conflict at Ford in the 1990s, Healy (2008: 100) mentions that the CTM was totally opposed to any intervention of the ICFTU or the ORIT in that matter, even though in that case those ILMOs were supporting a CTM affiliate.

Mexican unions were “purged” very efficiently during Miguel Alemán presidency (1946-1952), making it less necessary for ORIT and the AFL-CIO to act as a check on them (Interview M2). This situation differed from the situation of other Latin American countries, such as Chile or Peru, where mainstream unionism was still under significant influence from the Communist Party, and hence needed to be “taken care of” by ORIT and the AIFLD (Interview M4).<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, ORIT, and more broadly the ICFTU, still exerted some control over the CTM’s international activities. A representative of the CTM noted the way a high official of the ICFTU decided who would represent Mexico at the ILO even though the CTM had selected another candidate:

“X”, who represented us, passed away. So we had already nominated a brother to replace him, a fine man, who spoke French, a graduate in International Relations, from the Musicians’ Union. But while I was attending an ORIT meeting, an ICFTU official told me:

- Oh, “Y” has got to go to the ILO. I am telling you, he is going to go. But first he will have to pass some background check.
- No, I said, in Mexico we have already decided, and it is going to be “Z”.
- No, because you cannot take this decision, this decision is ours. If “Y” doesn’t go, then nobody goes.

And that is how the nomination was done.

(Interview M16, my translation, any reference to individual names were erased in order to guarantee confidentiality)

This story is in contradiction with the discourse on Mexican nationalism. In fact, the same interviewee noted that “They [the AFL-CIO] never controlled us”. This suggests that even if the AIFLD and ORIT were not as involved in Mexico as they were in other countries, a certain degree of control was maintained, in particular through the

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<sup>65</sup> Despite its good formal relationship with ORIT, the CTM was already quite isolationist, and this attitude was tolerated as long as it played its role of safeguarding against communist activists. A representative of the CTM noted however the historical ties linking his organization to the Venezuelan CTV and the Argentinean CGT, which he considered the three most prestigious union centres in Latin America (Interview M16).

ICFTU's coordinating role at the ILO. Also, representatives of both the CTM and the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center told me about training activities conducted by the AIFLD and ORIT with Mexican unionists during the Cold War, which took place in Washington (Interview M5) or at the ORIT training facility in Cuernavaca, Mexico (Interview M16). The AFL-CIO Solidarity Center representative argued that those activities were not significant, however, and that the AFL-CIO-CTM relationship was much more formal than substantial.

## **2.2. Mexico and ORIT after the Cold War**

The Cold War equilibrium between the CTM and ORIT was broken at the end of the 1980s. Three main factors appear to be behind this: the shift in AFL-CIO foreign policy, the shift of ORIT's political orientations, and the debate over NAFTA.

The shift in the AFL-CIO foreign policy was primarily due to budget cuts made by the U.S. government in its international programmes. As suggested by an AFL-CIO Solidarity Center representative, from 1989 funding from Washington for union development in Latin America was severely cut (Interview M5). Unions were not considered as necessary allies against communism anymore but rather as obstacles to the development of the free market. That shift would become more pronounced after the election of George Sweeney at the Presidency of the AFL-CIO in 1995. The reform of the AFL-CIO's foreign policy was at the forefront of Sweeney's programme. In fact, in 1997, he ordered the dismantling of the AFL-CIO's regional institutes, and their replacement by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, also known as the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center.

The founding of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center would mean a reorientation of the AFL-CIO's relations to unions in Latin America. Instead of focusing exclusively on corporatist unions, known for their anticommunist stand, U.S. unions would open up to other types of unions and encourage those with democratic practices. Shortly after this policy shift was announced, Sweeney came to Mexico City in 1998 and in a speech at the UNAM he laid out the new AFL-CIO's approach to Mexico. The U.S. labour federation would planned to diversify its contacts with Mexican unions, and would no longer deal exclusively with the CTM. It would also encourage the development of independent unionism. Consequently, the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center opened a permanent field office in Mexico City. Two Mexican interviewees mentioned in particular union training conducted in the State of Puebla's maquilas by an earlier representative of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center. Although one Mexican observer viewed these initiatives as quite positive (Interview M6), a labour lawyer close to the FAT downplayed the efficiency of these actions and claimed that U.S. ways of organizing rarely fit the Mexican reality (Interview M8).

NAFTA proved a key turning point (Interviews M4, M6 and M27). The CTM's support for the agreement cut it off from both its North American counterparts and from ORIT which, under the AFL-CIO's influence, also adopted a position against NAFTA. This is confirmed by the position of CTM officials I interviewed who saw NAFTA as mostly positive for Mexican workers (Interviews M16 and M19). For one, the dramatic rise in numbers of maquilas after the adoption of NAFTA was not a problem as those workers were now protected by unions (Interview M16).<sup>66</sup> The major issue he sees with

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<sup>66</sup> This interviewee referred to the creation of new unions in the maquilas, but most of them are actually considered as "ghost unions", signing "protection contracts" instead of real collective agreements.

free trade is actually the behaviour of one U.S. union (the Teamsters) that opposes the entrance of Mexican truck drivers into the U.S. and therefore violates the spirit of free trade (Interview M16).

The UNT did not exist when NAFTA was negotiated, but one of its main affiliates, the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM), had a position. An STRM representative suggested his union was not opposed to NAFTA, although it was critical of some aspects (Interview M9). Overall, the STRM believed that NAFTA would at least set some rules in terms of international trade, instead of relying on the arbitrary decisions of the U.S. government. The agreement was perceived as an opportunity to a more egalitarian bilateralism. There again, however, the United States and U.S. unions were criticized by representatives of the UNT and the STRM (Interviews M9 and M25) for not respecting the spirit of NAFTA. They referred not only to the same Teamsters issue but more importantly to the limitations on foreign investment in the United States, imposed by the U.S. Federal Communication Commission, that blocked the employer of STRM members, TelMex, from making significant progress in the U.S. market.

Since then, the UNT has defined a position on NAFTA however, which includes demand for a reform to the side agreement on labour and to the chapters related to agriculture (Interview M9). Mexican unions' support for NAFTA explained why the AFL-CIO turned to the FAT and the RMALC. According to a UNT representative, the AFL-CIO would later realize that it needed allies more representative of Mexican labour, leading U.S. unions to support and work with the UNT as soon as it was launched

(Interview M9). This confirms the idea, discussed in chapter 3, that the international support enjoyed by the FAT was actually disproportionate to its position at home.

Whereas the AFL-CIO began to diversify its contacts with Mexican unions and ORIT to adopt new policies, relations with their traditional ally, the CTM, began to deteriorate. An important manifestation of this was the moving of ORIT's headquarters from Mexico City to Caracas, in 1989, and then to São Paulo, in 2006. This symbolized the growing discrepancy between the CTM and ORIT. As put by an ORIT official:

ORIT left Mexico because of problems with Mexican unions (...) the PRI, the Mexican Government, the privatizations, the commercial opening, the signature of NAFTA... there was several things (...). It became very uncomfortable for ORIT to stay in Mexico without confronting the CTM (...) When the CTM took the government's side against the Zapatista uprising (...) ORIT took its distance and said "No, this is something else" and that bothered the CTM a lot (...) ORIT also questioned the decision of the CTM to support NAFTA whereas U.S. and Canadian unions rejected it (Interview B4, my translation)<sup>67</sup>

The CTM was particularly reluctant to ORIT's interventionist attitude towards its affiliates. Whereas ORIT had remained particularly discrete during the Cold War, it became much more inclined to criticize corporatist and conservative governments in the last decade. This entered in conflict with CTM's nationalism and with its privileged relation with the Mexican government. As put by an ORIT official: "I believe that for a long time the Mexican labour movement cut itself from the exterior. The main problem we [ORIT] had in Mexico was that when we criticized the Mexican government, unions said "We will not allow you to speak ill of Mexico"" (Interview B25, my translation).

More broadly, the CTM showed great scepticism towards the efficiency of ORIT's new orientations. Its representatives considered that the "golden era" of ORIT is

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<sup>67</sup> CTM representatives were the only persons I interviewed to deny the political dimension of ORIT's decision to move from Mexico City (Interview M16).

behind it. The two officials I interviewed both praised Luis Anderson for his work<sup>68</sup> but remained very vague about the action of Victor Baez since he was elected, and one of them talked in harsh terms about ORIT's current policies: "ORIT was abandoned. It is not working at the same rhythm as it used to (...) Everyone is working in its own country today, without globalizing unionism (...) There is not so much communication [between unions] in Latin America today" (Interview M19, my translation). As a result, ORIT considered the CTM, along with the Venezuelan CTV and the Argentinean CGT, to be part of a "conservative bloc" opposed to ORIT's post-Cold War evolution (Interview B3).<sup>69</sup>

Despite the increasing distance between ORIT and the CTM, the Mexican union centre fought to remain the only, and later the main, representative of Mexico's workers in ORIT. Representatives from both the CROC and the UNT concurred in explaining that their organizations were not able to join the ICFTU and the ORIT until 2001-2002 because their applications had been blocked by the CTM (Interview M11 and M9). In the end, accepting both as new affiliates was seen as a "bargain" as one of them (the CROC) was generally associated with corporatist unionism whereas the other (the UNT) was the main representative of independent unionism.

Internal conflicts between Mexican affiliates continued after the founding of the ITUC. When this fieldwork was conducted, several months after the launching of the ITUC, Mexico was one of the rare countries that had not yet communicated who would

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<sup>68</sup> According to Jakobsen (2001: 373) however, the CTM did not support Anderson's candidacy to the ICFTU Secretariat General in 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Significantly, a CTM representative considered the same three unions as the most prestigious in Latin America and strongly supported the CTV against Chávez (Interview M16).

represent it on the newly formed ITUC General Council.<sup>70</sup> This was because the three Mexican affiliates could not reach a compromise on how to split the three available seats (one titular, a first substitute and a second substitute). CTM officials were claiming that the titular position should be always kept for the most important organization, the CTM: “it is not possible that the majority organization be minimized by minority organizations” (Interview M19, my translation). In contrast, UNT representatives contested the status of the CTM as the major union centre in Mexico. A labour lawyer working for the UNT summarized that perception: “The CTM is not a real organization anymore (...) its dependence on the government is very high (...) it has stopped being the main organization in this country for several years (...) internationally, it only has formal, not real representation” (Interview M21, my translation). Furthermore, the UNT now played that role: “Obviously, the main organization at the national level is the UNT, as much at the quantitative level, in terms of membership, as at the qualitative level, where it keeps proposing policies” (Interview M21, my translation). In the end, Mexico adopted a unique system, whereby its representation to the ITUC would change every year, in order to allow each of the three affiliates to fill the position of “titular” within the same mandate.

The CROC, which decided to launch an international policy in 1998, presents itself as an alternative to the CTM. The official I interviewed explained how his organization moved away from the corporatist regime, in particular by severing its links with the PRI, and supporting the PRD candidate at the 2006 Presidential election (Interview M11). The CROC explored several options before joining the ORIT and

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<sup>70</sup> The General Council is ITUC’s “Parliament”. Seats are distributed by country, with one titular and two substitutes for each seat. In countries with various affiliates, it is common to distribute the three positions among the various affiliates, eventually rotating after each Congress, held every four years.

maintained links with as many organizations as possible. It presents itself as a reformist organization: it supports NAFTA while criticizing aspects of the agreement and it thinks unions should get involved in productivity talks inspired by the German model of co-management. A representative of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation confirmed that the CROC actively participates in various activities organized around labour internationalism (Interview M12).

UNT's reasons for joining ORIT are very much related to its opposition to the CTM. According to a UNT official "it was important that not only the CTM got international representation" (Interview M22, my translation). Moreover, it is claimed that the UNT is more representative of the Mexican society thanks to the connections it has with other social movements, including agricultural workers' organizations that participated in its founding. In terms of international relations, maybe even more than in other matters, the UNT's position is largely defined by its most influential affiliate: the STRM.<sup>71</sup> A former UNT official considered that this situation was problematic, as it gave the STRM full control over the UNT's foreign policy, without giving clear rules, in particular in terms of funding and mobilization of the affiliates around these issues (Interview M27).

As an independent union which aims at breaking away from Mexican corporatism, UNT is more in phase with ORIT's new orientations. UNT sees ORIT as a useful forum from where to get inspiration for its own programme. European experiences were particularly helpful when UNT came out with its proposal of a socio-economic council (Interview M22) and its participation in the European Union – Mexico civil

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<sup>71</sup> A representative of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation did not see that situation as a bad thing however and considered that the UNT is by far the best hope for independent and democratic unionism in Mexico (Interview M12).

society encounters helped it to think about the way the union would promote a “social agenda”.

Nevertheless, the UNT is also critical of some aspects of ORIT’s policies and thus limits its involvement. Even as the most involved Mexican affiliate of ORIT, it remains suspicious about the latter. These criticisms deal mostly with the bureaucratic tendencies of ORIT leadership and its lack of concrete involvement, in contrast with GUFs which are perceived as much closer to the unions’ realities (Interview M25).<sup>72</sup> This perception of ORIT by the UNT leads the latter not to get involved too deeply within the former. UNT representatives acknowledged that U.S., Brazilian and Argentinean unions were the most influential within ORIT, not Mexican (Interview M25). Unions from the Southern Cone were helped by the existence of a regional coordination whereas Mexicans could not rely on a similar structure for North America (Interview M9).

The broadening gap between the CTM and ORIT and the relative scepticism maintained by the UNT towards ORIT led to a withdrawal of Mexican unions from ORIT’s agenda. The lack of interest of Mexican union centres in international affairs and in ORIT affairs in particular was well illustrated by the process of unification that led to the creation of the TUCA. In fact, all the activities related to this issue were organized not by Mexican unions but by an external actor, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES). The FES is the political foundation of the German Social Democratic Party and was closely associated with the founding of the ITUC in Europe. One of its representative suggested:

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<sup>72</sup> Most UNT representatives in charge of international activities are also (if not first and foremost) STRM representatives. This reflects the specific fact that the UNT does not maintain its own staff, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and the influence of the STRM within the UNT. The fact that these representatives wear two hats was reflected in their discourse. As I interviewed them on both the UNT’s and the STRM’s international activities, they generally had much more to say on the latter than on the former. In fact, they were quite critical of ORIT, and of political ILMOs in general, which they considered much further from the day-to-day realities of workers than the GUFs.

“if the Foundation does not launch the debate on this theme, none of these three [ORIT affiliates] will (...) I did not see any initiative coming from them” (Interview M12, my translation). The CTM, the UNT and the CROC all participated in FES-sponsored events, but the organizers noted a much stronger involvement of the UNT and the CROC than the CTM. A similar observation could be made concerning the first joint initiative taken by ORIT and the GUFs in Mexico: a research on protection contracts. Concerned that this “perversion” of the corporatist regime could “contaminate” other countries of the region with similar labour laws, the ORIT and most GUFs jointly launched a campaign of awareness of and opposition to the protection contracts. The FES was given the mandate to conduct the research and promote it. The campaign was followed mostly by the UNT and, to a lesser extent, by the CROC. The CTM was almost absent from it.

Despite its three official affiliates to ORIT, Mexico withdrew considerably during the post Cold War period from ORIT in comparison to the privileged position it enjoyed during the Cold War. If the legacy of corporatism can explain why the CTM cut almost all its links to the “new” ORIT, other factors are at play concerning the UNT. They deal both with national dynamics (inter-union relations, UNT’s internal structures) and the lack of a regional coordination, in contrast with the Southern Cone. We now turn to Brazilian unions to explore this contrast.

### **3. Brazil and ORIT**

As noted, Brazilian unions are quite different from Mexico’s. Although there are remnants of its corporatist past, its main union centres were forged in the resistance to the authoritarian regime and have developed a certain independence from the state, along with strong links with left-wing political parties. In the last decades, they have also

favoured socially-inclined integration in South America and opposed U.S.-style free trade agreements. Their clandestine status under the military dictatorship prevented them from any kind of international involvement, and their radical roots were not in sync with ORIT's strong anticommunist stand. With the end of the Cold War and ORIT's shift to a more progressive agenda, however, they became more likely to join and get involved in ILMOs. Therefore, studying Brazil's involvement in ORIT provides a nice contrast to Mexico, offering a clearer idea of the various paths Latin American unions have taken towards this organization in the last decades. Whereas Mexico represents the traditional corporatist type of unionism, Brazil shows how other types of unions, which are more progressive and independent, have managed to gain a voice within ORIT.

As noted, during the first decades of the Cold War, Brazilian participation in ILMOs, particularly the ORIT, was non-existent, in contrast with Mexico, where formal ties with ORIT were strong. As union centres had always been prohibited by the CLT, and since state control over unions was particularly harsh, no participation was possible in ILMOs. It is only with the launching of the CUT, and later the CGT and FS, that Brazil started to have a voice in the international labour movement. After democratization, the CGT was the first Brazilian union centre to join the ICFTU, in the early 1990s. It was followed by the CUT in 1992, and FS. When they were legalized, Brazilian unions had mixed feelings towards ILMOs in general and ORIT in particular. On the one hand, they knew they needed to reach out to international forums in order to gain legitimacy. Some of them, mostly the CUT, had also benefitted from the support of ICFTU affiliates, in particular from Europe. On the other hand, they were reluctant to join an organization with a Cold War past.

In this section, I will discuss the perceptions of each of ORIT's affiliates in Brazil regarding the directions taken by the ORIT since the end of the 1980s, more particularly on two issues: first, the founding of the TUCA, and more broadly the ORIT's internal politics; and, secondly, questions of free trade and regional integration.

### **3.1. The CUT and ORIT**

CUT's decision to join the ICFTU, and consequently the ORIT, was not taken easily. From its founding in 1983 to 1992, the CUT remained unaffiliated with any worldwide ILMO. The various tendencies that contributed to the formation of the new Brazilian union centre did not want to join either the ICFTU or the WFTU because, as reported by a former CUT official, "at that time, if you joined either of them, it concretely meant that you were taking sides in the Cold War" (Interview B7, my translation). Another former CUT representative described the state of mind of its union centre at that time:

Our option was nonalignment on any international tendency until 1992 (...) We criticized the movement organized by the communist countries through the WFTU, the role of the ICFTU in the world and specifically of ORIT here in the region, under the influence of the AFL-CIO, which was basically the Department of State, so we stayed out of it (interview B3, my translation)

The end of the Cold War was definitely the turning point that led the CUT to reconsider its position: "Now we could discuss if we could be in the same organization, along with other organizations with which we always had good relations, and in order to help bringing a new vision, new ideas from within the ICFTU and ORIT (...) a more progressive position" (Interview B7, my translation). The debate was heated however, as many Cutistas<sup>73</sup> were still very reluctant to join ORIT.<sup>74</sup> The 1991 CUT Congress was

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<sup>73</sup> "Cutista" is the adjective used to refer to the CUT and its members.

not able to resolve the debate, and the decision was deferred to the 1992 “Plenário”, the highest authority of the CUT between Congresses, where the decision to join the ICFTU and ORIT was adopted, although only by a 60% majority. The issue remained sensitive for several years, but it is now broadly accepted within the CUT (Interview B7).

The shift in the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy played an important role in making the ORIT a more welcoming space for unions like the CUT. As put by a CUT representative: “The most visible, the clearest change, happened when change started to happen within the AFL-CIO with the election of Sweeney (...) and with a policy of opening adopted by ORIT, looking for union centres which decided to criticize and resist neoliberal adjustment instead of adapting to it” (Interview B3). The CUT and the AFL-CIO therefore developed a good relationship between 1995 and 2001 (Interview B7). In 2001, the AFL-CIO’s support for the wars engaged by the U.S. government in Afghanistan and eventually in Iraq, led to a cooling off of its relations with the CUT and other progressive organizations opposed to military intervention (Interview B7). Nevertheless, by then, the CUT’s position within ORIT had already been consolidated.

The influence of the CUT on ORIT is visible in several ways. One of the most obvious is the shift of ORIT’s headquarters from Caracas to São Paulo in 2006. Just as the move from Mexico City to Caracas was motivated by political reasons, this one both reflected ORIT’s increasing difficulties with the Venezuelan government and the growing importance of Brazilian affiliates, in particular the CUT (Interviews B3 and B7). CUT also became involved very quickly in the structure of the ORIT, with several representatives elected to its executive. In 2005, moreover, Victor Baez was elected

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<sup>74</sup> The option of joining the WFTU did not gain enough support to compete with the ICFTU option, and joining the WCL was never seriously considered (Interviews B7 and B21).

General Secretary and a Cutista, Rafael Freire Neto, was elected Secretary for Social and Economic Affairs, the position previously held by Baez and considered the “number 2” in the ORIT hierarchy. As CUT’s fears about the conservative past of ORIT had disappeared, it had become convinced that it needed to gain influence there in order to consolidate its position in Brazil and to advance its political agenda on the regional scene.

One of CUT’s top priorities when it joined ORIT was to make it more democratic by transforming its leadership into a more collegial one. Therefore, it takes credit for the changes adopted by ORIT and the creation of the Secretariat (Interview B7). These changes, , did not extend to the ICFTU which is still associated with an “anglo-saxon” model of unionism, carried out by professional unionists rather than militants. The functioning of the ICFTU is more centralized around the person of the General Secretary whereas ORIT’s leadership is more collegial and more power is devoted to the Executive Committee. As put by a CUT official: “We are practicing in the Americas an international unionism with a different method, a method we haven’t found yet at the international level, at the ITUC” (Interview B21, my translation).

Concerning the substantive policies of ORIT, the CUT had a significant influence on its shifting position on free trade, especially the FTAA. Whereas the ORIT initially promoted the inclusion of a “union forum” in the FTAA (Interview B7), a strategy of opposition was adopted in 1997, focusing upon the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA) as its main vehicle. ORIT’s participation in the HSA and its progressive opening to other social movements, is considered as a legacy of the CUT. As put by a CUT representative: “In the debate over the FTAA, we encouraged, and I think it was great, the construction of the HSA: alliances with social movements and NGOs in resistance to the model of

integration put forward by the FTAA (...) and we won” (Interview B21, my translation).<sup>75</sup> This dedication to alliances came with a will to practice internationalism through mobilization more than through lobbying, the latter being associated with the “anglo-saxon” model rejected by the CUT. The ORIT had to “do unionism, not lobbying” (Interview B21, my translation). The Labour Platform was a good example of this new orientation and method, as it gave ORIT a genuinely union-oriented programme and was built by all the affiliates, not simply by the leadership.

The CUT was also involved in the founding of the TUCA which it considered as an opportunity to reach out to new affiliates. Since, as in Mexico, the CLAT did not have significant membership in Brazil, the new regional organization particularly contributed to attracting previously non-affiliated unions to ORIT, some of them with already existing ties to the CUT. A CUT official suggested that the arrival of unions with similar perspectives to those of the CUT, such as the Argentinean CTA, was a good thing. Nevertheless, the CUT regretted that the Uruguayan PIT-CNT and the Peruvian CGTP decided not to join, along with other unions influenced by the WFTU (Interview B21). Despite the opportunity it presented for recruiting new affiliates, the CUT considered the launching of the ITUC as a “top-down process” and regretted that it was not more clearly presented as the birth of a new organization instead of the merger of two previously existing structures (Interview B7). The leaders of the new ITUC are also still all “men, white, English or European” and therefore no real change happened from what the ICFTU and the WCL were.

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<sup>75</sup> Massicotte (2004: 38-39) confirms that the CUT and other Brazilian social movements played a key role in the anti-FTAA campaign, in particular by inspiring popular consultations across the hemisphere in order to show the opposition to the projected free trade agreement.

CUT's commitment to international activities and ILMOs is very well illustrated by its CUT-Multis programme. Although not directly linked to CUT's involvement in ORIT, it is in line with the desire of ILMOs to coordinate their political and sectoral activities. CUT-Multis is aiming at developing networks of Brazilian unions present in the same MNC (Interview B16). It was officially launched in 2001, two years after Dutch unions wanted to launch an international network of unions at Unilever, a chemical MNC based in The Netherlands. Nine unions were representing Unilever workers in Brazil, affiliated to either the CUT or to FS. The CUT was able to send representatives of two of its unions to the meeting in The Netherlands, but they had never really talked to each other before. After they came back to Brazil, the Brazilian participation in the network stopped, as a result of a lack of communication between the Brazilian unions themselves.

The CUT realized it had to enhance networking between its unions representing workers in the same MNC, and the Dutch FNV expressed its interest in supporting this initiative. The CUT therefore started to build these networks in various sectors (e.g. chemistry workers, steelworkers, commerce workers, bank workers). Not all of them succeeded but the project was expanded and continued to be funded by the FNV. It eventually became official CUT policy at its 2006 Congress. When a network is successful, the CUT encourages its branch-based federations to make the link with their own GUF and incorporate the network into an international network, under the coordination of the GUF. This is one the most advanced cases I encountered during all of my fieldwork of a union centre's involvement in *branch-based* international activities, therefore reflecting the will of the CUT leadership not only to get involved in political

ILMOs but also to encourage its branch-based unions to develop international activities and coordinate them.

CUT's capacity to influence ORIT relied on several factors, in particular the alliances it was able to build within ORIT. If the Mexican CTM is considered a part of ORIT's "conservative pole", the CUT belongs to the "progressive pole", along with the Argentinean CAT, the Canadian CLC and the Colombian CUT-C<sup>76</sup> (Interviews B3, B7, B10 and B21). The CUT also managed to maintain good working relations with conservative unions however, giving it a strategic position ORIT. It was particularly the case with the Argentinean CGT, not only because of the work the two unions had been doing in common through the Southern Cone coordination but also because the CGT wanted to have influence, through the CUT, on Brazilian economic policy, on which Argentine relies a lot. As put by a CUT representative: "the last union with whom the CGT is going to quarrel with is the CUT (...) since they [the CGT] are all very "pelegos" [corporatist], they believe everyone is" and therefore that the CUT has a lot of power over Brazil's economic policies (Interview B10, my translation).

A significant asset for the CUT to gain influence within ORIT has been its long-standing involvement in the Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur (CCSCS). As put by a CUT official:

The CCSCS allowed us to build relations in all the Americas and when we joined the ORIT and the ICFTU, we came with this heritage of independence, pluralism, building capacities, ability to work with a broad range of organizations, and a will to strengthen union centres from the South (Interview B21, my translation)

The CCSCS also played a significant role in the development of ORIT's position and strategy towards the FTAA:

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<sup>76</sup> The CUT-C was not an ORIT affiliate until the founding of the TUCA.

In the ORIT, if we didn't have this solid basis of the CCSCS and this policy of articulation with social movements and other union centres built by the CCSCS, maybe we wouldn't have been able to build the platform against the FTAA and maybe we [the CUT] wouldn't have the same weight we now have in the ORIT (Interview B21, my translation)

Between 1999 and 2006, the CCSCS was mostly funded by the AFL-CIO, largely because it helped the U.S. unions build a coalition against the FTAA (Interview B10).

The AFL-CIO did not want to repeat the error it made with NAFTA, when it could not find solid allies in the South to fight the Agreement.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond influencing the positions and strategies of ORIT, the CCSCS also played a role in ORIT's decision to develop regional coordinations, a direction supported by the CUT. As put by CUT representatives, these regional groupings constitute "a space of intervention very close to the affiliates" (Interview B21, my translation), therefore reinforcing ORIT's proximity with its membership. The CCSCS remains much more functional than the two other regional coordinations. As put by a CUT representative: "It is not because one founds an autonomous organization that it is going to be more combative (...) I think that the Andean Coordination was mostly due to efforts made by the ORIT and the CC.OO., it does not necessarily reflect a local political will" (Interview B10, my translation).

The good inter-union relations within the Brazilian labour movement also benefited the CUT in its involvement in ORIT. In contrast with the situation in Mexico, where constant quarrels characterized the relations between the CTM and the UNT, Brazilian unions have opted for presenting a common front in international fora, therefore

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<sup>77</sup> A representative of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center suggested that during this period, 90% of the Solidarity Center's activities in the Southern Cone were focused on the CCSCS and that it had to eventually stop funding it because of cuts made by the Republican administration in budgets devoted to international aid (Interview B1). The AFL-CIO was replaced by European unions, in particular the Spanish CC.OO. and the Dutch FNV, as CCSCS's main funder.

reinforcing their influence. It is was easier for them to reach common positions on international issues than on domestic ones and it was important for all of them to solve their eventual disagreements between them, in Brazil, instead of bringing them to ORIT (Interview B7). The three union centres entered into a negotiation for the election at the 1996 ICFTU Congress, and they could solve the issues peacefully, adopting a rotation between them. The CUT agreed to be considered equal to the two others even though it represented a larger number of workers.<sup>78</sup> A similar kind of agreement was reached between them for the General Secretariat of the CCSCS where the relations between the Brazilian affiliates are very coordinated (Interview B21).

### **3.2. Força Sindical and ORIT**

Another Brazilian union centre, FS, was founded in 1991 and joined the ICFTU and ORIT a year later. It hesitated between the ICFTU and the WCL but finally opted for the former under the influence of the social democratic tendency of its leadership (Interview B15). FS presents itself as the non-partisan alternative to the CUT: it does not grant its support to only one party, and has various ideological orientations within its membership. As put by FS current and former officials: “the union cannot be the transmission belt of a party”, “Força always was and remains pluralistic” (Interviews B14 and B15, my translation).

In contrast with the CUT, FS did not benefit from international contacts before it decided to join ORIT. FS “had to start from zero” and to fight the idea that it was

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<sup>78</sup> This arrangement differs from the one made between Mexican unions not only because it was quickly and peacefully obtained, but also because it did not need a complex formal agreement stipulating the yearly based rotation, but relied on the mutual good will and confidence between the organizations.

founded only to counter the CUT, which made it not very popular at first among ILMOs. As put by a former FS official: “everything was very new. There was no culture of union centres, and no culture of international relations within labour. This all started at the end of the 1970s” (Interview B15, my translation). It was even more difficult for FS to become involved in the CCSCS which was very ideological and dominated by the CUT, at least in its first years.

FS international policy is characterized by its relation with the CUT. The strong presence of the latter on the international scene makes FS uncomfortable, even if the two unions share a lot of positions, such as on child labour or corporate social responsibility (Interview 15). FS is worried that the CUT use its influence on ORIT and on the CCSCS to promote its own political agenda and its “model” of left-wing unionism. As put by an FS official: “Today in ORIT, the most significant influence comes from the CUT Brazil. The CUT is determining ORIT’s policy through Rafael [Freire]<sup>79</sup>” (Interview B14, my translation). He deplored this situation, and believed both ORIT and the CCSCS are now too dominated by the left, which led to a discrimination against the affiliates not sharing this orientation: “If you’re left-wing, you’re my friend. If you’re right-wing, no” (Interview B14, my translation).

This scepticism towards ORIT and its “CUT style” affects FS’s evaluation of ORIT’s policies and strategies. In contrast with the CUT, FS would like ORIT to strongly support its Venezuelan affiliate against Chávez and it is very sceptical about the policy of alliances with other social movements initiated by ORIT, in particular since the battles against the FTAA. As put by an FS official: “The labour movement is the labour

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<sup>79</sup> A former CUT’s Secretary for International Relations, Rafael Freire has been ORIT Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs since 2005.

movement. Civil society, NGOs... are NGOs. If one mixes up everything, it leads to confusion. Because one never knows how NGOs are funded (...) whereas one knows who funds the labour movement: the workers” (Interview B14, my translation). Similarly, he did not appreciate the position of the left-wing Uruguayan PIT-CNT, both refusing to join the TUCA and influencing it from the CCSCS: “if the PIT-CNT does not want to join, it has to found another organization” (Interview B14, my translation).

In that context, the merger between ORIT and the CLAT was considered as an opportunity to bring more pluralism to the future organization. Since the background of many CLAT affiliates is more to the right, FS felt that it would find new allies in its ranks. As put by an FS official: “The main tendency within the ORIT are left-wing organizations, most of them are centre-left. Within the CLAT, almost all the organizations are linked to the Church or to the right” (Interview B14, my translation). FS was expecting that this ideological diversity would lead the new TUCA to adopt the same attitude FS adopted when it was founded: acknowledging its internal diversity and focusing on the common denominator, which was “unionism of result” for the FS, and should be solidarity between members for the TUCA (Interview B14). These hopes were proven wrong as the merger between ORIT and the CLAT resulted in a strengthening of CUT’s positions and policies, to the detriment of FS.

Less involved internationally than the CUT and benefitting from less support within ORIT, FS has been trying to both work with its powerful Brazilian counterpart and make its own ideas make their way within ORIT. The “pluralism” it officially supports seems to find allies in the more conservative sections of the ORIT membership, which puts it at odds with the current political orientations of the organization. Despite its status

as the second biggest Brazilian union centre, FS clearly does not enjoy as much influence as the CUT within ORIT, although it maintains its international affiliation.

### **3.3. The UGT and ORIT**

The UGT had just been founded when I conducted my fieldwork in Brazil.<sup>80</sup> Out of the founding organizations, only one, the CGT, was an ORIT affiliate. This section therefore deals with the CGT's involvement in ORIT and with the position of the newborn UGT on ORIT's positions and policies.

The CGT decided to join the ICFTU immediately after it was founded, in particular because several of its founding unions were already affiliated to GUFs, making the choice of the ICFTU the only logical one (Interview B11). Nevertheless, the CGT application was initially rejected by the ICFTU. The latter considered the CGT's support for the "imposto sindical" in violation of the ILO Convention 87 on union freedom. Hence, the CGT decided to officially give up its support for the "imposto sindical", while leaving its affiliates the choice to have their own position on this matter. The ICFTU then accepted the CGT's application, on the condition that it would not block the CUT, should this union decide to apply for membership in the ICFTU as well. The CGT agreed to this condition and became the first Brazilian affiliate to the ICFTU and to ORIT.

Both the CGT and the UGT have been comfortable with the main orientations taken by ORIT, in particular in relation to free trade. On that matter, ORIT actually took the lead and was the driving force behind the continental campaign against the FTAA. As an UGT official put it: "ORIT was responsible for launching the debate over the FTAA,

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<sup>80</sup> The genesis of the UGT is treated in chapter 3. It was founded out of the merger of the CGT (an ORIT affiliate), SDS and the CAT (both CLAT affiliates), along with some unions which decided to secede from FS.

over free trade and what its impact on workers would be if it was really applied to the whole hemisphere” (Interview B8, my translation). This battle was also beneficial to the development of stronger ties between U.S. and Latin American unions. It was the moment when U.S. labour moved closer to the South, as it was threatened by free trade and started promoting a certain level of protectionism (Interview B24).

The merger between ORIT and the CLAT is considered as an inspiration by the UGT. Since two of UGT’s founding unions were CLAT affiliates and one was an ORIT affiliate, there is an explicit parallel between the two processes, although the founding of the UGT was also motivated by changes made to the Brazilian labour laws (see chapter 3). As an UGT official put it: “Considering the possibility of a labour law reform in Brazil and considering this international process of unification, we went on with the unification of the CAT, the CGT and the SDS” (Interview B24, my translation). This process of unity was made easier in the Southern Cone by the long-standing relations maintained between unions of the region. A UGT representative suggested: “We have managed, in the Southern Cone, to reach a more or less homogenous union policy, but there [the Andean region], it hasn’t been the case” (Interview B11, my translation).

In contrast with FS, the UGT does not see the predominance of the CUT in international fora as a bad thing. On the contrary, it means Brazilians are gaining weight in ILMOs, and that benefits all Brazilian unions (Interview B8). An UGT official suggested: “Today we have a great union leader there, Rafael Freire, who has a new orientation, a real union policy, not the policy of an organization remote from its basis, which was the case of most international organizations” (interview B11, my translation). Whether it is at ORIT or at the CCSCS, Brazilian unions generally reach a consensus and

are able to work together. As one UGT official stated: “There was a time when there were many divergences between union centres, but for 8 to 10 years, we have been dealing with issues as if we were one single organization (...) If a consensus is reached, we bring it to the ORIT, otherwise we don’t” (Interview B11, my translation).

UGT’s international policy has not yet been clearly defined. The priority of the new union centre will be to consolidate its national and state-level structures before it can really look outward (Interview B24). Nevertheless, positions related to international activities were very contested when the UGT was launched, leading the union to create two secretariats (one in charge of the Americas and one in charge of international relations) in order to satisfy all of the founding organizations (Interview B11). Overall, the UGT is more inclined than FS to work in coordination with the CUT and to gain international recognition to consolidate its position domestically.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the main changes through which ORIT went through since the 1980s and the impact those changes had on the involvement of its Mexican and Brazilian affiliates. ORIT started to adopt a more autonomous and democratic way of functioning under the leadership of Luis Anderson, a tendency that was continued and reinforced by his successor Victor Baez. These changes were encouraged by the end of the Cold War, which made anticommunism disappear as a strategic priority. This led to a shift in foreign policy of ORIT prime affiliate, the AFL-CIO, but also to the arrival of new affiliates coming from more progressive backgrounds.

Hence, ORIT adopted a more collegial type of leadership and developed regional coordinations that allowed it to maintain links with non-affiliated union centres. The

merger with the CLAT is another opportunity to continue the effort to achieve unity and greater Latin American autonomy inside the ITUC. In terms of political positions, ORIT adopted a more radical discourse in opposition to U.S.-style free trade and got involved in broad-range coalitions against the FTAA, therefore strengthening its partnership with other social movements. It also viewed favourably the electoral victories of the left in Latin America, while remaining critical towards those governments, particularly those menacing union freedom.

These tendencies within ORIT matched the ones at work in the Latin American labour movement in general, where a shift to the left and towards more independence from the state could be observed in many instances. Nevertheless, they played out differently in each country, according to its specific socio-political trajectory and the shape of its labour movement. The startling contrast between the two most important countries of the sub-continent, Mexico and Brazil, reveals the existence of at least two ways of reacting to those changes and participating in them.

After its close (if formal) association with ORIT during the Cold War, the Mexican labour movement has incrementally moved away from ORIT since the end of the 1980s. This shift reflects the continued dominance of sectors of the labour movement associated with the authoritarian corporatist state under the PRI. Its corporatist component (the CTM and to a lesser extent the CROC) incrementally lost ground and support within ORIT, and is now clearly alienated from it. Its more independent component is definitely more aligned with the ORIT's recent orientations, but divergences remain, in particular on free trade. More significantly, the internal difficulties

faced by the UNT to build itself as a distinct entity seem to represent an obstacle to its involvement.

In contrast, the Brazilian long-lasting absence from ORIT came to an end with the arrival of union centres in that country after democratization and their affiliation to ORIT. Brazilian participation in ORIT (largely dominated by the CUT, representing the progressive side of Brazilian unionism) proved to be in sync with the most recent evolution of the ORIT, and had an important role in influencing that evolution, both in terms of internal functioning and in terms of political positions and strategies. Despite ideological differences, the various components of the Brazilian labour movement cooperate quite well when it comes to international issues, which also reinforce their capacity to influence ORIT.

The differences observed between Mexican and Brazilian unions towards ORIT are significant to the extent that they show how diversified Latin American unionism remains, at least in its international activities. Clearly, different and sometimes antagonistic positions exist as to unions' role and the strategies in the region. ORIT is an important space where this confrontation takes place. Studying these dynamics supports the idea that the "South" is not a homogenous entity and that it should be approached dialectically.

Furthermore, ORIT's recent evolution is in line with efforts made by governments of the region to gain more autonomy from the North and to give Latin America a place in international fora. Contrary to what happened during the Cold War however, this convergence is not the expression of a submission of organized labour to political powers, but the fruit of the ideological proximity cultivated by unions and many political

parties currently in power in the region. The issue of free trade has been a political opportunity for ORIT to start articulating its own position and promoting a progressive labour agenda on the issue. This gives labour internationalism a political significance and independence that it had lost during the Cold War.

In the next chapter, I will turn to two Global Union Federations and their activities in the Americas in order to establish if the tendencies observed in ORIT are also at play within sectoral ILMOs.

## CHAPTER 5. UNI AND THE IMF IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL

In chapter 4, we saw how Mexican and Brazilian unionisms interacted differently with the changes through which ORIT went since the end of the Cold War. Whereas Brazilian unions became more involved and are relatively in phase with ORIT's new directions, Mexicans have become alienated from ORIT, an organization they were once very close to. These divergences can largely be explained by the two labour movements' different historical trajectories and also by their contrasting experiences of regional integration.

It is also useful to look at sectoral ILMOs in order to get a complete picture of labour internationalism's dynamics in the Americas. Sectoral ILMOs bring together unions from the same industry. They have become prime interlocutors of MNCs and important players in multinational bargaining. To that end, I turn to Global Union Federations (GUFs), the most important sectoral ILMOs.<sup>81</sup> As we saw in chapter 2, GUFs bring together unions from the same branch or industry, in contrast to political ILMOs whose affiliates are union centres. Although explicitly associated with the social democrat ideology, GUFs were never formally affiliated with the ICFTU (or today, the ITUC) and therefore kept their autonomy which allowed them to have affiliates regardless of their ideological orientation, and to be, overall, less embedded in Cold War dynamics than the explicitly political ILMOs. As GUFs' nature and history was different from that of political ILMOs, they would not necessarily react the same way to the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization. Consequently, if the analysis were to show that both types of organizations responded in a similar fashion, it

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<sup>81</sup> GUFs were called International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) until 2000. They changed their name to reflect their "union" identity. Also, the term "federation" distinguishes them from the ICFTU (and later the ITUC), which are "confederations", as they gather union centres.

would lend strength to the thesis that Southern unions did not react uniformly to recent changes affecting ILMOs.

In fact, as this chapter will show, the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization did have similar effects on North-South dynamics within GUFs in the Americas as those had on ORIT. At the same time, this chapter confirms the thesis that differences in their labour movements continue to affect the way the Mexicans and Brazilians relate to their GUFs. Finally, within the North, Europeans have clearly gained a greater influence in the region through GUFs than U.S. unions.

Relatively ignored by Political Science, GUFs are mostly studied by Industrial Relations experts who focus on their reaction to neoliberal globalization. Their industrial nature makes GUFs natural interlocutors for Multinational Corporations (MNCs), one of the key players of a globalizing economy. One of the strategies put forward by GUFs, the development of International Framework Agreements (IFAs), have received a lot of attention. Signed between a GUF and an MNC, an IFA aims at guaranteeing minimal labour standards for all workers employed by the company, regardless of the country they are in. As we saw in chapter 2, the literature on the topic focuses on the main characteristics and “efficiency” of IFAs, but less on their genesis and how this can actually affect GUFs’ internal dynamics. This chapter deals with GUFs and with IFAs in terms of what they reveal regarding North-South dynamics rather than their impact at the local level.

The transformations of the production process and the challenging of traditional industrial categories led GUFs to regularly reconsider their organization. Today, some of them are still very much associated with specific industrial sectors whereas others cover a

much broader range of activities and tend to define themselves more by their methods than by the type of workers they represent. For the purpose of this study, I have selected to study the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) which belongs to the first category, and Union Network International (UNI) which belongs to the second. Furthermore, the IMF and UNI have adopted very different types of structures. While the IMF is quite centralized, UNI has put in place sectoral and regional structures that make it a very decentralized organization.

In this chapter, I will study how Mexican and Brazilian unions are involved in UNI and in the IMF. To that end, I will not only focus on the official positions held by Mexicans and Brazilians inside those organizations but also on the extent to which Mexican and Brazilian affiliates adhere to the policies and strategies put forward by UNI and by the IMF. In each case, I will start by identifying the main characteristic of each GUF and identify its priorities, and then go on to consider the extent to which its Mexican and Brazilian affiliates agree with these. The first section deals with UNI and the second with the IMF. In each section, Mexico and Brazil are treated successively, and a short synthesis is provided. These elements will form the basis of the analysis developed in chapter 6, where I will argue that several Norths and several Souths coexist within ILMOs in the Americas.

### **1. UNI in Mexico and Brazil**

Based in the region of Geneva, Union Network International (UNI) was founded in 2000 with the merger of four International Trade Secretariats (ITSs): the Communications International (CI), the International Federation of Employees, Technicians and Professionals (known under its French acronym FIET), the International

Graphical Federation (IGF) and the Media and Entertainment International (MEI). UNI presents itself as the “global union for skills and services” (UNI 2010). This definition encompasses a broad range of sectors coming from the founding organizations. In order to take this diversity into consideration in its work, UNI has adopted an internal structure based on 12 sectors, each corresponding to a branch in which it has affiliates: commerce, telecommunications, finances, postal services, social security and health, electricity, graphical, media and entertainment, cleaning and security, information technologies, hair and beauty and tourism. Each of these sectors has its own World Council and staff, responsible for the applying UNI’s policies and developing specific strategies for the sector.

The idea of the merger first came from the rapprochement between the FIET and CI (Interview M26). As these two ITSs began to explore the idea of sharing resources,<sup>82</sup> their two General Secretaries began to consider further cooperation<sup>83</sup> which would eventually lead to a merger that included two other ITSs (IGF and MEI), whose activities were close to those of the FIET and CI. The idea was to launch a GUF that would correspond to the new economy, oriented towards service workers and organized based on network principles rather than hierarchy. That led the leadership of the future organization to opt for a name that would break away from traditional ITSs by not referring to a specific sector but rather to the spirit of “network”<sup>84</sup> while keeping a reference to “union”: Union Network International. Also, they added the term “Global

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<sup>82</sup> They both needed new offices for their headquarters in the Geneva region and decided to share a building.

<sup>83</sup> As a matter of fact, the positions of General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary of UNI have been filled by the former FIET and CI General Secretaries since the founding of UNI.

<sup>84</sup> Both in reference to the internet economy and to a more horizontal way of functioning.

Union”, adopted in 2000 by ITSs, after the name UNI, so that the full name of the organization would read: UNI Global Union.

These details offer insight into UNI’s orientations and priorities. UNI aims at breaking with “union diplomacy” in favour of “real unionism” (Interviews B20 and B22). To do this, UNI focuses on two main goals: union organizing (both helping affiliates to get more members and having new unions join UNI) and signing IFAs with MNCs. As put by a UNI official:

This name change also represents a change in the way we act. Before, we were working as a small group who was organizing exchanges, international relations, training (...) but an important thing was missing for us to be a real union: representing workers. We started that when we started to talk about IFAs. From then on, we started to negotiate in the name of workers, we launched campaigns to help our affiliates organize more workers. This is real unionism, not merely being a secretariat (Interview B20, my translation)

Organizing new workers is UNI’s priority. A UNI official suggested: “This is UNI’s job: helping affiliates to grow (...) One of the key words at staff meetings is ‘organize, organize, organize’. Who? The workers” (Interview B22, my translation). All IFAs are not considered equal by UNI, however. The IFA with the Spanish telecommunications MNC Telefónica is considered by UNI’s staff as an example of an efficient IFA as it is quite detailed and resulted in the CEO of the company meeting with unions’ representatives every year. The IFA with the French retail MNC Carrefour is cited as a counter-example. In fact, the agreement is not applicable in practice, because Carrefour does not authorize union activities in its shops and local unions are too weak to enforce and monitor the IFA (Interview B20).

The country of origin of the MNC makes a difference to the success of IFAs: in general, things are easier with North European companies as they already benefit from a tradition of social dialogue, but tougher with South European companies (French,

Spanish) and very complicated with Canadian and U.S. companies (Interview B20). Europe has growing influence in Latin America, as much as a result of state policies (e.g. privatization of the public service) as in terms of the growth of European investment. As put by a UNI representative quoting a colleague of his: “It is a Spanish reconquest here in Latin America, through multinationals” (Interview B22, my translation).

In order to ensure better implementation of IFAs, UNI strongly encourages its affiliates in the same MNC to form networks to allow unions to exchange information about the company and to support each other in the application of the IFA. According to a UNI representative: “Signing an agreement it not complicated. Applying it is complicated (...) Where there is no network, we have a lot of difficulties [to apply the IFA]” (Interview B20, my translation). In many cases the agreement is signed in Europe with no problem, but the real complications begin when unions try to have it accepted by the MNC’s management in Latin America (Interview B22).

UNI presents itself as an “apolitical” organization. The absence of a radical ideology, moreover, allows it to attract affiliates from a broad spectrum of political backgrounds.<sup>85</sup> As put by UNI representatives:

What is nice with UNI is that there is no political discourse. I don’t know if you’re from the left, from the right or from the centre, but what I want is for you to respect me as a worker. So, UNI is really like a big union. It wants to achieve respect. It doesn’t care if Chávez is in Venezuela, Lula in Brazil or Bush in the U.S. (...) Its only concern is the worker (Interview B22, my translation)

We are not socialists nor revolutionaries (...) Unions who want that are not in UNI, they are in the WFTU (...) The unions belonging to UNI understand that we are a social democratic union and that our goal is to improve workers’ life (Interview B20, my translation)

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<sup>85</sup> Despite its explicit proximity with ORIT, UNI has some affiliates associated with the WFTU, without this situation being seen as problematic (Interview B20).

In addition to the sectors, UNI is also organized by region, on a model similar to the one developed by the ICFTU and the ITUC. In the Americas, UNI is therefore represented by a regional organization, UNI-Americas, with its own statutes and governing bodies (UNI-Americas, undated). Its supreme authority is the Regional Conference, which meets every four years to adopt its strategic orientations and to elect the governing officers of UNI-Americas. The Regional Executive Committee is responsible for governing UNI-Americas between Conferences. Its statutory composition guarantees the representation of the different sub-regions of the continent, and it ensures that all four founding organizations (CI, FIET, IGF and MEI) participate in it. The Regional Conference also elects a President and Vice-Presidents, along with a Regional Secretary, who is responsible for the daily activities of UNI-Americas' Secretariat and staff, based in Panama City. Whereas the President and Vice-Presidents remain attached to their own national organizations, the Regional Secretary works full time for UNI-Americas. The Secretary is the direct superior of a pool of regional directors, each in charge of specific sectors and themes. According to the UNI representatives I interviewed, all regional directors at UNI-Americas come from the rank-and-file of UNI affiliates.

More recently, UNI-Americas has started to encourage its affiliates in the same country to set up a national Liaison Committee, responsible for maintaining a permanent link between UNI affiliates of the same country, regardless of their sectors. These committees help to articulate UNI's policies in the country, relay this country's affiliates' demands to UNI and to increase the number of UNI affiliates in the country, for example

by organizing meetings with unions potentially interested in joining UNI (Interview B20).<sup>86</sup>

In order to support its activities, UNI-Americas also relies on international cooperation programmes developed by Northern unions, mostly from Europe. A leaflet distributed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Conference entitled “Project Catalogue to Organize More Workers, Sign Global Agreements, Strength Solidarity” records 23 projects, all funded by external organizations. Among them, 19 are related to European unions,<sup>87</sup> two to the AFL-CIO Solidarity Centre and one to the International Labour Organization. In the background report distributed at this same conference, UNI-Americas listed its training projects, all supported by European unions or by the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center (UNI-Americas 2007: 53).

Therefore, UNI can be characterized by its structures and by its strategies. In terms of structures, it is a multi-sectoral organization, representing a broad-range of industries and professions. In order to balance this diversity, it has adopted a decentralized structure, both in terms of sectors and in terms of regions. This gives its affiliates the opportunity to articulate UNI’s priorities and strategies with the specificities of their industries and of their region. UNI’s strategies are focused on growth, both by

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<sup>86</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, the only functioning Liaison Committee was in Argentina where it gathered 27 unions from both the CGT and the CTA. I observed its activity during the 2<sup>nd</sup> UNI-Americas Regional Conference, held in Mar del Plata, that it helped organize. Its Women and Youth committees were particularly present during all the Conference, raising awareness among the delegates to the themes and issues of concern to them. I was also able to attend as an observer the founding meeting of the Brazilian Liaison Committee, which included unions not yet affiliated to UNI but who expressed interest in its activities.

<sup>87</sup> The organizations involved are either unions or their international solidarity branch: the Swedish Secretariat of International Trade Union Development Cooperation (related to the LO and TCO union centres), the Dutch FNV Mondiaal (related to the FNV union centre), the Spanish ISCOD (related to the UGT union centre), the Swedish Graphical union (Grafiska Fackförbundet Mediafacket), the Swedish union HTF, the Finish Centre of Trade Union Solidarity (SASK, related to SAK union centre), the Spanish union centre CC.OO., the Danish union of banking employees (Finansforbundet), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Co-operation (related to the LO and FTF union centres).

recruiting new affiliates and by helping its own affiliates to organize more workers, and on actions towards MNCs, particularly through the signing of IFAs and the establishment of networks between unions of the same MNC. With these characteristics in mind, it is now possible to evaluate to what extent UNI's Mexican and Brazilian affiliates adhere to the positions and policies put forward by UNI.

## 1.2. UNI in Mexico

A first glance at some formal indicators points at the relative absence of Mexican unions within UNI. Mexico had only three official delegates (out of 104) at the UNI-Americas 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional conference held in Mar del Plata in 2007, all were from unions not really involved in UNI (Interviews B20 and B22).<sup>88</sup> Only one Mexican (the president of the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana, Francisco Hernández Juárez) sits on the Regional Executive Committee as representative of the North American region (vs. 3 Canadians and 9 Americans). The only other Mexican representative who holds a “titular” position on the Regional Executive is another STRM member on the Women's Committee.<sup>89</sup>

Mexicans have not been very active within UNI, with the notable exception of the STRM (Interviews B20 and B22).<sup>90</sup> Although UNI acknowledges the involvement of the STRM, it deplores that the union did not do more to reach an IFA with its main employer, TelMex, with which it maintains a good relationship. As put by a UNI

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<sup>88</sup> By way of comparison, Chile, Panama and Peru, all significantly smaller countries than Mexico, had five delegates each. Brazil had 16, and Argentina, the host country, 33.

<sup>89</sup> By way of comparison, Argentine holds 12 titular positions on the Executive and Brazil 8. The outgoing UNI-Americas President was a Brazilian, and the one elected at this 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Conference was an Argentinean.

<sup>90</sup> As seen in chapter 3, the STRM is one of the leading unions of the movement against traditional corporatism, in particular through its action in the UNT.

representative: “They [the STRM] care for what happens in the rest of Latin America, but concrete actions are missing” (Interview B20, my translation). The Mexican banking union used to have a strong international presence but decided not to stay affiliated when the FIET merged to form UNI. UNI tried to win this union back (Interview B20) as well as the SNTISSSTE, which has distanced itself more from UNI.

Among the Mexican UNI affiliates, I was able to interview representatives of the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM, representing telephone workers), the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del ISSSTE (SNTISSSTE, representing the workers of the public employees social security agency) and the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica (STPC, representing workers from the movie industry). I tried to meet with representatives from other affiliates, in particular from the graphical and postal sectors, but I could not obtain interviews with them.

The STRM is by far the most active Mexican affiliate in UNI. It joined the International of Postal Workers, Telegraph and Telephone Workers (known under its French acronym IPCTT<sup>91</sup>) in 1990. It had been associated with international bodies before the 1970s but then neglected international issues as it focused its attention to domestic dynamics.<sup>92</sup> The union’s renewed interest in international activities was motivated by (1) the privatization of TelMex in 1990-1991 and (2) technological changes which considerably challenged the traditional organization of work in the industry (Interviews M9, M22 and M25). In this context, the STRM felt the need to expand its knowledge about the ways other telecommunication unions were dealing with market opening and technological changes. As put by an STRM representative: “It allows us to

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<sup>91</sup> IPCTT would later merge with other ITSSs to form CI.

<sup>92</sup> Namely the process engaged by Francisco Hernández Juárez to gain autonomy from the Congreso del Trabajo and to present the STRM as the union alternative at the national level. See chapter 3.

go forward without having to suffer from the experience ourselves. You take the experience of the other and you bring into your own reality, without having to live the drama of technological change” (Interview M25, my translation).

With regard to privatization, the STRM used its international affiliation to validate and promote its own strategy. At first, few unions in the regions supported the decision of the STRM to negotiate privatization rather than to oppose it, and it received criticism especially from Colombian, Argentinean, Peruvian and Brazilian unions (Interview M25). An STRM representative suggested: “The only case of privatization which benefited from the support, the participation and the monitoring of workers was the case of TelMex” (Interview M2, my translation). In this process, the union narrowly cooperated with the company’s CEO, Carlos “Slim” Helú, which was another irritant for other unions in the region, sceptical about union-management partnership. As put by an STRM representative: “Slim is part of the synergy, because he is not an adventurer, he knows that this kind of business necessitated an important investment. So the company invested a lot of money, which ultimately allowed him to make a lot of money” (Interview M25, my translation). Ultimately, the STRM convinced several other unions to follow the same path, in particular in Brazil (Interview M25).

The STRM’s involvement in UNI is quite limited however, and the union does not believe in UNI’s goal of building cross-sectoral solidarity between its affiliates. The STRM is only involved in the Telecommunications sector (UNI-Telecom), chaired by STRM’s president, Francisco Hernández Juárez. It does not participate in other UNI structures, as the realities of the other industries are too different. An STRM thus suggested: “There are no real opportunities to exchange experiences with other [sectors],

it's complicated. In reality, I believe the contrary happened: instead of going towards other sectors, the sector has returned to old forms of relations" (Interview M25). The union is not interested either in setting up a National Liaison Committee for UNI Mexican affiliates (Interview M9).

The STRM is also very critical of what it views as the bureaucratic tendencies of UNI and denounces its Eurocentrism. It is not satisfied with the fact that leaders always come from the same (Northern) countries and wishes the staff were more combative. As put by an STRM representative:

The president is almost always coming from one of the biggest unions (...) The staff determines where the agreements go (...) I haven't seen yet a real clash between UNI and the World Bank, or between UNI and the WTO, whereas they should clash! But they use diplomacy more than denunciation or confrontation (...) All is low profile, all is diplomacy (...) And why is that? Because Philip Jennings [UNI General Secretary] doesn't have a union, because the guy in charge of representing UNI-Americas stopped being a unionist 20 years ago (Interview M22, my translation)

Contrary to UNI's priorities, the STRM has rejected the idea of pursuing an IFA. STRM leaders believe that the Telefónica agreement had absolutely no impact in Mexico and that it was mostly signed by the Spanish UGT in order to secure its relationship with Telefónica in Spain (Interview M22). Therefore, despite its formal involvement in UNI-Telecom, the STRM mostly uses UNI as a forum to promote its own policies and is at odds with some of the main priorities of that GUF.

Mexican unions' distance from UNI is also explained by a lack of identification with a pluri-sectoral organization. The SNTISSSTE, representing workers from the public health and social services sector, decided to stop participating in UNI because it did not feel at ease within a GUF where the majority of unions come from the private sector (Interviews M13 and M20). The situation is similar for the STPC, a union

representing workers from the movie industry, a minority within UNI. As put by a representative of this union: “I believe it [UNI] is too big to be on all the fronts at the same time. It should be divided (...) What do I have to do with postal workers? Nothing!” (Interview M17, my translation). It also resented the lack of action of UNI-MEI (the UNI sector in charge of the entertainment industry) when the STPC needed it the most, when it fought against legal changes harmful to their members (Interview M17).

There are few Mexican unions genuinely involved in UNI. Out of the 12 sectors of UNI, Telecommunications is the only one where Mexicans are really involved. Even when they are members, they do not share many of UNI’s priorities and orientations. They do not see UNI as part of their organizing and bargaining strategies, but merely as a forum and a source of information. They do not encourage the signing of IFAs, one of UNI’s priorities, despite the strategic position they hold facing some MNCs, in particular TelMex. Finally, they do not adhere to the multisectoral nature and structure of UNI as they are primarily concerned with their own sector.

Mexican involvement in UNI (or lack thereof) reflects the ongoing impact of corporatist practices, inhibiting their participation in ILMOs. Their proximity to employers (e.g. their view of head of TelMex) seems particularly problematic as it makes their involvement more difficult in confrontational strategies with MNCs. Also, the very fragmented nature of Mexican organized labour makes it difficult for its components to reach out to GUFs as they are either quite small and isolated or not really encouraged by their union centre to get involved internationally, as is apparent in sectors other than

Telecommunications. More broadly, this case confirms that Mexican unions represent one “South”, weighted down by its corporatist past and internationally isolated.

## **1.2. UNI in Brazil**

In contrast with the Mexican situation, Brazilian unions constituted the second largest delegation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> UNI-Americas Regional Conference, after the hosting country, Argentina. They also held the presidency of UNI-Americas up until that time. Several of the regional directors also come from the ranks of Brazilian affiliates, and Brazilian unions are exercising an increasing influence on UNI-Americas, particularly in the finances and telecommunication sectors (Interviews B20 and B22).

I was able to interview representatives from six Brazilian unions affiliated to UNI and involved in five sectors: finances, telecommunications, electricity, graphic industry and commerce.<sup>93</sup> I tried to get interviews from other unions, in particular from the postal sector, but it was not possible to meet with them. I was also able to observe two UNI events held in Brazil during my field trip: the third joint meeting of the international banks networks, held in São Paulo (22 and 23 November 2007) and the founding meeting of the Brazilian Liaison Committee of UNI affiliates, also held in São Paulo (29 November 2007).

The Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores do Ramo Financeiro (CONTRAF) is one the most involved Brazilian union in UNI. This participation is not only visible

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<sup>93</sup> These unions are the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores do Ramo Financeiro (CONTRAF, representing banking workers, a CUT affiliate), the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Telecomunicações (SINTETEL, telecommunications workers, a FS affiliate), the Federação dos Empregados nas Empresas de Geração, Transmissão e Distribuição de Eletricidade no Estado de São Paulo (FEDERALUZ, electricity workers, an UGT affiliate), the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Comercio e Servicios (CONTRACS, commerce workers, a CUT affiliate), the Sindicato de Comerciantes de São Paulo (commerce workers, an UGT affiliate) and the Federação dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Gráficas do Estado de São Paulo (FETIGESP, graphical workers, independent).

through the formal presence of the CONTRAF in UNI's structures, but also in this union's adherence to UNI's policies. In order to gain this influence, the CONTRAF had to learn UNI's internal procedures and relied on the Southern Cone integration process to become more involved in UNI.

CONTRAF represents the largest number of bank workers in Brazil and is a CUT affiliate. It joined FIET before it merged into UNI, at a time when the most influential union in the finance sector was the corporatist Argentinean affiliate, "La Bancaria", with which CONTRAF had long-standing ideological divergences<sup>94</sup> (Interview B5). From 2002, with the adoption by UNI-Americas of a sector-based structure, the debates turned less ideological and more focused on industry-specific issues. This made cooperation easier between CONTRAF and La Bancaria, which became the most influential banking workers' unions in the Americas (Interview B5). This was due not only to the strength of those two unions but also to the fact that Mexican banking workers did not join UNI and that the financial sector is almost totally unorganized in Canada and in the U.S..

CONTRAF managed to gain influence within UNI by adapting to Anglo-Saxon internal rules and methods followed by most ILMOs (Interview B5). Whereas Brazilian unions are having debates during their Congresses, where each tendency presents and defends its own positions; this does not happen at UNI's congresses as key issues are settled beforehand by the Resolutions Committee. CONTRAF learned this lesson at the 2002 Regional Congress, where they failed to influence UNI's policies from the floor of the Congress. As a result, they ensured that they had representatives elected on the

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<sup>94</sup> CONTRAF, a CUT affiliate, is associated with the left-wing unionism, whereas La Bancaria, a CGT Argentine affiliate, belongs to the corporatist tendency of the Latin American labour movement.

Resolutions Committee for the 2007 Mar del Plata Conference, where they were much more satisfied with the outcome:

We went to the Rio Conference in order to discuss policies, in line with what CUT usually does (...) But even if this Conference was held in our own country, we could not discuss anything there. Why? Because the discussion process is totally different from our culture, nothing is discussed during the Rio Conference, everything was already dealt with before, at the Resolutions Committee (Interview B5, my translation)

During the Mar del Plata Conference, the only delegates trying to launch a real debate from the floor of the Congress were Brazilian. As in Rio, these efforts failed, as all the resolutions were adopted as approved by the Resolutions Committee.

Another key tactic for CONTRAF to gain influence in UNI has been its long-standing involvement in the Finance Committee of the Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur (CCSCS)<sup>95</sup> (Interview B5). The CCSCS launched its own industry-based organizations in 1999 to enable unions from the same sector to work together on issues related to their branch. The banking sector was among the first to be organized, and CONTRAF quickly became involved.<sup>96</sup>

The CCSCS initiated strategies that would later be transferred to UNI-Américas-Finance, giving CONTRAF a central role as intermediary between the two organizations. One of these strategies was the creation of networks between unions from the same bank (Interview B5). This initiative started in 2001 with two Spanish banks with a significant presence in Latin America: Santander and BBVA. Spanish unions (CC.OO. and UGT) were heavily involved in this process from the start, as they were privileged interlocutors

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<sup>95</sup> The CCSCS is the regional ILMO put in place by Southern Cone union centres in 1986 in order to fight against the dictatorships in the region and develop a response to the debt crisis. It has since become the labour interlocutor to the MERCOSUR (see chapter 3). It includes unions from Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil.

<sup>96</sup> The membership of the CCSCS Finance Committee is slightly different from that of UNI-Américas-Finance as some unions belong to the CCSCS while not being UNI affiliates, in particular the Uruguayan PIT-CNT.

of the management of those banks. In 2002, the initiative was extended to the Dutch ABN and the British HSBC, and in 2007 to some “multilatinas”, i.e. Latin American banks present in several countries of the region, the Brazilian Banco do Brasil, Unibanco and Itaú. This led Brazilian unions to play a special role, as they had easier access to the management of these banks: “Same thing as the Spaniards did in Spain” (Interview B5, my translation).

In each case, the network assesses the common problems encountered with the bank in the different countries, drafts a framework agreement and then organizes a campaign to have the management sign the agreement.<sup>97</sup> Among the events organized to mobilize workers is the world day of action, in which each union participates in the way it wants, and during which a leaflet is distributed, with one common page for all the countries, and another page specific to each country, so that workers can feel both immediately concerned and involved in a broader network.

The network strategy was first and foremost launched by the CCSCSC Finance Committee, and then supported and taken over by UNI-Americas-Finances (Interview B5). Today, meetings are called by the CCSCS Finance Committee, UNI-Americas-Finance and the CUT-Multis project (see chapter 4), who jointly support the project financially. For this CONTRAF official, networks represent what labour internationalism should become: concrete actions instead of diplomacy. This is the direction favoured by CONTRAF:

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<sup>97</sup> During the third joint meeting of the international banks networks, where I was an observer, various progresses were reported depending on the bank. For some of them, where the management was reluctant to meet with the workers’ network, unions were still focusing on compiling information on working conditions in their respective countries. In others, such as Banco do Brasil or ABN-AMRO, drafts of a framework agreement were already circulating.

In the past, we criticized a lot the behaviour of FIET. We were seen as those who brought internal disputes (...) Today, we belong to the leadership because we are dedicated to build this alternative collectively, but we have a political logic, and this logic is very different from what UNI and FIET were in the past. We used to say that we did not want an international body only responsible for sending letters, behaving like an NGO, it has to be a real trade union. So I believe Brazilians contributed a lot to make UNI what it is today: a global union (Interview B5, my translation)

Although CONTRAF is primarily involved in the Finance sector, it agrees with UNI's multisectoral character as it allows connections between the various sectors, both in terms of what workers do and in terms of MNCs present in these various sectors. For instance, bills are now paid by phone and bank workers sell products like commerce workers (Interview B5).

CONTRAF also supports the idea of a Brazilian Liaison Committee and belongs to the nucleus that started working on it (along with São Paulo Commerce workers, CONTRACS, Graphical workers and Telephone workers). Work in common has already begun on Youth issues, and the new President of UNI-Americas has been elected with the clear mandate to encourage the launch of these committees (Interview B5).

Brazilians also exert influence in the Telecommunication sector of UNI through the SINTETEL. This union represents telecommunications workers in the state of São Paulo. It is affiliated with FS and was a long-time IPCTT affiliate before the founding of UNI. Its leader was the outgoing UNI-Americas' President, whose successor was elected at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Conference.

SINTETEL primarily used its international affiliation for information gathering (Interview B19) which proved especially important during the privatization of the telecommunications industry. Although the union was initially totally opposed to privatization, it learnt from others that it has more to gain by constructively engaging in the process. As put by a SINTETEL representative: "You have to participate in the

privatization process so that the worker loses as little as possible” (Interview B19, my translation). The union also changed its statutes to be able to organize all the workers of the sector, allowing SINTETEL to watch its membership grow from 35,000 to 150,000 members. SINTETEL is one of the only unions to have adopted this kind of approach and therefore to have gone through privatization unharmed (Interview B19). The most significant external influence on that matter was the Mexican STRM, who managed to convince SINTETEL’s leadership of the virtue of accompanying privatization instead of opposing it frontally (Interview B19).

SINTETEL also supports UNI’s goal of developing IFAs and positively views the one signed with Telefónica (interview B19). In particular, it made it possible for the Grupo Iberoamericano de Trabajadores de Telefónica (GITT), representing the workers of the company in Latin America, Spain and Portugal, to meet with the management of Telefónica on a yearly basis. As a result, unions were informed of the major decisions taken by the company: “We knew everything about and we participated in the privatization process, the company’s strategies, the investments, everything goes through us” (Interview B19, my translation). Good relations were maintained between the union and the company, so that no union in Brazil had to resort to the coercive clauses of the agreement, contrary to some other Latin American countries. Even though the European unions took the lead in contracting the agreement, unions from other regions were consulted and listened to (Interview B19). SINTETEL would like to see this strategy expanded to TelMex, with which it encountered serious problems when it arrived in Brazil. Yet it did not receive any help from its Mexican counterpart and UNI affiliate, the STRM (Interview B19). This reveals contrasting conceptions of labour internationalism

between Brazilian and Mexican unions, the latter being apparently not interested in using their influence on TelMex to improve working conditions in other countries.

Similarly to CONTRAF, SINTETEL favours the creation of a Brazilian Liaison Committee. The example of Argentina, where strong ideological divergences exist between unions, leads Brazilians to believe they too can put aside their differences and work together on pragmatic, industry-specific issues (Interview B19).

In the Commerce sector, Brazilians are represented by two unions, CONTRACS and the Sindicato dos Comerciários de São Paulo. CONTRACS is a recent UNI affiliate. As it gathers workers from a broad range of industries, it is also affiliated with the International Union of Food Workers (UITA) and maintains relations with the Public Service International (PSI). It has also been involved in the CCSCS Commerce Committee. It is through this committee that it became aware of UNI's activities and recognised that membership offered better leverage against MNCs in the distribution industry (Interview B18). Considering its financial weakness, CONTRACS pays a reduced fee to UNI which gives the union the possibility to participate in UNI's debates but grants it less weight at the most important decision-making bodies. In many instances, CONTRACS has to ask CONTRAF to relay its positions to UNI (Interview B18).

Although it has not influenced UNI's policies significantly, CONTRACS has already used its affiliation to gather support for its members. For instance, UNI helped CONTRACS to build a partnership with the Spanish union FECOTC (Interview B18). This joint programme led to a campaign in favour of better working conditions in the

retail industry. CONTRACS was also able to get the support of the French CGT to protest Carrefour's attitude against workers' protests (Interview B18).<sup>98</sup>

On another front, UNI can serve as a moderator between its Brazilian affiliates in the Commerce sector and help them to build consensus. A CONTRACS representative suggested: "in some instances, UNI serves as a conciliator, helping to stop us fighting against each other and build something instead" (Interview B18, my translation). The creation of the Liaison Committee is seen as a way to build a "coexistence pact". It will also allow to gather support from unions in other sectors which is important to build consumer-oriented campaigns in the retail industry.

The graphic industry has a specific status within UNI. In order to facilitate the inclusion of these industrial workers into a GUF mostly composed of service workers, UNI granted this sector more autonomy (Interview B12). The president of UNI-Americas-Graphical comes from a Brazilian union, the FETIGESP. Despite the fact that UNI's internal rules are still mostly shaped by Europeans, unions from the South are more heard today in UNI than they used to in the International Graphical Federation (IGF). A FETIGESP representative suggested: "At the time of the IGF, we went to Europe, Europeans would listen to us as if we were nothing, they ignored us totally (...) Today in UNI, we go there, we are respected, we can defend our positions, have a debate, I feel there is a real interest in us now" (Interview B12, my translation).

FETIGESP also supports UNI's effort to sign IFAs. It was involved in the campaign "UNI@Quebecor" and considers that the agreement reached by UNI with Quebecor was a great achievement with immediate consequences for graphic industry

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<sup>98</sup> CONTRACS is less enthusiastic however about the Carrefour IFA signed by UNI, considered too broad and general to have real impact in Brazil.

workers (Interview B12). For instance, it allowed the union in Recife (North Eastern Brazil) to be recognized by the employer. These efforts could be consolidated by a Brazilian Liaison Committee, an initiative also supported by the FETIGESP.

Brazilian unions are more involved in UNI than their Mexican counterparts. This suggests that, similarly to what we saw happening at ORIT, there is a diversity of involvement of the South within UNI and within ILMOs more generally. The intensity of the Brazilian involvement varies, however, depending on the sectors, but it is strong in finance, commerce and telecommunications. Brazilian unions hold important positions in UNI's structures and send significant delegations to Congresses. They adhere to and influence UNI's policies. They are thoroughly engaged in actions vis-à-vis MNCs, especially in network building among unions from the same MNC. They have also influenced this strategy, which was initially developed through the CCSCS, and is now largely encouraged and supported by the CUT-Multis programme. The Brazilian unions are also able to justify the fact that UNI brings together several sectors, either because of the similarity of these sectors or to gain more political leverage. In that sense, they support what UNI is and the reasons why it was founded. They welcome the creation of a national Liaison Committee and are ready to work on consensual positions between them, regardless of their national affiliations. Finally, they acknowledge the importance of European affiliates in these strategies, particularly those related to MNCs, where European unions play a crucial role through their international cooperation programmes, and because most of the work has been done with European MNCs. Nevertheless, Brazilian unions seem to have greater leverage with Brazilian MNCs, to which they have easier access.

## **2. The IMF in Mexico and Brazil**

In many respects, the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) represents a very different type of GUF than UNI. In contrast to UNI, which is the product of a relatively recent merger and represents a broad variety of industries, the IMF was founded in 1893 and remains focused on one industry: steel. Whereas UNI is present in the services, the IMF represents industrial workers. The IMF is also much more centralized than UNI. These differences make UNI and the IMF good case studies to examine the reactions of GUFs to the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization.

Today, the IMF brings together unions representing workers in all sectors of the industry, from the extraction of metals to their transformation and manufacturing. As noted, the IMF is a fairly centralized organization, which does not have regional organizations as does UNI, but rather regional directors, who are directly dependent on the IMF Secretariat. As put by an IMF representative, a regional director “isn’t an autonomous entity. It belongs to the Secretariat (...) It is not the representative of the region, it is the IMF representative in the region” (Interview B6, my translation). There is one regional office in Chile, responsible for Latin America, but no office responsible for the U.S. and Canada. Each year, presidents of all IMF affiliates in the region meet with the regional director in order to discuss IMF affairs, and the regional coordination takes place through the regional director and one representative from each sub-region (Southern Cone, Andean Region and Caribbean, Mexico and Central America). The IMF

governing body, the Executive Committee, is composed of 25 persons, including four from Latin America.<sup>99</sup>

The IMF has an explicit bias in favour of national, unified, metalworkers federations. Its 2005-2009 Action Programme clearly encourages its affiliates to work towards the creation of a unified union of metalworkers, or at least to build a national council where all IMF affiliates coordinate their actions (IMF 2005: 16). The IMF is reluctant to affiliate local unions, and has already launched several national councils, including in Argentina, Japan and the UK (Interview B6). This dedication to unity is facilitated by the fact that IMF has always been more open to ideological diversity in its ranks than the ICFTU or other GUFs. Communist unions joined the IMF before the fall of the Berlin Wall and Christian unions have always been with the IMF.<sup>100</sup>

At its 2005 Congress, the IMF put the challenges of globalization at the heart of its political programme. The orientation document adopted at the Congress (IMF 2005) starts with an analysis of the impacts of globalization on the economy, on policies and on trade union activities. It denounces deregulation, which has been encouraged by the International Financial Institutions, for the highly adverse consequences they had for workers. In that context, the IMF calls for a renewal of unions' strategies because of the weakening of their traditional alliances, specifically those with progressive political parties (IMF 2005: 5).

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<sup>99</sup> Other regions benefit from four seats (Africa), four seats (Asia-Pacific), four seats (U.S. and Canada), six seats (Western Europe), three seats (Central and Eastern Europe).

<sup>100</sup> The WCL did not have its own metalworkers federation. Some unions affiliated to the IMF were created purely to counter the communist influence however. One of the tasks of the IMF is to make sure these unions now become genuine unions. For instance, the IMF has been working for a few years in South Korea and Indonesia to make its own affiliates there more democratic (Interview B6).

Like UNI, the IMF sees IFAs as a measure to counter the adverse effects of globalization (IMF 2005: 19). Between 2002 and 2008, the IMF signed 18 IFAs (Croucher and Cotton 2009: 59-60). In order to avoid the problems posed by IFAs that are signed by an affiliate or a regional organization without consultation with the IMF, it has adopted a protocol that must be applied to all IFAs in order for the IMF to recognize them: the IFA must include references to the ILO Conventions, be ratified by the IMF even it was initiated by an affiliate, and be preceded by a consultation with all IMF affiliates related to the MNC in question (Interview B6). Thus, some IFAs signed by European Works Councils have not been recognised by the IMF.<sup>101</sup>

European unions still have a lot of power within the IMF while the Japanese are not very involved because the IMF's "best practices" challenge their industrial relations culture. With regard to North American unions, their metalworkers unions have actually become general unions, with only 20% to 30% of their membership in the metal industry. This gives them less political weight than the Germans, for example, where unions are still clearly associated with one branch (Interview B6). With regard to Southern unions, the Mexican Miners Union and the Brazilian CUT Confederation of Metalworkers are seen as the two major players in Latin America.

In order to encourage a stronger participation from its Southern affiliates, the IMF has recently reformed its rules. Nevertheless, this reform also gave unions from poorer

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<sup>101</sup> For instance, the IMF rejected agreements signed at BMW and at the German steel company Mannesmann, as these companies signed agreements with their European workers councils, not necessarily controlled by unions. The same happened when the European Metalworkers Federation (EMF, independent from the IMF) signed an agreement with Opel that would only include Europe and led to tensions between the IMF and the EMF. Japanese affiliates have also been reluctant to see a third party interfere in their relation with Japanese companies (Interview B6).

countries less political power in the organization.<sup>102</sup> This illustrates the contradictions of North-South dynamics within the structure of the IMF. The injustice of the fee policy has been acknowledged by the organization, but the solution found still reflects that Northern affiliates refuse to entirely give up their historical supremacy on the IMF. It outlines two different conceptions of representation, and to a broader extent, of democracy: one based on the number of workers represented by each affiliate and another one based on the amount of resource provided by each affiliate.

### **2.1. The IMF in Mexico**

As a result of the fragmentation of Mexican unionism, there is no national federation of Mexican metalworkers. Therefore, most Mexican IMF affiliates are local unions, representing workers in one of several plants of the same company. The IMF was once tempted to settle a National Council in this country. It opened an office and devoted a full time representative in Mexico in order to achieve this process of unification. After a few years of work, the experience came to an end, and the office was closed (Interview B6). As suggested by an IMF representative:

It's not an IMF problem, it's their [Mexican affiliates] problem (...) Our Mexican comrades didn't understand this (...) They didn't make a concrete effort to achieve unity. When the IMF was there, they attended the meetings, they talked to each other etc. but there was no real process of unity (Interview B6, my translation).

I was able to interview representatives from four Mexican unions affiliated with the IMF: two in the auto industry (the Volkswagen and Ford unions), one in the mining sector and one electricity workers union which also represents a small group of metalworkers. I will

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<sup>102</sup> The new rule categorizes countries in 5 groups according to their wealth and progressively diminishes the amount of the dues according to the category. Nevertheless, Congress's rules still give more votes to affiliates paying more dues, regardless of their category (Interview B6).

not cover this last union, since its representative acknowledged that it was almost inactive within the IMF, above all because international relations were the jurisdiction of its union centre, the CTM, and not of unions themselves (Interview M10).<sup>103</sup>

Despite its relatively small size, the Sindicato Independiente de la Industria Automotriz Volkswagen (SITIAVW) has been quite active internationally, specifically with other Volkswagen unions. Founded in 1967, it represents workers at the Volkswagen plant in the city of Puebla. It is a UNT affiliate and participates in the leadership of the UNT in the state of Puebla. Since the 1980s, the union has been affiliated with the Volkswagen World Council (Interview M24). This council brings together Volkswagen unions across the world, and is largely dominated by the German affiliate IGMetall, which holds the presidency, and the general secretariat of the council (Interview M24). The German influence is visible in particular through the promotion of “positive unionism” done at the Council (Interview M24, my translation). “Positive unionism” is described as “defending workers’ interests” and in particular “maintaining and creating new jobs” (Interview M24, my translation). It is opposed to both “official unionism”, too close to the management, and “radical unionism”, which refuses change and leads to plant closings. This discourse illustrates how, through the promotion of “positive unionism”, German unions actually promote their own type of unionism among Council’s affiliates.

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<sup>103</sup> This union is the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (SUTERM). The fact that the CTM was the prime responsible for international relations was also mentioned by other CTM affiliates, but not to the point of annihilating their autonomy in that sphere of activity. SUTERM’s attitude can therefore be analyzed either as an “excuse” to not get involved in the IMF (only a small portion of its membership works in the steel industry) or as the fact that it is a very disciplined CTM affiliate. It is generally known as a quite conservative union, by contrast with the other electricity workers’ union, the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (Sánchez 2005).

SITIAVW came to the IMF mostly to gather support from other unions. It decided to join after its first strike in 2000, during which it received support from the IMF, the AFL-CIO, the USWA and the Volkswagen World Council (Interview M24). This conflict made it realize how international support was essential to its success and that it needed to broaden its networks in order to gather as much information as possible about the processes at work in the industry, in particular the increased flexibility of the working conditions.

Nevertheless, the SITIAVW remains sceptical about the efficiency of IMF's strategies. The union is aware that the IMF has signed an IFA with Volkswagen, but considers that it should be "renovated in order to be a bit more aggressive, although it does set rules to frame the behaviour of the management" (Interview M24, my translation). It used the IFA only to try to improve the conditions of some workers employed by Volkswagen's suppliers, but it was mostly symbolic, as the IFA does not have legal power.<sup>104</sup> This shows how, to some Southern unionists, IFAs do not go far enough in restricting employers' capacity to exploit workers, not only in the company itself but also in its providers' factories.

The SITIAVW was also disappointed by the closing of the IMF Mexican office and lamented the fact that it was not consulted (Interview M24). Since then, coordination between Mexican IMF affiliates has been very weak, not to say inexistent. An attempt was made from 2002 to 2005 with the Conferencia Mexicana de Sindicatos de

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<sup>104</sup> Signed in 2002, the Volkswagen IFA, officially called "Declaration on Social Rights and Industrial Relationships at Volkswagen", affirms the commitment of the employer to enforce the ILO core labour standards, including freedom of association, non-discrimination, rejection of child labour and forced labour, and application of the legal standards on minimum wage, working hours and safety at work. Like most IFAs, it cannot be used in court. The management and the Volkswagen world workers' council jointly monitor its application.

Trabajadores de la Industria Automotriz (COMSTA), which brought together all unions from the auto sector but it failed because of pressures from the employers relayed by official unions. As put by a SITIAVW representative: “There was a lot of pressure put by the employers on official unions (Nissan, Ford, GM, DaimlerChrysler) and they made the Conference fail (...) We did not have these pressures. We have another type of relationship [with the employer] based on respect” (Interview M24, my translation). Since the large majority of auto unions are official unions it is difficult to do anything without their consent, even though they represent the most “modern branch of official unionism” (Interview M24, my translation).<sup>105</sup> The fragmentation and ideological diversity of unions in this sector is an important obstacle to the involvement of the IMF in Mexico

The Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Ford Motor Company y de la Industria Automotriz (SNTFMCIA) is one of these corporatist unions. It represents workers in three Ford plants located in three different Mexican states. It is a CTM affiliate and has been an IMF affiliate since 1994, although it has not participated in IMF activities for two years (Interview M18).

Like most corporatist unions, and specifically those affiliated to the CTM, the SNTFMCIA strictly follows the instructions of its union centre (the CTM), even on matters related to its specific industry. This is also true for the union’s international activities and explains why the SNTFMCIA has withdrawn from IMF activities. As put by an SNTFMCIA official: “My boss is Joaquim Gamboa [CTM’s General Secretary], he’s my immediate superior” (Interview M18, my translation). The decision to join the

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<sup>105</sup> This comment reinforces the idea mentioned earlier that CTM auto unions are more open to domestic and international cooperation than other CTM affiliates, in particular SUTERM.

IMF was actually taken because the then CTM Secretary General, Fidel Velázquez, encouraged its unions to do so. This illustrates how Velázquez wanted CTM unions to carry the CTM perspective into different international fora, a policy that is not followed any more by the CTM, according to what we saw about its involvement in ORIT in the previous chapter.

The attempt to coordinate unions of the auto industry in Mexico was closely related to the (temporary) presence of an IMF office in Mexico and to the work of the IMF representative in charge of this office, Everardo Fimbres (Interview M18). The decision of the IMF to close the office and the opposition of the employers to this initiative explains its failure. As put by an SNTFMCIA representative: “Those who were really afraid to do it were the bosses of the auto industry” (Interview M18, my translation). This says a lot about the relationship between CTM unions and employers. In that case, CTM unions officially deplored that employers did not agree with the launching of a National Council, but did not see as problematic the fact that a purely union-led initiative could be brought to an end by employers’ opposition. That position could also be interpreted as an excuse used by CTM unions to see the project fail. The two explanations are not contradictory.

Moreover, the SNTFMCIA and other corporatist unions consider that the IMF did not respect the autonomy and specificities of its affiliates. As put by a SNTFMCIA representative, Mexican unions expect “unconditional respect for the organizations belonging to the IMF” but lament that “the IMF never understood that” (interview M18, my translation). For instance, CTM and its unions did not appreciate a presentation made during an IMF meeting in San Francisco in the 1990s during which a researcher

presented the CTM officials as “dinosaurs” and denounced the kind of unionism it was practicing. Although the IMF later apologized to its Mexican affiliate, CTM and its unions considered that this incident showed how the IMF is dominated by Western European and U.S. affiliates that do not understand the kind of unionism in Mexico (Interview M18). This reflects the nationalism of Mexican unionism but is also reminiscent of the position of the CTM towards ORIT. CTM and its unions tend to amalgamate their corporatist practices with Mexican unionism in general, and then use the nationalist card to play down ILMOs opposition to the type of unionism they practice.

The difficulties encountered by the IMF with its Mexican affiliates in the auto industry led it to focus its attention on another affiliate, the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMS). This union joined the IMF at the beginning the years 2000 under the leadership of its General Secretary, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia. Although it belongs to the Congreso del Trabajo, the SNTMMS is not affiliated with any union centre. Gómez Urrutia chose the IMF because it best represented the sectors in which the union is present: the mining industry and the metal industry, in which about 30% of the union membership works (Interview M15).

Confronted with several MNCs, in particular Mexican ones such as Minera México, the SNTMMS needed international networks to better understand and resist the companies’ strategies (Interview M15).<sup>106</sup> With the IMF, it found a supportive organization and has worked closely with the regional office. This support became even more crucial when Gómez Urrutia was dismissed by the Mexican government (see

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<sup>106</sup> These problems are due to the vitality of the union under its current president, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, who would eventually be dismissed by the Mexican government under the pressure of the mining industry (see chapter 3 for a more detailed account).

chapter 3). The SNTMMS' fight against the state was a tremendous task for which the union needed international support because it often lacked support from its own fellow Mexican unions. As put by a labour lawyer close to the SNTMMS: "Of course, when you can't find support within the official structure of your own country, you have to resort to the solidarity of other countries" (Interview M23, my translation). Therefore, the SNTMMS became the focal point of the IMF activities in Mexico, leading in particular to an international campaign to support Gómez Urrutia.

The fragmentation of the Mexican labour movement, identified in chapter 3, is quite visible in this study of the Mexican involvement in the IMF. In the absence of a unified national organization of metalworkers, the IMF is only represented by local unions who remain isolated from each other. When the IMF attempted to foster national coordination, the closeness of corporatist unions with employers, along with their reluctance to see foreign organizations trying to challenge their practices, doomed this initiative.

The IMF therefore seems to have given up on Mexico, with a few exceptions. The SITIAVW is still on good terms with the organization, but it is isolated and relies mostly on the Volkswagen network, which is controlled by German unions. Even though this network can be seen as a channel for Mexican independent unionism to reach international fora, it can hardly be considered as a space for Latin Americans to influence ILMOs. The SNTMMS is the other solid basis of the IMF in Mexico, but it is difficult to identify to what extent this position is due to the problems the union encountered in the last few years or whether it is the fruit of genuine internationalism. In both cases, it is

hard to see the SNTMMS as the bedrock on which to rebuild the IMF in Mexico as long as its leadership issues are not solved.

## **2.2. The IMF in Brazil**

In contrast with the situation in Mexico, the IMF has only two affiliates in Brazil: the Confederação Nacional dos Metalúrgicos (CNM) and the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores Metalúrgicos (CNTM). Both are the national organizations representing metalworkers from their respective union centres, CUT and FS, the two most important Brazilian union centres. I was able to interview a CNM representative and to observe an IMF-sponsored event: the meeting of the Gerdau World Council. Gerdau is a Brazilian multinational steel company. In this section, I will present the CNM's perspective on the IMF, and focus more specifically on the case of Gerdau.

The CNM joined the IMF in 1994, encouraged by the CUT, which was eager for its branch-based organizations to join the International Trade Secretariats (ITSs, GUFs previous name) corresponding to their industries. This position was in line with CUT's decision to get involved in the ICFTU and gain international recognition from ILMOs in order to consolidate its position in Brazil and in the region. This affiliation gave the CNM benefits in the form of information on MNCs, training, and opportunities for joint actions and support (Interview B13). Although the IMF is still dominated mostly by its affiliates from Europe and Japan, Brazilians have more and more influence on its policies. In 2008, the regional office for Latin America was moved from Chile to Uruguay in order to be closer to Brazil and Argentina, where the two major industries of the region are located. Also, the next deputy secretary general of the IMF will be a Brazilian, showing the increasing influence of this country (Interview B13).

The CNM shares with the IMF an important strategic priority: the development of networks between unions belonging to the same MNC (Interview B13). A distinction has to be made between networks of European MNCs, such as those of Volkswagen and Daimler, who are older and more autonomous, and those present in other MNCs (e.g. Toyota, Arcelor-Mittal, Ford, GM), who are often coordinated by the IMF. Today, 28 companies where workers are represented by the CNM are organized in networks, including four who are still supported by the CUT-Multis project.

The CNM believes that the union from the MNC's country of origin should bear a special responsibility for setting up a world network and dealing with issues concerning this company. The CNM presented a resolution to that effect to the IMF's Central Committee (Interview B13). The CNM has already begun to take the initiative of setting up networks in Brazilian MNCs (such as Embraer, WEG, Marcopolo). With regard to Vale, a major Brazilian mining MNC, the CNM works in concert with another CUT's organization representing mineworkers.<sup>107</sup>

The CNM also supports IMF's goal to reach IFAs, but denounces flaws in their design. As put by a CNM representative: "IFAs are important tools. What happened though is that it is generally negotiated only by the union in the country of origin" (Interview B13, my translation). This is an obstacle to the proper diffusion and appropriation of the agreement by other unions: "It doesn't exist *de facto* because neither the union nor the company or its subsidiaries (certainly not them) will have interest in

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<sup>107</sup> Vale was very proactive in terms of global industrial relations. Its management met with the IMF and set up a special office in charge of global unions relations, along with an office in Geneva where the ILO and other international labour bodies have their headquarters. Vale was apparently very keen to sign an IFA as soon as possible, but the IMF refused to start the process until an important conflict with one of Vale's subsidiaries in Canada was solved (Inco) (Interview B6). The United Steelworkers of America have a permanent representative on the union bargaining committee with Vale in Brazil. It is the first time a foreign union gains permanent representation on an MNC bargaining committee (Interview B2).

promoting it” (Interview B13, my translation). In order to avoid these problems, the CNM insists on the importance of building a solid network between unions *before* signing an agreement. Good IFAs can be useful however, as in the case of Daimler where a Brazilian union forced a Daimler supplier to re-hire a fired unionized worker, using, among other tools, the IFA’s provisions on subcontracters (Interview B13).

The efforts made by Brazilian unions to build networks within Brazilian MNCs were particularly visible during the setting up of the Gerdau network. Once a family-run small company from the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the last decades Gerdau has become the most important long steel producer in the Americas and a major player worldwide. Its international growth was essentially achieved by acquisition of existing companies in other countries, such as Ameristeel in the U.S. and Canada, which it bought in 1999. As a major Brazil-based MNC, Gerdau reflects the growing economic power of the South, and hence offers a good case to study trade union reaction. Indeed, the large majority of actions taken towards MNCs by GUFs are undertaken with European MNCs. Since the increasing importance of South-based MNCs is a characteristic of globalization, it is important to look at how GUFs react to them.

Gerdau is one of the first cases where the unions organized in a network to confront a Brazilian MNC. Although Gerdau recognizes the unions in its Brazilian plants, it is often not the case in other countries, where the company has mostly bought already existing steel companies (Interview B13). In North America, the United Steelworkers (USWA) asked the CNM for help to get their union recognized at Ameristeel, which had been bought by Gerdau. The operation was successful and the USWA later thanked the Brazilians for their crucial support. The IMF became very involved in the Gerdau case in

large part because one of the federation's directors comes from a Gerdau plant and was therefore determined to see a World Workers Council established and consolidated in this company<sup>108</sup> (Interview B6).

The event I observed was a meeting of this Gerdau World Council, hosted by the São Paulo metalworkers union (a CNTM-FS affiliate) on October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Representatives from nine countries attended the meeting: the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Spain, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina. Brazil was represented by both the CNM and the CNTM, Mexico by a small local union (not affiliated with the IMF)<sup>109</sup> and the U.S. and Canada by a delegation of the USWA.

The object of the meeting was to give each union the opportunity to present its situation to the others, decide on common actions and structure the committee. All unions reported the negative reaction of their local management to the launching of the Council. Gerdau's management strategies were discussed and criticized as designed to weaken the unions in the workplace.<sup>110</sup> They decided on common targets for wage bargaining and launched a Steering Committee for the World Council. The committee would be composed by representatives from the IMF, the USWA, the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, Spanish unions and Brazilian unions, with the Brazilians designating the secretary of the

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<sup>108</sup> This is the IMF director who, during my fieldwork, was expected to become the IMF Deputy General Secretary, a position he was actually given since then.

<sup>109</sup> This union came from the Confederación de Trabajadores y Campesinos (CTC), a minor affiliate of the corporatist Congreso del Trabajo.

<sup>110</sup> The representatives of the USWA made a presentation on these techniques, as they were widely used in other companies in the past. These are new management techniques, which were very popular in the business community in the 1980s and 1990s. They imply "workers participation" in the work place, "empowerment" approaches and teamwork, but were widely condemned by the labour movement as sources of intensification of work and individualization of labour relations.

committee. It was also decided to set up a website for the committee to include a database on each union and a collective agreement signed with Gerdau.<sup>111</sup>

The case of Gerdau's World Council shows how Brazilian unions are playing a central role when actions are taken towards a Brazilian MNC. Clearly, the initiative to launch this Council came from Brazilians (both at the CNM and at the IMF) and they were the ones leading the meeting I observed. Despite the important contribution of the United Steelworkers of America, Brazilians will keep an important position on the Steering Committee and will provide the logistical support for it. This illustrates how a manifestation of globalization (the emergence of Southern MNCs) allowed Brazilian unions to gain more influence on GUFs' activities.

The Brazilian participation in the IMF is much more important than that of the Mexicans. Despite the fact that both countries have significant auto and steel industries, and unions representing workers in those branches, their unions do not relate to the IMF in the same way. Brazilians have managed to obtain a key position in the IMF hierarchy (Deputy Secretary General), all the more significant since the IMF is a centralized organization with the major decision-making bodies concentrated in Europe. The very structure of Brazilian unionism, which privileges national branch-based organizations (an indirect legacy of the Vargas labour laws but also the fruit of the CUT's will to set up its own national organizations) fits the IMF's desire to unify metalworkers into single

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<sup>111</sup> The conception and maintenance of the site and database would be given to the Brazilian Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos (DIEESE), who already has extensive experience in that matter. The DIEESE is an inter-union Brazilian organization, particularly in charge of socio-economical studies in support of unions' bargaining activities. It produces numerous studies and databases on wages, social protections and various other indicators. It is supported and used by all major Brazilian unions centres.

national structures in each country and therefore facilitates the Brazilian involvement in the IMF (in contrast with the very fragmented Mexican situation).

Contrary to the case of UNI however, this involvement does not seem to be facilitated by a previous regional integration. Instead, it relies on the Brazilians' capacity to build networks among their unions (a strategy encouraged by the CUT and promoted by the IMF), a tendency boosted by the arrival of Brazilian MNCs. The case of Gerdau shows that Brazilians played a key role in the formation of the World Council, not only because they have better knowledge of the company but also because they have assets, such as the DIEESE expertise, that they can put at the service of the Council. Nevertheless, the Gerdau case also showed that U.S. unions kept a determining influence, and that their experience with management techniques that are now used by Gerdau makes them key players in the strategies to come.

### **3. Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to compare the involvement of Mexican and Brazilian affiliates in UNI and the IMF. In both organizations, Brazilian unions have been much more involved than their Mexican counterparts. Not only do Brazilians hold more positions in the organizations' hierarchies and participate more extensively in their structures, but they also influence and adhere to the strategies and policies put forward by UNI and the IMF.

Domestic factors play a determinant role in these differences. The fragmentation of the Mexican labour movement and the difficulties encountered by its components, even at the international level, represent major obstacles to their participation in the two GUFs studied here. The resistance of Mexican corporatist organizations to international

involvement in their domestic affairs also jeopardizes Mexican workers' capacity to be heard internationally. Finally the strategic orientations of some independent unions, in particular the STRM, imply a level of cooperation with the employers not always favourable to international action. In contrast, the ideological diversity of Brazilian unionism is not an obstacle to inter-union cooperation when it comes to international activities. The CUT encourages its branch-based organizations to become involved in their respective GUFs, in particular through the CUT-Multis Project, and they remain the dominant Brazilian affiliates in most sectors. Nevertheless, they leave space for other organizations so that the diversity of the Brazilian labour movement is represented internationally.

Regional factors always play an important role, although more in some cases than in others. In the case of UNI, the CCSCS sectoral committees crucially enhanced Brazilian participation in UNI. This was not the case for the IMF however, where regional integration did not play a role in Brazilian involvement. In contrast, Mexico suffers from its regional isolation, especially with UNI which does not include a North American subregional structure as this leaves Mexico without regional coordination.

Therefore, if the strategies facing MNCs have revived GUFs' activities, they have not always led to a stronger involvement of the South. The implantation and appropriation of those strategies largely depended on domestic and regional dynamics. When unions adhere to this strategy and have the capacity to develop networks, it can lead to a greater involvement of the South, particularly when MNCs themselves come from the South. But the presence of a Southern MNC does not guarantee a stronger

international involvement of its unions, as showed by the case of TelMex. It mostly depends on the union's will to become involved.

This fieldwork suggests that although they do not oppose the principle of IFAs, many Latin American unions are sceptical about their effectiveness to improve working conditions in MNCs. This weakness is explained by the fact that most IFAs are conceived in Europe, with few concern or knowledge about the realities of the South. Nevertheless, if some Latin American unions react by not getting involved with IFAs at all, others, particularly in Brazil, use them as opportunities for inter-union networking and opening channels of communication with the management. Therefore, IFAs' effectiveness is not measured in terms of formal disputes they help to solve but in terms of opportunity to build solidarity and obtain recognition.

Finally, this fieldwork clearly indicated the central role played by European unions in these issues. The fact that the GUFs were less dominated by the AFL-CIO than ORIT made them spaces in which Europeans could become involved in the Americas. The numerous programmes supported by European unions or their foundations indicate their interest in this involvement. Moreover, European integration gave these unions a lead in terms of strategies towards MNCs. The efforts made by GUFs to negotiate IFAs are made much easier in European-based MNCs and therefore give Europeans more control about what is done at that level.

This increasing European influence is visible in terms of strategies. European unions advocate strongly for the adoption of IFAs whereas U.S. unions are less involved in this process. If Europeans represented a more progressive ideological alternative to the AFL-CIO during the Cold War, this distinction is less clear since the AFL-CIO changed

its foreign policy. Yet the links built during this period between Brazilian and European unions remain and the number of programmes supported by European funding suggests that they are more in sync with Latin American priorities than their U.S. counterparts.

In the next chapter, I will use these findings along with those on ORIT in order to build a thorough analysis of the impact of neoliberal globalization and the end of the Cold War on North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas.

## **CONCLUSION: SEVERAL SOUTHS**

The previous chapters discussed the perceptions of the dynamics of International Labour Movement Organizations (ILMOs) in the Americas held by the representatives of various organizations. Despite their differences in structure and history, there are similarities linking ORIT, UNI and the IMF with regard to North-South relations. The goal of this chapter is to analyze the information presented in chapters 4 and 5, using the contextual information and theoretical frameworks presented in chapters 2 and 3. This chapter thus reflects on the main arguments of the thesis by addressing the research questions delineated in chapter 1, and locates these arguments in relation to the literature on labour internationalism and international political economy in general.

Rather than considering the North and the South as two homogenous blocs, we should acknowledge the existence of several Souths (and several Norths) within ILMOs in the Americas. The basis of this assertion can be found in my answers to the three research questions outlined in chapter one, each of which contributes to understanding the impact of the end of the Cold War and of the spread of neoliberal globalization on North-South relations within ILMOs. I also argue that this diversity can be explained by taking into consideration national, regional and international dynamics, and their interactions. Each element of the analysis should be taken in relation to the others.

This analysis is conducted using a critical international political economy framework, particularly the International Political Economy of Labour (IPEL) developed by Harrod and O'Brien (2002). As we saw in chapter 2, the holism, eclecticism and dialectic of this approach makes it possible to combine various analytic trends. In the spirit of Strange's (1970) call, IPEL opens the possibility of bridging Industrial Relations,

a discipline oriented towards the role of unions as bargaining agents, to more critical and holistic traditions coming from political economy and critical geography. Hence, I was able to draw on analyses of International Frameworks Agreements (IFAs) (Bourque 2005, Croucher and Cotton 2009) to better define one of the major activities of the Global Union Federations (GUFs). Yet, this Industrial Relations approach lacks a holistic perspective in that it puts aside other goals pursued by ILMOs and neglects their political characteristics. That is why it is important to also bring in more critical studies, such as those of Moody (1997) and Waterman (2001) which emphasize internal imbalances between ILMOs affiliates that are often overlooked by Industrial Relations scholars. Their analysis leads them though to ignore ILMOs and to focus their attention on alternative forms of labour internationalism.

Therefore, I had to turn to IPEL to find a dialectic framework, where both challenges and opportunities presented by the end of the Cold War and the spreading of neoliberal globalization for ILMOs are taken into consideration. IPEL literature, with the notable exception of O'Brien's (2002) and Anner's (2001) works on the WTO social clause, however, often disregards North-South dynamics within ILMOs. Nevertheless, its eclecticism and its holism provide a good framework for asking questions about those dynamics and mobilizing complementary approaches to answer those questions. It was therefore possible for me to draw on the work of critical geographers (Wills 1996, 2002 ; Herod 2001) to build an analysis where levels of action (national, regional, international) are conceived as interdependent. IPEL's openness helped me to illuminate North-South dynamics by offering a dialectical theoretical framework open to a broad range of critical approaches.

In the last section of this chapter, I will outline how this research can be articulated with the literature on labour internationalism. The eclecticism of my approach allows it to contribute to several discussions, including those on ILMOs as bargaining agents. Nevertheless, the main contribution is to the literature on the International Political Economy of Labour, where I underline the necessity of approaching organized labour from a dialectical perspective and the importance of thinking about relations amongst various geographical scales.

### **1. ILMOs in the Americas: Several Souths, Several Norths**

The goal of this research was to analyze the extent to which the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization affected international unionism in the Americas, focusing in particular on their effects on North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas. To that end, three research questions were raised in chapter 1: Has the launching of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) contributed to a rebalancing of power within ILMOs in the Americas? Have campaigns against free trade and in favour of alternative regional integration projects contributed to a rebalancing of power between North and South within ILMOs in the Americas? Have strategies adopted by ILMOs to confront MNCs led to a North-South rebalancing within ILMOs in the Americas?

This section will provide answers to these three questions, based on the fieldwork presented in chapters 4 and 5. In order to evaluate the state of North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas, I analyze the material in the light of the three historic tendencies identified in chapter 2: U.S. domination; Latin American independence and European influence. The commonalities and differences observed between Mexican and

Brazilian unionisms in chapter 3 will also be used in order to illuminate the different involvement of each country's unions in the ILMOs. Each research question will be treated successively, using tendencies observed in the three organizations studied: the Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT), Union Network International (UNI) and the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF).

To conduct this research, I find that Critical International Political Economy represents the most appropriate theoretical framework. In the line of Strange's (1970) call, eclecticism allows using works coming from various disciplines, specifically Industrial Relations, Political Science and Geography, and thus to bridge analytical gaps in order to reach a more thorough understanding of the processes at work. Critical IPE has also been concerned with dialectics, in particular since the seminal works of Cox (1986). Rather than overtly optimistic (Gordon and Turner 2000, Fairbrother and Hammer 2005) or plainly sceptical (Waterman 2001, Moddy 1997) approaches, I adopt a dialectical perspective, in the line of Munck (2002) and Stevis and Boswell (2008), identifying both challenges and opportunities for organized labour and considering unions as potentials for both resistance and reproduction of the system. Furthermore, I take seriously the calls for looking at the interactions between domestic, regional and global scales of action (Wills 1996, Munck 2002, Burawoy 2010) to catch the complexity of the situation instead of focusing on only one level as if it were isolated from the others. This eclectic, dialectical and holistic approach has been articulated by Harrod (2002) in his proposal for an International Political Economy of Labour. This research aims to contribute to this new body of literature by developing analytical tools for a more thorough analysis of ILMOs' North-South dynamics.

This analysis confirms the hypothesis advanced in chapter 1. The end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization have had contradictory effects on North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas. While Mexican unions have clearly been isolated from ILMOs, Brazilian unions have invested them massively. With regard to the North, U.S. unions have lost some of their influence in the region, whereas Europeans have been increasingly involved. These tendencies confirm the dialectic of the dynamics at stake within ILMOs. The major political economic events of the last decades have both created challenges and opportunities for a rebalancing of power within these structures.

### **1.1. The launching of the ITUC**

The creation of the ITUC, out of the merger of the social democratic International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Christian World Confederation of Labour (WCL), was undoubtedly made easier by the end of the Cold War. This event reflected the ideological hegemony of social democracy over the labour movement after the fall of the USSR and its allies. Communist influence dramatically declined while the U.S.-inspired anticommunist reformism tended to wave relative to a more open, Europe-based, social democracy. It was therefore legitimate to expect that the end of the Cold War would crystallize the tendencies of the “new internationalism” put forward in the ITUC’s founding texts, and desired by many observers reviewed in chapter 2.

My fieldwork showed that the founding of the ITUC, and more precisely of its regional organization, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), did not play a significant role in the rebalancing of North-South relations in the Americas. This does not however mean that the end of the Cold War did not challenge the dynamics of ORIT. On the contrary, the changes were so deep that they occurred before the launching

of the ITUC, starting as early as in the 1990s. There was thus time to consolidate these changes prior to the rapprochement between the ICFTU and the WCL.

According to most of the officials I interviewed, ORIT really began to change under the leadership of then-General Secretary Luis Anderson (1984-2003) and with the agreement of the AFL-CIO, which remained a dominant affiliate. These changes saw the ORIT's centre of gravity gradually move from Mexico and Central America to the Southern Cone. The organization went from being located in Mexico and headed by a Panamanian, to being located in Brazil and headed by a Paraguayan and a Brazilian. During this period, ORIT adopted a new framework for action, labelled "socio-political unionism", that no longer focused on anticommunism but rather on building alliances with other social movements in order to develop more just societies. In terms of its internal functioning, ORIT expanded its leadership from a single General Secretary to a collegial Secretariat. It also structured its affiliates in regional coordinations, directly inspired by the Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur (CCSCS).<sup>112</sup>

This evolution of ORIT came at the same time as new affiliates were deciding to join its ranks, in particular the Brazilian CUT. Both sets of events (ORIT's internal changes and the joining of new affiliates) mutually reinforced each other. The determining factor for both movements, however, was the end of the Cold War. ORIT was able to develop an alternative discourse when it no longer had to focus on fighting communism. Unions previously not affiliated - in particular the Brazilian CUT - decided to join ORIT when they realized it was no longer an extension of the U.S. government in the region anymore, and could thus become an effective trade union forum. In many

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<sup>112</sup> The CCSCS is the regional ILMO put in place by Southern Cone union centres in 1986 in order to fight against the dictatorships in the region and develop a response to the debt crisis. It has since become the labour interlocutor to the MERCOSUR (see chapter 3).

respects, Anderson symbolized this period of transition. He was influenced by the Cold War period but also started, although carefully, to reform ORIT. The interviews confirmed that even if it was Anderson who initiated the changes, it was the Brazilian CUT that contributed to the acceleration and deepening of these reforms, in alliance with other progressive ORIT affiliates. For example, the principles of collegial leadership and the establishment of regional coordinations open to non-affiliates were initially supported by Anderson.

The impact of the end of the Cold War on ORIT and its affiliates has to be put in the context of broader consequences of the fall of the USSR for the Latin American left. Castañeda (1993) shows how the end of the Cold War freed the Latin American left of its traditional allegiance to the Soviet model and allowed many sections of this movement to complete their transformation from armed guerrillas to legal political parties. He later identifies how these groups turned into “two lefts”: one more moderate and, in his words, “modern”; the other more radical and “archaic” (Castañeda 2008). The former would be best represented by the Brazilian PT and its historic leader Lula, whereas the latter is embodied by Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and other regimes he partially inspired.

It is tempting to make a parallel between the evolution of Latin American labour movements and this analysis of the left in general. The impact of the Cold War is indeed similar: it “freed” organizations from their previous allegiances, either communist or anticommunist, and allowed for new alliances and more efficient actions. Nevertheless, unions I studied were not mere puppets of communist or anticommunist organizations, even during the Cold War. The Brazilian CUT does come from the left but never identified (at least not its majority) with the Soviet model. Similarly, the Mexican CTM

contributed to the containment of communist activities, but it was not its *raison d'être* and it was much more influenced by corporatism than by anticommunism. Unions whose involvement has increased in ORIT come from countries led by the “modern” (Brazil) and “archaic” (Argentina) left, or even from the few Latin American countries still governed by the right (Colombia). The fact that Mexico was immune from the wave of left wing electoral victories helps explain the isolation of its labour movement, but it is not alone here as both the Venezuelan labour movement (“archaic” left-led) and the Chilean (“modern” left-led) are similarly isolated. Therefore, factors specific to the labour movement have to be investigated if one wants to understand the post Cold War dynamics of ORIT and of Latin American labour in general.

The merger between the ICFTU and the WCL is presented as a new beginning for the international labour movement. This research shows that it is not the case in the Americas. The real new beginning occurred with ORIT's self-reform, much earlier than the project of merger. Moreover, the merger with the CLAT (WCL's Latin American branch) was not decided in the Americas but in Europe, following the founding of the ITUC. As noted, in 2007, ORIT had already largely completed its post-Cold War reform. This reform was based in, led and strongly influenced by, Southern Cone unions, especially the Brazilians. ORIT had transformed its internal structure so that it would be more collegial and closer to the affiliates (through the regional coordinations) while keeping itself open to those unions that had not yet decided to join (through those same coordinations). Therefore, when the decision came to merge with the WCL and its regional organizations, the transition had already been achieved within ORIT and the merger was not seen as a symbol of renewal *per se*.

As shown by my fieldwork, the launching of the ITUC and of its regional branch, the TUCA, was considered as a decision taken in Europe, by the leadership of the ICFTU and the WCL, not by their affiliates. It was not a Latin American (or even North American) decision to merge ORIT with the CLAT. On the contrary, this merger represented a challenge for ORIT, as CLAT disagreed with many of the directions taken by ORIT. CLAT's leadership promoted a strictly Latin American identity, disagreed with the autonomous regional coordinations and wanted to keep pretty much all its structures despite the merger process. In the end, the new TUCA structure resembles ORIT's much more than CLAT's, reflecting the relative strength and size of the two founding organizations. Yet the process was largely perceived as a struggle, not as a unification of forces.

Nevertheless, ORIT was able to use this opportunity to reinforce some of the directions it had taken in the few years before the merger. The fact that the new TUCA adopted the same type of leadership and structure as ORIT (Pan-American with regional coordinations), helped institutionalize the decisions taken by ORIT's leadership. Even more significantly, ORIT used the merger to attract unions with which it had been working for a long time, in particular through the regional coordinations, but that had not yet become affiliates. That was particularly the case of the Argentine CTA and the Colombian CUT-C, two progressive unions that should, according to many representatives I interviewed, play a crucial role in the TUCA. The process was not as successful with the Uruguayan PIT-CNT and the Peruvian CGTP, but both will continue to work with the TUCA through the regional coordinations in which they participate. Hence, the creation of the ITUC can be seen as European in inspiration, yet at the same

time, one of its defining features - attracting previously non-affiliated unions - had the most impact in Latin America. This was due more to the way ORIT engaged in the merger process than to the role of the European unions.

Therefore, to answer the research questions, the end of the Cold War had a significant impact on North-South relations within ORIT, but the launching of the TUCA in 2008 was not the crystallizing moment, since most of these changes occurred before the merger between the social democratic and the Christian organizations. With regard to the North, the AFL-CIO's grip on ORIT was loosened, leaving the organization able to decide freely on its orientations, following the will of the majority of its affiliates and not a predetermined anticommunist programme. Among its Southern affiliates, those of the Southern Cone, and more precisely the Brazilian CUT, came to play an increasingly active role. Since joining ORIT in the early 1990s, they gained positions and influenced the way ORIT works. At the same time, some Southern unions that had prominent positions within ORIT during the Cold War, such as those from Mexico, were gradually isolated within international unionism in the Americas. The model of unionism these unions practiced no longer corresponded to ORIT's priorities. Since these unions still dominate the labour movement of several Latin American countries, including Mexico and Venezuela, the latter have lost the influence they used to have on the international labour movement. The founding of the TUCA did not play a role as such in these changes, but it did help to institutionalize them via the bargaining that occurred between ORIT and CLAT over the TUCA's future structure.

The merger also reflected the increasing influence of European unions in the region. As we have seen, they have always exerted a strong influence on ILMOs at the

world level, but had been marginalized in Latin America by the hegemony exerted by the AFL-CIO over the region. With the imposition of the merger between ORIT and CLAT, they proved that they were willing to return to the region. This was already visible in the assistance Europeans provided to the CCSCS, another element of the post-Cold War ORIT's orientations. The decline of U.S. hegemony certainly unlocked the region for Europeans who have long had cultural and economic ties to Latin America (Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch or French MNCs have been doing business in South America for a while), but had been unable to loosen the U.S. grip on the region. By supporting non-ORIT organizations (such as the CCSCS or the CUT), they implanted bases in South America that were able to flourish once the AFL-CIO released some of its control.

Among the three historical tendencies identified earlier, U.S. domination has clearly decreased while Latin American independence is much stronger and European influence is increasing. These three tendencies are not exclusive. They happened at the same time and reinforced each other. Nor are they interchangeable. The European influence does not replace U.S. domination as it is different in nature and intensity. Today's European influence is not as strong as the AFL-CIO's hegemony during the Cold War. It also reaches different aspects of unionism, insisting more on the strategies to be used against MNCs than on the broader ideological battle the way anticommunism did during the Cold War. With regard to the increased Latin American independence, we also saw that it was the result of an internal rebalancing within the South, with some unions gaining in power and some others losing considerable ground.

Therefore, the dialectic at work within ORIT since the end of the Cold War is confirmed by this research. Whereas O'Brien (2002) and Anner (2001) had already

shown how the end of the Cold War could lead to new North-South divisions, my research brings out the way it also led to internal fractures within the North and the South. Whereas the Southern participation in ORIT was quite homogenous during the Cold War when it was largely dominated by corporatist unions, it is now more diverse (although progressive unions are most influential). Also, whereas the Northern domination was almost exclusively exercised by the AFL-CIO, the North's influence is more diverse today because of the increased involvement of Europe but also because of the change in the orientation and role of the AFL-CIO.

This conclusion also challenges the vision of the sceptics, such as Waterman (2001), Moody (1997) or Eder (2002), who tend to consider the South as a homogenous bloc and who systematically associate the North with conservative forces. I have shown that the South is actually a diverse grouping and that its more progressive elements have been able to make their way into ORIT, creating a vehicle for Latin Americans to be heard within the international labour movement. Similarly, there is diversity within the North, and increased pluralism. Although the sceptics also criticize ILMOs for their bureaucratic tendencies, I found that this critique largely comes from the most conservative elements within ORIT in order to justify their withdrawal, rather than from the more progressive, independent and internally democratic unions. Hence, this research strongly suggests that the Cold War had contradictory impacts on ORIT: it allowed some Latin American unions to have more influence while others lost it, and it diversified and reduced the Northern influence in the region.

## **1.2. Free Trade Agreements and Regional Integration**

Apart from the end of the Cold War, another major influence discussed in this dissertation is the impact of free trade agreements and the broader phenomenon of neoliberal globalization. Such agreements foster international trade by removing trade barriers but they also often diminish the capacity of states to protect their national economies. As part of the “new constitutionalism” (Gill 2002), they contribute to the institutionalization of neoliberalism. The originality of my contribution is to analyze the impact they have on ILMOs’ dynamics which I have done by examining two important cases of regional integration (the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, and the Mercado Común del Sur, MERCOSUR) and one failed project (the Free Trade Area of the Americas, FTAA).

My fieldwork suggests that regional integration had contradictory impacts on North-South relations within ILMOs in the Americas. On the one hand, NAFTA acted to isolate the Mexican labour movement from its partners in the region, while on the other hand MERCOSUR contributed to the integration of Brazilian unions into ORIT and expanded the influence of the CUT in the region. The campaign ORIT led against the FTAA reflected these dynamics, as it adopted the tone and strategies set up by the Southern Cone unions.

NAFTA prompted temporary transnational activities linking North American unions, but, as confirmed by several actors, the main Mexican unions remained largely on the margins of this campaign. The pressures exerted by the U.S. labour movement in particular led to the adoption of a labour side-agreement, but the latter quickly proved to be toothless. Beyond these immediate results, NAFTA did not lead to long lasting

contacts or networking between unions of the region. On the contrary, the opposite positions taken by the Mexican CTM and the AFL-CIO were considered by many people I interviewed as the turning point in the relationship between the AFL-CIO and the CTM, leading to the rupture between these two organizations, and more broadly between Mexicans and most other unions in the Americas. Today, North America remains the only region of the hemisphere where ORIT did not set up a coordination for its affiliates. While U.S. and Canadian unions can continue to fully participate in ORIT because of their historical weight and their economic power, Mexicans suffer from this situation as they are the only Southern country with no access to a regional coordination.

The experience of the Southern Cone is drastically different. Unions of the region actually coordinated *before* MERCOSUR was even launched through the CCSCS, and *outside* of ORIT, which gave the CCSCS a lead in terms of integration in the Southern Cone. This way, it was able to immediately represent a coordinated answer of civil society to MERCOSUR. Its action contributed to the more social direction taken by MERCOSUR,<sup>113</sup> and also led to the establishment of permanent mechanisms for consultation with civil society. Beyond those results, the nature of the CCSCS made it easier for many unions, including the Brazilian CUT, to access ORIT. Composed from the beginning of both members and non members of ORIT, the CCSCS included both corporatist and more independent unions, which agreed to work together on a specific set of issues. This “practice” of labour internationalism at the regional level made Brazilian unions work together and with other unions of the region on common issues, allowing them to later “reproduce” this habit at the level of ORIT.

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<sup>113</sup> In particular by leading to the adoption of MERCOSUR’s Social and Labour Declaration in 1997, see chapter 3.

ORIT's approach to the FTAA project largely reflected the influence Brazilian unions acquired in the organization. The FTAA was rejected because it was considered an extension of NAFTA, therefore representing the type of free trade ORIT and its affiliates did not accept (again, in opposition to Mexican unions' position in favour of NAFTA). The main strategy adopted to fight the FTAA was participation in the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), a broad-based coalition of social movements. According to the people I interviewed, the Brazilians played a significant role in setting up this strategy, which reflected their domestic experience of forming alliances between trade unions and other social movements. The fact that the Brazilian government was one of the major opponents to the FTAA and largely contributed to blocking the project certainly contributed to give Brazilian unions an ascendancy in the social movement-based coalition opposing the FTAA. In this case, the closeness of Brazilian unions with a progressive government helped them to gain influence.

The systematic development of coordinations in the other regions of the hemisphere (again, with the notable exception of North America) was even more significant of the impact of CCSCS on ORIT. These coordinations are based on the CCSCS model in the sense that they are open to ORIT members and non-members and are supposed to reflect the views of unions of the region and to help them participate in the works of ORIT. The first important initiative they were associated with was the Labour Platform of the Americas in 2005, a document in which ORIT aims at presenting its own vision of continental integration (see chapter 4).

The CCSCS's action also had impact on other ILMOs, in particular UNI. My fieldwork clearly showed the impact the Finance Committee of the CCSCS had on the

strategies developed by UNI-Americas-Finance in the region. The initiative to create a network of unions working in the same multinational banks came from the CCSCS and was later adopted by UNI. There again, regional integration played a role in shaping the activities of a GUF and therefore contributed to a rebalancing of North-South relations by giving Brazilian unions a decisive position in the strategies adopted ILMOs.

The contrasting examples of NAFTA and MERCOSUR show how regional integration can have diametrically opposed effects on ILMOs' internal dynamics, reflecting the differences in the integration processes themselves – NAFTA clearly based on a neoliberal model, MERCOSUR on a more social one. In one case, NAFTA, the diverging interests of unions from the different countries involved led to the isolation of some of them (Mexicans). In the other case, MERCOSUR, regional integration represented an opportunity to consolidate an already existing coordination and develop strategies that would eventually be “transferred” to ILMOs working in the region.

Similarly, I argue that regional integration can have contradictory effects on ILMOs' North-South dynamics. Whereas regionalization can contribute to the greater involvement of some Southern unions, it can also lead, in other cases, to the alienation of other Southern organizations. The originality of my contribution is double: I compare two cases of regional integration and I focus on their impact on ILMOs' dynamics themselves. In general, works on integration focus on only one case and evaluate the strategies adopted by organized labour facing them, not on the consequences this experience of regional integration would have on ILMOs' dynamics (see Ayres 1998 on NAFTA or Portella de Castro 2007 on MERCOSUR). By showing the impact regional integration can have on ILMOs' internal dynamics, I enlighten an understudied aspect of

the contradictory consequences of neoliberal globalization on labour internationalism.

The dialectic of these dynamics is clear, as they contribute to both the integration of some Southern unions and the isolation of others. Both cases prove that when unions establish long lasting relations at the regional level, it contributes to their better incorporation into ILMOs.

### **1.3. Strategies for Confronting Multinational Corporations**

The growing importance of Multinational Companies (MNCs) is another characteristic of neoliberal globalization that needs to be considered when studying ILMOs. To illuminate this issue, the thesis has examined GUFs, which are the aspect of labour internationalism that are most concerned with the operations of MNCs, since they represent branch-based unions. As the discussion above shows, the GUFs are the natural interlocutors of MNC management and can therefore act as the appropriate representatives of labour facing capital. As we saw in chapter 2, the literature on GUFs teaches us that the privileged strategy to engage with MNCs has been the establishment of World Councils, gathering unions from the same company, and the signing of International Framework Agreements (IFAs) with these MNCs. The two GUFs studied here, UNI and the IMF, both engaged in these strategies. Through the representatives of the various unions I interviewed, I was able to observe several initiatives and to compare them, always from a North-South relations perspective.

My fieldwork indicates that the degree of advancement of GUFs in their efforts to confront MNCs varies greatly depending on the sector, and even the company. Nevertheless, Brazilian unions were clearly more involved than their Mexican counterparts in this type of strategy. In this case, Mexicans were not necessarily isolated

by the strategy, but they clearly were less involved in it than Brazilian unions. The strategy of network building, in particular, was much more successful in Brazil than in Mexico, mostly because of the corporatist legacy and the division of the Mexican labour movement. The latter also did not benefit from regional structures similar to those put in place in the MERCOSUR area.

I was able to study two distinct cases in Mexico: the automobile and the telecommunication industries. The two unions I interviewed in the automobile industries correspond to two diametrically opposed cases. In one case, the union is independent, i.e. a UNT affiliate, and represents workers in an important European MNC, Volkswagen, where a solid World Council has been in existence for years. The Mexican union definitely benefits from its involvement in a strong international network, but it remains, paradoxically, isolated in its own country, where no national structure exists. Included as a local union into an international network largely dominated by the German IGMetall, it cannot significantly influence the decisions taken at the World Council. Despite this international involvement, it is not very involved in the IMF, and union leaders believe that this GUF abandoned Mexico. The other case concerns another type of industry and another type of union: the union is corporatist (a CTM affiliate), and represents workers in a U.S. MNC, Ford. In this case, not only is the union isolated from the IMF, for which it clearly expresses its mistrust, but it is not even incorporated in a company-based World Council, since these almost never exist in non-European MNCs. Therefore, the case of the automobile industry in Mexico shows that even when unions match very different models (corporatist or not, European or U.S. MNC), their relationship with the IMF

remains the same: a relative alienation. In that case, strategies towards MNCs did not encourage Mexican unions to become more involved in the IMF.

The situation of the telecommunications industry involves a much stronger union than the auto industry. The union I studied is probably the most powerful within the UNT (at least when it comes to international affairs) and represents workers of the Mexican MNC TelMex across all the country. The interviews I conducted with representatives of this union displayed the closeness that existed between the company's management and the workers' representatives. The privileged position of this union towards TelMex, an important player in Latin America's telecommunication networks, definitely contributed to the political positions this union could obtain within UNI, and more particularly within UNI-Americas-Telecom. Nevertheless, the difficulties met by UNI to start a process leading to an IFA with TelMex and the discourse of this union regarding issues such as privatization, indicate that there is no fit between UNI's strategies and those of its Mexican affiliate, the Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana. This union is definitely one of the most involved Mexican unions at the international level, but beyond its formal presence, it is not very engaged in the strategies put forward by its GUF, despite its closeness with a powerful MNC.

The situation I observed in Brazil suggested a much more genuine involvement. I was able to study two industries thoroughly: the banking industry and the steel industry. In both cases, a process of networking had been launched and Brazilian participants were very much involved in it. The case of the banking industry is particularly significant. Brazilians led the way towards networking with unions representing workers from the same multinational banks, starting with European ones. The initiative came from the

Southern Cone itself, through the CCSCS Finance Committee, and was then transferred to UNI. The leadership of Brazilians in this initiative was confirmed when networks started to expand to “multilatinas” banks, many of whom are Brazilian banks. Therefore, in that case, strategies adopted to confront MNCs played a crucial role in the growing involvement of Brazilian unions in UNI.

In the case of the steel industry, aside from unions representing workers from European MNCs that already benefit from company-based World Councils, I was able to examine the case of Gerdau, a Brazilian MNC where unions are starting to organize a World Council. Here, the Brazilian unions had a central role with the two most important Brazilian federations (CUT and FS) working together. Their knowledge of the company, but also the material contribution they were able to provide through their research centre, the DIEESE, made them important players. This influence was mirrored in the IMF itself, where Brazilians could have one of their former leaders elected to an important political position.

In both cases though, one element played a major role: CUT’s dedication to network-building and the support it granted to its unions through the CUT-Multis programme. Although unions from several union centres were involved in the two industries I studied, CUT’s unions were clearly leading the way. This unique situation of a union centre explicitly involved in its unions’ international activities differentiates the CUT not only from other Brazilian union centres but also from other countries, in particular Mexico, where no similar situation was found, neither within the CTM nor the UNT.

The various initiatives taken to confront MNCs that I have studied suggest that the impact of these strategies on North-South relations is not uniform. Presented in the literature as at the forefront of labour internationalism (Croucher and Cotton 2009, Bronfenbrenner 2007, Fairborther and Hammer 2005), the strategy of the IFAs and World Council remains very uneven, depending on the country and on the industry. Overall, however, Mexicans remain alienated from most of these strategies, which have not contributed to their deeper involvement in GUFs, whereas the Brazilians, under the leadership of the CUT, are much more involved in these campaigns, and have gained influence in GUFs through them.

The indications are clearer when it comes to Northern influence. Actions taken towards MNCs are inspired by European trade unions and have helped to consolidate their influence in Latin America. As we saw in chapter 2, European MNCs are known for being more open to this kind of approach, due to the process of European integration. This makes European unions key players when Latin Americans engage with European MNCs. The CUT-Multis programme itself, which is central to the Brazilian involvement in these strategies, started as a Dutch-sponsored programme and remains supported by Dutch unions. Therefore, this research clearly suggests that strategies to confront MNCs favoured European involvement in the region. Regarding Latin American MNCs, the situation is less clear. In most cases, the union of the country of origin took a strategic position. Brazilians, at least in the case of Gerdau and of Brazilian multinational banks, use this position to influence the strategies put forward by the GUFs in charge of their sectors. Nevertheless, as shown by the example of TelMex, the fact that an MNC comes from a Latin American country is not a guarantee that the union in the country of origin

will develop a strategy of networking leading to an IFA. Therefore, strategies facing MNCs have contradictory effects on North-South relations within ILMOs: they can enhance the involvement of some Southern unions, but not systematically and largely depending on the political will of these unions to adhere to this strategy. Regarding the North, the impact is clearer, strategies facing MNCs having led to a deeper European involvement and influence on ILMOs in the Americas.

#### **1.4. Conclusion**

The tendencies observed in the three dimensions studied here (founding of the TUCA, free trade and regional integration, strategies facing MNCs) remain the same. In all their manifestations, the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization have led to a diversification of the South and of the North within ILMOs in the Americas.

Mexican unions have withdrawn from ILMOs (in practice if not formally) or they have not fully engaged (if at all) in the strategies put forward by ILMOs in the region. Brazilian unions, particularly but not exclusively those related to the CUT, have gained a great deal of influence and strongly participated in the projects led by ILMOs in the region. Regarding the North, the U.S. domination of the region is definitely not as strong as it used to be, although U.S. unions maintain a presence and an influence, particularly within ORIT. Europeans are definitely more active in the region than they used to be, particularly through the support they provided to Southern Cone unions and GUFs' activities.

This research illuminates the dialectic of the dynamics at stake and the relevance of Critical International Political Economy as the best framework to study these

questions: its holistic, eclectic and dialectical approach contribute to a better understanding of the situation. Nevertheless, this research also allows understanding the dynamics at stake by pointing at the inter-relations between the various scales of action. That is what the next section will explore.

## **2. Understanding ILMOs: International, Regional and National Dynamics**

This research not only revealed the dialectic of the dynamics of North-South relations within ILMOs but the focus put on ILMOs' affiliates also uncovered the importance of the interactions between three dimensions: national, regional and international. I argue that ILMOs' dynamics cannot be properly understood if the analysis focuses on only one scale of action, as is often the case in the literature on labour internationalism. As we saw in chapter 2, the mainstream literature tends to either consider only one level of analysis (in most cases the international level) or to treat various levels as silos, without considering the interactions between them.

In this section, I will show how domestic (national), regional and international dynamics interacted to explain Mexican and Brazilian involvements in ORIT, UNI and the IMF. This research also provides insights into the U.S. and European involvements, although less strongly since the fieldwork was focused on Mexico and Brazil. I will then show how this argument contributes to the literature on labour internationalism and to Critical International Political Economy.

### **2.1. Interacting Levels of Analysis**

As we saw in chapter 3, Mexican and Brazilian unionisms differ in the ways they have evolved since the formal democratization of the continent. There is an obvious

discrepancy between the continued strength of corporatist structures in Mexico and the new orientations taken by ILMOs. Whereas Mexican traditional unionism, particularly the CTM, fit the expectations of organizations like ORIT during the Cold War, it does not correspond to the new model put forward by the ITUC. Furthermore, as underlined by analysts of Mexican unionism (Healy 2009, Bizberg 1990), nationalism remains a defining feature of this movement, which generates conflict with some of the important ILMO strategies. In order to get closer to workers' realities, many GUFs are attempting to intervene in domestic affairs. We saw how the IMF tried to unify the automobile sector in Mexico and how this attempt failed. The fact that the CTM remains wary of external intervention leads its unions to react with the same suspicion, creating another obstacle to Mexican involvement in ILMOs.

In contrast, the mainstream Brazilian labour movement is dominated by the CUT, a progressive and independent union centre. Although it still has to work in a largely corporatist legal framework, CUT's ideological positions make a much better "match" with the programme put forward by the ITUC than in the case of the Mexican unions. Since it was supported from the beginning by foreign unions, in particular from Europe, it does not maintain the same scepticism towards international cooperation than the CTM. Its attitude towards its own unions when it comes to working with the GUFs is diametrically opposed to the CTM's: it has developed a programme, CUT-Multis, which would encourage its unions to participate in GUFs' strategies. Therefore, the contrast between those two types of unionism and the impact it has on the international involvement of these two organizations is clear.

Nevertheless, Mexico also has an independent labour movement. It is only by looking at it in detail that one can understand why it did not manage to replace the CTM as Mexico's international voice and reverse the tendency to isolationism observed under the leadership of the CTM. The UNT, the most representative body of independent unionism in Mexico, suffers from a congenital weakness: it is a very light umbrella organization with an inadequate structure. Plagued by the quarrels between its main affiliates, it cannot represent a strong alternative to the CTM. Moreover, the acrimony between the CTM and the UNT is so strong that they cannot discuss international issues among themselves and therefore have to settle their disagreements in public, as shown by the episode of the Mexican representation to the ITUC. Despite its loss of interest in ILMOs, that the CTM will to keep its "historical" position in ITUC also proved that international representation remains essential to its self-image and its legitimacy at home. This indicates again how international and domestic dynamics are intertwined and how we cannot understand one without taking in consideration the other.

The Brazilian labour scene is similarly divided. If the CUT and other smaller organizations represent its most progressive wings, union centres such as FS or even the UGT are much more moderate and in many ways closer to the position of the CTM than to the CUT. Nevertheless, their experience in opposing the military dictatorship has taught Brazilian unions to work together on a number of issues, including international representation. When it was the first organization to join ORIT, the CGT waived its right to veto the eventual application of the CUT with no resistance. Similarly, despite its obvious domination of the Brazilian labour scene, the CUT always opened its activities and its networks to non-CUT unions. The newly born UGT made extensive use of the

launching of the ITUC to justify its own existence, but it never did so by challenging the participation of other Brazilian unions like the CTM did with the other Mexican affiliates. This capacity to work together domestically helped Brazilian unions to get involved in ILMOs the same way constant internal disputes have been an obstacle to Mexican unions' international visibility.

Fragmented ideologically, the Mexican labour movement is also fragmented sectorally. As we saw, labour laws have always put obstacles in the way of the development of unified, national branch-based unions. This has proven to be particularly difficult for GUFs to work in Mexico, since they have to reach out to divided local unions who, for reasons we saw earlier, are not keen to work together. In contrast, Brazilian corporatism always favoured branch-based unions, initially to facilitate their control by the state. Eventually, this proved beneficial for the independent labour movement, as it adopted the same type of structures (national branch-based federations) which would prove to be efficient interlocutors for GUFs, as shown by the steelworkers federations or by the CUT banking workers federation I studied.

All these direct or indirect legacies of corporatism explain why Brazilian and Mexican unionisms have reacted so differently to the important changes that have characterized ILMOs in the last decades. Mexico is not the only Latin American country where corporatism has not totally disappeared, and in many respect, as we saw, Brazil also maintains elements of corporatism in its labour structures. Yet it is the very specific institutional arrangements and historical trajectories of each country that can explain how and why they ended in positions so different in relation to ILMOs.

Finally, this research showed in many occasions how regional dynamics played a crucial role in the involvement (or lack thereof) of Mexican and Brazilian unions in ILMOs. The contrast between North America and the Southern Cone in terms of trade union regional integration is telling. The position adopted by Mexican unions on NAFTA clearly isolated them from other North American unions. At that time, the UNT had not been formed so the independent labour movement lacked coordination and that gave the CTM's position even more weight. Nor did the situation really change with time. Even with the launching of the UNT and its joining of ORIT, no real attempt to build a regional coordination of North American unions has been attempted. The fact that NAFTA did not provide any positive opportunity for unions to work together or any hope that it could turn into a more socially-oriented structure did not help such a coordination to emerge. Therefore, Mexico found itself very isolated. Culturally and politically Latin American, it is economically attached to the U.S., which is already a delicate position but one which could potentially make it a key player in a Pan-American organization. While other Latin American countries gradually developed regional coordinations, starting with the Southern Cone and then the Andean region and Central America, Mexico remained isolated. The fact that Mexico did not follow the shift towards the left engaged by most other Latin American countries also contributed to its further alienation. With less and less political link to the rest of Latin America and no formal coordination with its counterparts in North America, Mexico was left with in a weak position to influence ILMOs in the hemisphere.

By contrast, we saw on many occasions how the deep integration of Southern Cone unions was used as a footstep by Brazilian unions to get involved in and influence

ILMOs. Coordination with other unions from a variety of ideological backgrounds gave Brazilians experience in bargaining with partners with different political views. This was a great advantage when the time came for the CUT to join ORIT for instance. Having already worked with an important corporatist union like the Argentine CGT, it not only benefitted from the relative support of this union, but had also proved that it could be a serious affiliate, open to work with a wide-range of partners. Beyond the help regional integration provided for the formal affiliation, it was then used as a model to “export” into ORIT and reproduce in other regions. By encouraging the creation of other regional coordinations, the CUT made sure that some of its allies who were not yet affiliated with ORIT, such as the Uruguayan PIT-CNT, could still influence the directions taken by the organization. Also, regional coordinations could help smaller and weaker unions from the Andean region or Central America to be heard by ORIT, therefore reinforcing the Latin American identity of ORIT, a goal pursued by the CUT.

Regional dynamics are related to domestic dynamics, but they also have their own logic, led in part by the type of economic integration done in the region and by other historical elements, such as the Southern Cone military dictatorships. Taking them into consideration to explain why Mexican and Brazilian got differently involved in ILMOs is crucial. In this case, as with the national dynamics, institutions matter and they contribute to shape the reaction of actors to international change.

This research also allows extension of this three-scale analysis to the Norths, although with less strength. The interviews I made clearly indicated that the domestic situation of the U.S. labour movement had a significant impact on ORIT dynamics. The important reform of the AFL-CIO engaged by George Sweeney after his election was

often mentioned as a decisive moment for ORIT renewal. The disappearance of the AIFLD and its replacement by the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center significantly challenged the way ORIT worked, since it was closely related to the AFL-CIO foreign policy. Later on, several persons I interviewed mentioned the cuts made by the Republican administration in foreign aid budgets as an important brake to the development of the AFL-CIO policy in Latin America. Finally the severe split suffered by the AFL-CIO in 2005, with the departure of some of its major unions, was also advanced as an explanation for the relative slowing down of its foreign policy.

As for Europe, regional integration definitely played a major role in European unions' capacity to intervene in Latin America. On many occasions, union representatives I interviewed mentioned European legislation as the reason why European MNCs were relatively more open than others to social dialogue. This gave European unions a strategic advantage in the setting up of World Councils and the bargaining of IFAs, many of which were actually signed in Europe, sometimes with no consultations of the rest of the world. Similarly, the launching of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in 1973, in the wake of the European integration process, was the moment when social-democratic and Christian unions started to co-exist in the same internal structure. The ETUC is seen by many persons I interviewed as the inspiration for the ITUC, and the reason why the idea of unifying these two "families" internationally came from Europe. Therefore, the influence of European integration is experienced in both sectoral and political ILMOs, through IFAs and the launching of the ITUC. In many ways, this process whereby Europeans use their regional experience to later "transfer" it to ILMOs is similar to what happened with Southern Cone unions in the Americas. If

comparisons between the European Union and MERCOSUR are often exaggerated (MERCOSUR being far less advanced than the EU in terms of free trade and economic integration), the impact those two experiences of regional integration had on trade union integration is quite similar. The support provided by Europeans to the CCSCS and to individual unions in the Southern Cone reinforces this idea and underlines even more the inter-relations between regional integration and ILMOs' internal dynamics.

## **2.2. A Contribution to an International Political Economy of Labour**

International Political Economy of Labour (IPEL) offered me a useful theoretical framework to conduct this research. Its holism made it possible for me to take into consideration both sides of ILMOs activities: those of GUFs, oriented toward multinational bargaining, and those of ORIT, of a more political nature. Its eclecticism allowed me to rely on Industrial Relations, political economy and critical geography to build a thorough analytical grid. Its dialectic led me to consider both challenges and opportunities raised for ILMOs and to investigate them deeply, looking at the internal politics of these organizations and more specifically at the North-South dynamics in the Americas.

The eclecticism of this research allows it to contribute to several debates identified in the literature on chapter 2. Its double focus on sectoral and political ILMOs leads to conclusions on both types of organizations. Nevertheless, its main contribution is to the literature in Critical International Political Economy, and more specifically to Harrod's call for an International Political Economy of Labour. In this section, I will show what this research brings to the discussion on ILMOs as bargaining agents and I will then move to its broader contribution on labour internationalism.

We saw how the Industrial Relations literature produced insightful analyses of IFAs, in particular Hammer's (2005) typology of "rights agreements" vs. "bargaining agreements" and Anner *et al.*'s (2006) work on the industrial determinants of international labour solidarity. The cases studied here, in particular through the actions of UNI and the IMF, confirm the idea that multinational bargaining is not a uniform reality. Latin American unionists I interviewed, although generally supporting the coordination of unions representing workers in the same company, were sceptical about most current IFAs as they considered them, to reuse Hammer's typology, too much "rights-oriented" and not enough "bargaining-oriented", therefore lacking the necessary grip for them to be useful to workers. Similarly, I could notice great variations between sectors, the automobile sector being much more advanced than others, such as retail, which confirms Anner *et al.*'s thesis. Nevertheless, I also noticed that variations could exist within the same sector, largely depending on the MNC's country of origin and on the attitude of the unions concerned with the agreement in each country. Therefore, my thesis of the diversity of the Souths and of the interconnections between the various scales enriches some of the works produced by Industrial Relations scholars on multinational bargaining. It adds factors to be taken into consideration in order to better understand IFAs.

Also, works on multinational bargaining mention the distinctively European mark of these agreements. Wills (1996) proves the importance of European Works Councils in these processes while Daugareilh (2006) talks about a European vision of globalization. This characteristic is also confirmed by my research, as many of the representatives I interviewed consider these processes as being led by Europe. Nevertheless, I also add a critical dimension to this observation: if European integration helped unions to establish a

dialogue with MNCs, it also led to a very Eurocentric process where Latin American unions often feel left aside. It can also lead to divisions between workers employed by European MNCs and the others. If IFAs manage to introduce justice and fairness in some working places, they also produce a “global labour aristocracy” increasingly disconnected from the realities of workers employed by other MNCs. This dialectic is often overlooked by students of multinational bargaining. Wills (2002) does talk about the dialectic of globalization, which both endanger workers’ power and produces opportunities for them to organize on other scales. She rightly underlines how the various scales of action are inter-related and how an international initiative only makes sense if it is relayed at the local level. But she does not apply this logic to the labour movement itself and to its actions. My research showed that unions themselves can serve either as catalyst for an alternative to neoliberal globalization or as brakes upon this resistance. Similarly, interconnections between the various scales can work one way or another, not necessarily in favour of a workers’ alternative to globalization. The case of Mexico clearly showed that scales *were* connected, but that they worked against labour internationalism, not in its favour.

The main contribution of my research is to highlight the dialectic at work within ILMOs in the Americas, in particular regarding North-South relations. I have demonstrated that “sceptical” approaches, such as those of Moody (1995) and Waterman (2004a) suffer from a lack of dialectic as they tend to caricature both ILMOs and “the South” as homogenous entities. Instead, I have shown that several Souths coexisted within ILMOs, and that these variations could be explained by domestic, regional and international factors. Similarly, ILMOs are themselves contradictory spaces. ORIT has

clearly become a more open and progressive organization than it used to be during the Cold War. It is considered by many progressive unionists as a tool for Latin American voices to be heard within the ITUC. On the other hand, it has weak bases in countries of the region still dominated by corporatist unionism, in particular Mexico, and therefore leaves aside “another South”. As for GUFs like UNI and the IMF, they have also opened up to the South, while becoming bridgeheads for European unions in Latin America. This differentiated portrait, based on the representations of the actors themselves, shows how a critical approach to labour internationalism can uncover the contradictions of the labour movement’s reaction to the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal globalization.

Gramsci demonstrates that unions can be on either side of the fence when the time comes for counterhegemonic movements. The distinction he makes between consent and coercion allows the identification of different types of hegemonies and also different types of resistance. This research suggests that unions confronted with hegemony by consent (Mexico) had more difficulties in abandoning their position and challenging the established system. In contrast, those confronted with hegemony by coercion (Brazil) were more willing to build an alternative and to remain united despite their differences. This suggests the importance of taking into account domestic realities and historical trajectories when questioning the capacity of unions to become involved internationally and to resist hegemony. Polanyi already explains the differences between British and Continental unions on the basis of their respective histories. This state of mind has to remain when we study ILMOs today.

This leads to the importance of the various scales of analysis and of their interconnections. Munck (2002) argues the need to look at the interactions between national, regional and international levels, but he applies it mostly to the analysis of capital, not so much to the analysis of labour. This shortcoming is pointed to by Harrod when he reminds that Marx himself mostly focused on capital's dynamics. Harrod's call for an International Political Economy of Labour should therefore include a consideration of the interconnections between the different scales of analysis. Offering a dialectical approach to multi-scalar analysis was the goal of this research. By showing that several Souths and several Norths coexist within ILMOs, it uncovers the dialectic of these structures and help avoiding overgeneralization. By demonstrating how these variations are due to a combination of national, regional and international dynamics, it reveals the interactions between various scales. Hence, it contributes to putting back labour on the International Political Economy agenda and to analyzing it from a critical standpoint. By doing this, I participate to the elaboration of an International Political Economy of Labour.

In one of its most recent contributions on the topic, Burawoy (2010) warns against the "false optimism of global labour studies". He considers that most works on labour internationalism generally suffer from a deterministic and, in a way, too rigid interpretation of Marx and Polanyi. Labour is seen as the central agent to the "new great transformation", whereas Burawoy is sceptical about the outcomes of the latest movements of commodification. He criticizes global labour studies for drawing too general (and generally too optimistic) conclusions from isolated local cases studies. He also underlines how these works are generally based on a "false homogenization of

history but also of geography (the dichotomous north-south distinction)” (Burawoy 2010: 305) and tend to underestimate that “third-wave marketization, coming on the heels of the Second Great Transformation that centered state regulation, has very different effects depending on national legacies and national strategies” (Burawoy 2010: 311).

My research fits with Burawoy’s comments on global labour studies. I adopt a theoretical framework based on Polanyi’s and Gramsci’s conceptions of capitalism and resistance. Nevertheless, instead of putting the focus on the broader role of labour in counter-hegemony or in the “Great Transformation”, I rather investigate the internal dynamics of labour, keeping in mind an important characteristic of the critical approach: dialectics. This allows me to avoid the “false optimism” denounced by Burawoy: I approach labour dialectically by identifying how it can both contribute to a rebalancing of power *and* maintain inequalities between its various components. My interest for North-South dynamics and the argument I make about the existence of several Souths and several Norths is an answer to the “dichotomous north-south distinction” identified by Burawoy. By looking at the southern perspective on ILMOs matters, I allow divergent Southern voices to be heard in this debate, in order to better understand the complexity of North-South dynamics within ILMOs. Even works dealing with North-South relations seldom develop on the diversity of opinions and strategies in the South. In their latest contribution on the topic, Flynn and O’Brien (2010) make a compelling argument on how the “West” can adopt innovative strategies to foster a more equalitarian labour internationalism, but once again they focus on the North (West), not so much on the South itself.

If ILMOs can be denounced as Eurocentric organizations, research on the subject is, also, Northern centred. My research aimed not only at bringing in what Southern actors think but also at using Southern academics in order to better understand the specificities of the “national legacies and national strategies” Burawoy recommends to take into consideration. If critical approaches, in the Coxian sense of the term, are to “change the world”, in particular by rebalancing North-South relations, they should take into consideration the South itself but also acknowledge its diversity and its contradictions, in order to eventually help resolve them. In that sense, having a better idea of North-South dynamics within ILMOs is essential as these organizations represent an important vessel for any kind of “counter-hegemony” or “great transformation” to happen. Looking at their internal politics is as important as evaluating their strategies, because if labour does not give the South a real place in its own structures, it is doubtful that it will reach its goal of making the world as a whole a better and more just place for the South.

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## **Appendix**

**Appendice A**

**Interview Guides**

## **Interview Guide**

### **IMF Affiliates**

#### **General Information**

- When was your union founded and in what context?
- What's the membership of your union?
- What workers does your union represent?
- How is the government of your union organized?

#### **Involvement in the IMF**

- How long has your union been affiliated to the IMF?
- Why did you union chose to join the IMF?
- What have been the advantages of being a member of the IMF? In what has it helped?
- Are you satisfied of the IMF current orientations? From your union's perspective, what should be the priorities of the IMF? What are the major qualities and defaults of the IMF's structure?
- Among all your union's international activities, what is the place of those related to your IMF affiliation? What are your union's other international activities? What are the other international networks in which your union is involved?

#### **Relative Importance of the Various Affiliates**

- From your perspective, what are the countries and organizations most influential in the IMF today? Since when and why? How does this influence materialize?
- What is the level of autonomy of the IMF's activities in the Americas in relation to the IMF World Headquarters? What is the weight of European affiliates in the IMF?

#### **IMF Sectors**

- Is your union more involved in its own sector or in the political instances of the IMF? Why?
- Are there Global Framework Agreements in your sector? Do they have an influence on your activities?

#### **Relationship Between ITUC and GUFs**

- What is the division of labour between your union and your union centre when it comes to international activities?

#### **Political Themes in the Americas**

- What is your union's position in relation to NAFTA? FTAA? Did you develop a position re. other free-trade agreements in the Americas such as MERCOSUR?
- What is your position in relation to recently elected left-wing governments in South America? In particular, how do you evaluate the policies of Lula? Kirshner? Bachelet? Chávez? Morales?

## **Interview Guide**

### **ORIT Affiliates**

#### **General Information**

- When was your union founded and in what context?
- What's the membership of your union?
- What are the sectors in which your union centre has stronger representation?
- How is the government of your union organized?

#### **Involvement in ORIT**

- How long has your union been affiliated to the ORIT?
- Why did your union chose to join the ORIT?
- What have been the advantages of being a member of the ORIT? In what has it helped?
- Would you say the ORIT has changed a lot since the 1990s? If yes, in what?
- Are you satisfied of ORIT current orientations? From your union's perspective, what should be the priorities of the ORIT? What are the major qualities and defaults of the ORIT's structure?
- Among all your union's international activities, what is the place of those related to your ORIT affiliation? What are your union's other international activities? What are the other international networks in which your union is involved?

#### **Relative Importance of the Various Affiliates**

- From your perspective, what are the countries and organizations most influential in the ORIT today? Since when and why? How does this influence materialize?
- How do you explain the transfer of the ORIT's Headquarters from Mexico City to Caracas and then to São Paulo?

#### **Merger with the CLAT**

- What is your union's position on the process of merger between the ORIT and the CLAT?
- How was this process debated in your union?
- What could be the consequences of this merger on the future orientations of the CSA?

#### **Relationship with Europe**

- What is the level of autonomy of the ORIT in relation to the ITUC?
- What is the weight of European affiliates in the ITUC's decisions?

#### **Relationship between the ORIT and GUFs**

- What is the division of labour between your union centre and its federations/affiliated unions when it comes to international activities?

#### **Political Themes in the Americas**

- What is your union's position in relation to NAFTA? FTAA? Did you develop a position re. other free-trade agreements in the Americas such as MERCOSUR?

- What is your position in relation to recently elected left-wing governments in South America? In particular, how do you evaluate the policies of Lula? Kirshner? Bachelet? Chávez? Morales?

## **Interview Guide**

### **UNI Affiliates**

#### **General Information**

- When was your union founded and in what context?
- What's the membership of your union?
- What workers does your union represent?
- How is the government of your union organized?

#### **Involvement in UNI**

- How long has your union been affiliated to UNI?
- Why did your union chose to join UNI?
- What have been the advantages of being a member of UNI? In what has it helped?
- Are you satisfied of UNI current orientations? From your union's perspective, what should be the priorities of UNI? What are the major qualities and defaults of UNI's structure?
- Among all your union's international activities, what is the place of those related to your UNI affiliation? What are your union's other international activities? What are the other international networks in which your union is involved?

#### **Relative Importance of the Various Affiliates**

- From your perspective, what are the countries and organizations most influential in UNI today? Since when and why? How does this influence materialize?
- What is the level of autonomy of UNI-Americas in relation to UNI World Headquarters? What is the weight of European affiliates in UNI?

#### **UNI Sectors**

- Is your union more involved in its own sector or in the political instances of UNI? Why?
- Are there Global Framework Agreements in your sector? Do they have an influence on your activities?

#### **Relationship Between ITUC and GUFs**

- What is the division of labour between your union and your union centre when it comes to international activities?

#### **Political Themes in the Americas**

- What is your union's position in relation to NAFTA? FTAA? Did you develop a position re. other free-trade agreements in the Americas such as MERCOSUR?
- What is your position in relation to recently elected left-wing governments in South America? In particular, how do you evaluate the policies of Lula? Kirshner? Bachelet? Chávez? Morales?

## **Appendice B**

### **Consent Form**

### Informed Consent Form

I, the undersigned, voluntarily accept to be interviewed by Mr. Thomas Collombat, for his doctoral research project on the dynamics of the international labour movement in the Americas. I understand that this project is about the impact of the end of the Cold War and the rise of neoliberal globalization on Global Unions in the Americas, more particularly on the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT), Union Network International (UNI), the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) and their affiliates in Canada, Mexico and Brazil.

I understand that this interview will last approximately ninety (90) minutes, will/will not (please chose one of both options) be audio-taped and that there is no foreseen risk to my participation. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions, and that I can at any time withdraw my agreement to participate to this project. Should I exercise my right to withdraw I will/will not (please chose one of both options) give the researcher permission to use the data I have provided to that point. I understand that there is no financial compensation to my participation.

I understand that my name will not appear in the final dissertation nor in any other publication written out of this project (e.g. communications, articles and book chapters) but that it will appear on the private notes of Mr. Collombat. I understand that these notes will be securely locked-up by Mr. Collombat and not accessed by any other researcher nor used for any other current research project without my explicit consent. I understand that these data will not be destroyed and might be used for future research projects with topics similar to the one of this dissertation conducted by Mr. Collombat, under the same rules of confidentiality, security and sharing.

Signed in (place), (date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
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Researcher

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**Appendice C**  
**Coding of the interviews**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organization</b>
M1	29 January 2007	Mexico City	Academic	
M2	2 February 2007	Mexico City	Academic	
M3	6 February 2007	Mexico City	Academic	
M4	7 February 2007	Mexico City	Academic	
M5	8 February 2007	Mexico City	Staff	AFL-CIO Solidarity Center
M6	14 February 2007	Mexico City	Academic	
M7	15 February 2007	Mexico City	Academic	
M8	16 February 2007	Mexico City	Labour Lawyer	FAT
M9	19 February 2007	Mexico City	Staff	STRM UNT
M10	21 February 2007	Mexico City	Official	SUTERM
M11	21 February 2007	Mexico City	Official	CROC
M12	22 February 2007 11 April 2007	Mexico City	Staff	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
M13	22 February 2007	Mexico City	Official	SNTISSSTE
M14	23 February 2007	Mexico City	Staff	CENPROS
M15	1 March 2007	Mexico City	Official	SNTMMSRM
M16	5 March 2007	Mexico City	Official	CTM
M17	6 March 2007	Mexico City	Official	STPC
M18	8 March 2007	Mexico City	Official	SNTFMCIA
M19	8 March 2007	Mexico City	Official	CTM
M20	8 March 2007	Mexico City	Former Official	SNTISSSTE
M21	9 March 2007	Mexico City	Labour Lawyer	SITIAVW UNT
M22	12 March 2007	Mexico City	Staff	STRM UNT
M23	12 March 2007	Mexico City	Labour Lawyer	SNTMMSRM
M24	15 March 2007	Puebla	Official	SITIAVW
M25	17 March 2007	Mexico City	Staff	STRM UNT
M26	22 March 2007	Mar del Plata (Argentina)	Official	UNI
M27	30 March 2007	Mexico City	Former official	UNT
B1	28 September 2007	São Paulo	Staff	AFL-CIO Solidarity Center
B2	8 October 2007	São Paulo	Staff	USWA
B3	9 October 2007	São Paulo	Official	ORIT
B4	15 October 2007	São Paulo	Official	ORIT
B5	18 October 2007	São Paulo	Official	CONTRAF-CUT

B6	18 October 2007	São Paulo	Official	IMF
B7	26 October 2007	São Paulo	Former Official	CUT
B8	29 October 2007	São Paulo	Official	FEDERALUZ UGT
B9	31 October 2007	São Paulo	Staff	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
B10	7 November 2007	São Paulo	Staff	CUT
B11	9 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	UGT
B12	9 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	FETIGESP
B13	13 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	CNM-CUT
B14	13 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	FS
B15	13 November 2007	São Paulo	Former Official	FS
B16	14 November 2007	São Paulo	Staff	CUT
B17	19 November 2007	São Paulo	Staff	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
B18	22 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	CONTRACS-CUT
B19	22 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	SINTETEL
B20	28 November 2007	São Paulo	Staff	UNI-Americas
B21	28 November 2007	São Paulo	Official	CUT
B22	11 December 2007	São Paulo	Staff	UNI-Americas
B23	13 December 2007	São Paulo	Staff	Sindicato dos Comerciários de São Paulo
B24	17 December 2007	São Paulo	Official	UGT
B25	18 December 2007	São Paulo	Official	ORIT
C1	21 February 2008	Montreal	Former Staff	FTQ
C2	3 March 2008	Ottawa	Staff	CLC
C3	5 March 2008	Ottawa	Official and Staff	CUPW
C4	19 June 2008	Montreal	Former Staff	USWA
C5	20 June 2008	Montreal	Former Staff	UNI-Americas
C6	20 June 2008	Montreal	Staff	CSN
C7	25 June 2008	Ottawa	Staff	CEP