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## ***From Margin to Center: Environmental Justice and Social Unionism as Sites for Intermovement Solidarity***

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**Abstract:** In this comparative analysis of labor-environmental alliances it is argued that various forms of unionism and environmentalism help or hinder efforts to transcend narrow sectoral interests. Movement organizations that parallel, and sometimes emulate, grassroots organization, tactics, and discursive practices are better equipped to engage intermovement, oppositional alliances. This is evident in each of the periods where intermovement solidarity persisted. First, the efforts to build alliances between the two movements during the early 1970s can be located in the strategies of a handful of social unions and an even smaller group of environmental groups with concerns for social justice and full employment. Secondly, active grassroots mobilizations during the late 1970s and 1980s in both movements transformed the character of several leading social movement organizations. Finally, the broad alliance that challenged NAFTA makes evident that key sources of intermovement solidarity stem from the way in which larger movement organizations responded to, or were redefined by these movements from below, i.e. social movement unionism and environmental justice, respectively.

**Keywords:** Environmental Movement, Labor Movement, NAFTA

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In reference to the paper's title, I am grateful for, and inspired by bell hooks' (1984) examination of the historical movement of feminist theory from "margin to center."

This paper examines the social movement conditions that give form to alliances between labor unions and environmental groups. Many scholars and activists view with more than intrigue the political potential posed by a coalescence of both groups. With few exceptions, however, prevailing opinion has concluded that the labor-environmental alliance that culminated in the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA - 1970) and Clean Air Act amendments (1970), had run course by the early 1970s. The battle against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as with many smaller battles that preceded it, proves otherwise. Importantly, the struggles to align movements in the early 1970s, and the anti-NAFTA mobilization in the early 1990s, offer the opportunity to apply the leverage of comparative analysis to our understanding of the sources of solidarity between the movements. For the first time since the early-1970s, a broad and sustained alliance between labor and environmentalists was forged in the fight against NAFTA (1991-1994). This development suggests a need to rethink the relationship of class (especially the organized working class) to environmentalism, and the way in which movement organizations (MOs) mediate these politics. Moreover, the historical context between periods of intermovement solidarity and fragmentation suggest that we need to carefully consider the strategic import of long-term movement dynamics, both within single movements and across movement political context. Thus, this paper aims to identify certain aspects of environmentalism and unionism which facilitate, indeed demand, linkage of the respective movements, their claims, and their strategies.

In the discussion that follows, I argue that parallel forms of organization, tactics, and discursive practices among movement organizations (MOs) facilitate their capacity to participate in intermovement, *oppositional* alliances. This occurs because of the way these varied organizational and ideological resources help or hinder efforts to transcend narrow sectoral interests (or single-issues) and ideologies. First, using as an exemplar the sustained efforts to build alliances between the two movements during the 1970s, I suggest the most important “variables” are in the forms, or types of unionism and environmentalism. Now, of course, political and historical context matters and is relevant to understand how political opportunities shape the relative prevalence of various types of unionism and environmentalism. It is for this reason that I contrast this first scenario, the early 1970s, with the case of the broad alliance that challenged NAFTA. Here, we find that new actors emerge as participants in the intermovement alliances not because their sectoral interests demand it, but because the dominant form of political practice within the MO has changed as a result of grassroots and rank and file pressure, both directly and indirectly.

Indeed, it becomes clear that the precipitating factors that led MOs such as the Teamsters, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Greenpeace and

the Sierra Club to forge intermovement solidarity in opposition to NAFTA — despite past failures to participate in intermovement alliances — stem from the way in which these groups responded to, or were redefined by, movements from below, i.e. social movement unionism and environmental justice, respectively. From a comparative vantage point, it becomes apparent that it was the historical movement of organized, democratic grassroots, from the margins to the center, that forged the discursive and organizational ‘tools’ for mobilizing intermovement solidarity and social and environmental justice.

### **Where Environmentalism Meets Unionism: Mobilization Strategies and Political Practice**

Beginning with environmentalism, a substantial amount of research has located the political activities of major conservationist and preservationist movement organizations (MOs), such as the Audubon, Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and the Sierra Club, squarely in the “Beltway” (Dowie 1995; Gale 1986). Organizationally, these MOs remain close to the national policy-making apparatus, are headquartered in Washington, D.C., and keep issues of social inequality and injustice separate from matters of resource management and preservation. Anti-toxics organizations, on the other hand, are much more inclined to direct action tactics, public education, and community well-being and are thus organizationally less centralized and ideologically closer to human social justice concerns in their public framing activities (Szasz 1994). Group such as Greenpeace, Clean Water Action, and the Citizen’s Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste exemplify the range of such organizations. Environmental justice goes even further, making explicit connections between social inequities, particularly racism, and environmental degradation. The discursive activities of environmental justice actors parallel those of the anti-toxics movement, but draw directly on the tools of anti-racist and civil rights activists (Bullard 1990; Capek 1993).

Much like the criticism of mainstream environmentalism in the 1960s by prominent social union leaders (discussed shortly), environmental justice reflects efforts to infuse class, race and gender into environmentalism, with a broad concept of social justice forming a code for equity (Taylor 1993). Unlike conservationist-preservationist efforts to maintain *distance* between social issues and non-human nature (Gottlieb 1993), the environmental justice movement “does not treat the problem of oppression and social exploitation as separable from the rape and exploitation of the natural world” (Taylor 1993:57). Thus, for the anti-toxics and environmental justice grassroots, environmental contamination provides a proxy for the evaluation, expression, and mobilization of human-welfare and social justice concerns.

Turning to unionism, many scholars studying contemporary labor movements and the potential for a reinvigorated working class movement find severe limits in the dominant industrial relations paradigm (Kaufman 1993), as well as social movement theories that regard labor as an “old” movement. These frameworks are insufficient, and even misleading models for explaining the political behavior and potentials of organized segments of the working class. Recognizing the limits to conceptualizing labor movements in *static* and *homogenous* terms, recent studies recast the conceptual distinctions – often found in use by labor historians – of social movement unionism and business unionism (Johnston 1994; Scipes 1992; Seidman 1994). Analogous to labor historians’ contrast between industrial and craft unionism, these distinctions between business unions and social movement unions can help bring the ‘movement’ back into contemporary labor studies and simultaneously bring labor into social movement scholarship.

Social *movement* unionism, which “is deeply democratic,” can be understood as an instrument, both organizational and cultural, for transforming a “class in itself” to a “class for itself” (Moody 1997, pg. 4; also Robinson 1994). For labor historians and movement scholars, social unionism demands “collective activity in the community, the workplace, and above all, in the political arena” (Kessler-Harris 1987:32). In contrast, business unionism, the dominant form of postwar-U.S. unionism, undermines efforts to construct both the organizational and cultural ‘tools’ of class formation. Moody refers to business unionism as one “that sees members primarily as consumers and limits itself to negotiating the price of labor” (1988:xiv). In order to pursue these objectives, like their conservationist-enviro counterparts, the MO is top-down in its structure of authority and geographically centralized, leaving most movement objectives and resource-decisions to be determined by professional leaders (See Milton 1982; Robinson 1994; Voss 1993). Business unions act like interest groups. Social unions and, even more so, social movement unions aspire toward a movement identity that emphasizes workers as a class, regardless of national, race, ethnic, gender, and sexual identification. As I will suggest, the latent contours of class can be activated by a supportive cultural identification between union movements and other currents for social justice associated with race, gender, and nation, as exemplified in movements for environmental justice.

To summarize, both business unionism and conservationism/preservationism, with their narrow single-issue ideologies, relatively autocratic systems of authority, and their tactical and organizational focus on mobilizing resources for Beltway politics, possess a limited ability to transcend their sectoral interests and forge the discursive and organizational tools necessary for alliance-building. On the discursive side, the critique of the status quo is precluded by the exclusive membership of the organizations and their close working relationship with the national political elite – a necessary baggage associated with the conventional tactics employed by these groups, i.e., lobbying and litigation. Moreover, given their

organizational legacies, the support base of these resource-rich organizations and their limited issue-orientation, leave them relatively *exclusive* in the formulation and mobilization of their goals.

On the other hand, social/social movement unionism and anti-toxics/environmental justice possess the ideological and organizational potential to actively build cross-movement, left-wing alliances. Decentralized, local, militant, and democratic, these organizations tend to operate with greater levels of inclusiveness and remain less likely to compromise movement goals with those of national elite. The sharp contrasts of movement tendencies and organizations thus demonstrate an underlying tension between movement organizations (MOs) that focus on the practice of grassroots mobilization for social justice versus those defined by conventional tactics. By conventional, I refer to political practice that follows institutionalized channels of influence characteristic of clientelism, formal litigation, legislative lobbying, and electoral aims (See Tilly 1978). As an example of the conflictory nature of movement strategies, the challenge of environmental justice has introduced not only a political ideology that is critical of the environmental mainstream, but has urged that movement practices be aimed away from conventional channels of power toward the grassroots (Chavis 1991).

## **Labor-Environmental Relations: A Recent History**

In the early- to mid-1960s links between labor – usually social unions – and left-liberal groups were visible, where labor provided support for Students for a Democratic Society, Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Christian Leadership Council, and New Left activists supported labor in innumerable organizing efforts, pickets, and boycotts. At the same time, there was conflict. As Levy points out, “student-labor peace initiatives took place alongside the rampage [on peace activists by] construction workers on Wall Street” (1994: 188). In many ways, the rift between environmentalists and labor during the 1970s and 1980s paralleled the chasm that developed between leading elements of labor and the New Left following the 1960s (See Levy 1994).

Throughout the 1970s, efforts to sustain and forge alliances between labor and environmentalists were a lasting, though highly marginalized and fragmented affair. Beginning in the late 1960s, a rank-and-file undercurrent of anti-toxic, workplace ecology was boiling over in a series of increasingly militant demands – and wildcat strikes – for safety and health in workplaces affiliated with large industrial unions, particularly in the mining, chemical, transport, and textile industries (Moody 1988; Gottlieb 1993). These struggles involved workers affiliated with unions best characterized as social unionist, e.g., the ‘United Auto Workers’ (UAW), United Mine

Workers of America (UMWA), Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW), and United Steelworkers of America (USWA).

At the same time, New Left activists mobilized political and ideological opposition to the consumer "way of life" and the urban-industrial order (Carson 1964; Commoner 1972; Marcuse 1964). The emerging spirit of ecology, in its countercultural and radical forms, signified a cultural challenge to the "American way of life" (Epstein 1991; Levy 1994). Capturing some of the political energy of the New Left was a cluster of new environmental organizations, such as Environmental Action, Friends of the Earth, and later, Greenpeace.

Anticipating an alliance as early as 1965, the legacy of social unionism in the UAW leadership "converged" with the emerging ethos of environmentalism and convened the "United Action for Clean Water Conference." Inspired by the turnout, UAW President Walter Reuther (a paragon of postwar social union leaders) was optimistic that the conference would be the "beginning of a massive mobilization of citizens; the beginning of a popular crusade not only for clean water, but for cleaning up the atmosphere, the highways, the junkyards, and the slums and for creating a total living environment worthy of free men [sic]" (quoted in Siegmann 1985:25). Despite a broad turnout of environmental representatives at the event, only two of the large organizations would return to help pass the OSHA (Siegmann 1985).

In contrast, the UAW, along with several other social unions, actively supported the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the Clean Water Act (1972), and strong amendments to the Clean Air Act (1970). Even with these apparent successes, a systematic void in the jobs-environment equation recurred. Tony Mazzochi with the OCAW urged legislation to fill that void and sabotage what clearly became the primary wedge between labor and environmentalists: "Every single environmental measure should have a provision in it for the protection of a worker's income and benefits. That would go a long way toward undermining the jobs versus environment argument. As it is now, the companies pick up the issue and run with it" (quoted in Kazis and Grossman 1982:225).

With very few exceptions, the environmentalism that began to take hold after Earth Day 1970, as Dowie (1995), Gottlieb (1993), and others remark, was on a trajectory moving its most resourceful elements into a "lobby and litigate" mode within the developing national environmental policy system. Forcing both language and tactics to converge in conference, board, and court rooms, the movement increasingly aimed resources toward the protection and refinement of a policy system that reached its limits by 1972. Reflecting a deep concern over the trajectory of environmentalism in a 1971 testimony before a Senate subcommittee, UAW President Leonard Woodcock lamented that:

The environmental movement has been too slow to grasp the social and economic aspects of the environmental issue which the movement has so effectively brought to national attention.... [T]hey have exposed themselves, as well as the working men and women who should be their strongest allies, to the trap being set for them by corporate polluters.... [W]ithout support from the American people as a whole, especially from workers and the urban poor or near-poor who are pollution's worst casualties, the environmentalists will be fighting a lost cause... (quoted in Siegmann 1985:26).

Neither the network of grassroots environmental activists that began to form nor the industrial social unions, however, were able to anticipate the tremendous economic changes that lay before them, much less the capacity of the environmental mainstream to form effective links to the state & corporations, tame their tactics, and become legitimate fixtures on the national policy system.

As the dramatic political, economic, and cultural shifts began to transform the parameters of social change by the mid-1970s, the cultural resonance of the social unionist and social justice critique of the new wave of environmentalism lost ground. A social justice environmentalism was removed from the core of the movement, only to resurface in an anti-toxics movement from below, becoming publicly salient with the Love Canal mobilization (Epstein 1991; Gibbs 1982; Gottlieb 1993). The labor movement also recoiled amid a deepening economic crisis and employer assault on unions (Goldfield 1987). Yet resistance to union conciliation and concessions, again from the grassroots, became evident in the surge of rank-and-file movements, such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), which began to 'seed' a new social movement unionism during the 1970s (Johnston 1994; La Botz 1990).

Conflicts over energy policy, particularly nuclear power, exemplified the growing friction between the leading business unions of the AFL-CIO and the various facets of the environmental movement. For example, the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department – the paragon of business unionism – urged the federation to take a more supportive role of their economic concerns around energy policy. In 1976, the AFL-CIO suggested that "the rapid development of nuclear power is a must without which the nation's economy would falter" (quoted in Logan and Nelkin 1980:6). Further subduing efforts to develop a more cooperative labor-environmental relationship, the building trades argued for more distance, because "environmental politics have polarized this country. Fundamental issues are locked in confrontation; constant antagonisms paralyze the development and enjoyment of natural resources" (AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department Conference, quoted in Siegmann 1985:3). With George Meany, perhaps the most notoriously conservative leader of the federation, at the helm of the AFL-CIO, the balance of power within the central organs of the labor movement remained distant from the industrial social unions and grassroots social justice movements. Business union leadership in the AFL-CIO showed minimal resistance to the ideologies of

unrestrained 'American' growth and the Cold War rhetoric embodied in Reagan's monetarist, socially conservative candidacy (Sims 1992). As employers escalated attacks on unions and the legal-institutional foundation of the postwar labor-capital accord, the *leadership* of the Teamsters endorsed Ronald Reagan for president.

Only a few efforts to sustain alliances were visible by the late 1970s, notably by those groups affiliated with the Environmentalists for Full Employment (EFFE). One important environmental group, which also remains important in the anti-NAFTA alliances, was the Friends of the Earth. Unlike many of the large environmental MOs at the time, Friends of the Earth (FOE) continued to urge the pursuit of full employment through a "soft-energy path," where, for example, "retrofitting old houses with adequate insulation and solar energy collectors will create hundreds of thousands more jobs than creating the new energy supply needed to make the same houses comfortable if they aren't retrofitted" (*Not Man Apart*, Feb. 1978, quoted in Siegmann 1985:45). With the eventual dissolution of EFFE, however, serious efforts to align the two movements into the 1980s were abandoned.

## **Mobilizing Environmental Justice and Social Movement Unionism**

Throughout most of the 1980s, efforts to create linkages between the two movements were severely hampered. Broad social divisions, though not insurmountable obstacles to cooperation, were exacerbated by, and unable to counter, the powerful "job loss" arguments of industry. Seeking an inside route to Reagan's neoliberal policy arena, the sharp single-interest maneuvers of the dominant organizations of both movements kept both paralyzed (Dowie 1995; Moody 1988). A more conciliatory, business union leadership dominated the AFL-CIO and most unions, as was the case with the professional, environmental MOs. The few labor leaders strongly identifying with workplace health and community toxics, such as Sheehan with the USWA and Mazzochi at OCAW, found themselves increasingly tagged as "surrogate environmentalists" (Gottlieb 1993:292). The mainstream environmental groups also made it clear that their approach to environmental politics would not expand to encompass social justice and workplace issues (Faber & O'Connor 1989; Gottlieb 1993; Dowie 1995). A defensive posture developed in both movements and their organizing tactics increasingly failed to mobilize their constituencies beyond single-issue concerns.

Changing alignments and challenges to the AFL-CIO's (business unionism) status quo, however, became increasingly apparent as the 1980s drew to a close (Freeman 1993). The leadership of about eight international unions began a social unionist mobilization. It was not until NAFTA, and more solidly, until 1995 – in the first-ever contested election of the federation – that these same industrial-union leaders

would ascend to power alongside the new service sector unions, such as AFSCME and SEIU, as chief instruments of reform within the AFL-CIO. Indeed, it was during the mid-1980s that new social unions, such as the Service Employees (SEIU) and the Federation of State, & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) were on the rise with new organizing tactics and a more diverse membership (Johnston 1994). Indicative of changing balances of power within the AFL-CIO, progressive issues received increasing support by the late 1980s; for presidential candidate Jesse Jackson in 1988, support for embargoes on apartheid South Africa, and demands to withdraw Contra-aid.

Further, important grassroots changes in the environmental movement began to unfold during the 1980s. For environmentalism, it became clear that despite a relatively strong growth in membership throughout the 1980s, the environmental movement was “losing ground” (Dowie 1995). A growing rift between the grassroots and the nation’s largest groups exposed very different momentums, strategies, and resources dispersed throughout the movement. Mark Dowie (1995) refers to this rupture in terms of two contending approaches, or “third” and “fourth wave” environmentalism’s, aimed at capturing the nation’s environmental imagination. Third wave environmentalism, characterized by the Group of 10, “represents nothing so much as the institutionalization of compromise” during the 1980s (1995:107). Third wave groups, such as the Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council, have proved quite effective in designing “pollution prevention” strategies that rely on “market-based incentives,” such as pollution permits and allowances; in short, the right to pollute and sell it (ibid: 109).

They also remain well-funded by some of the world’s worst corporate polluters (See Tokar 1997). A fourth wave, Dowie argues, is emerging and has shuffled beneath the “Big Green” groups with an increasing sense of urgency and breadth of social constituents. This fourth wave is emerging with an uncompromisingly anti-corporate ideology, “democratic in origin, populist in style, untrammelled by bureaucracy, and inspired by a host of new ideologies...” (Dowie 1995:206). For Dowie and others, recent mobilizations for environmental justice characterize this emerging ‘wave’ of the movement.

With striking parallels, the labor movement witnessed a resurgence of rank-and-file reformers, who, from the early 1970s onward, demanded greater democracy and militant worker action in the face of decline in American labor. First, large industrial unions experienced a dramatic decline in membership (Perusek & Worcester 1995; Goldfield 1987; Western 1995). Rapid technological change, global stagflation, heightened capital mobility, dismal organizing strategies on the part of most unions, and a well-organized anti-union campaign by employers created a recipe for job displacement and growing rank-and-file dissatisfaction with the leadership of their international unions (Perusek & Worcester 1995; Western 1995). Secondly, the

success (and ongoing struggles) of several rank-and-file campaigns for democratic control of unions instilled a bottom-up strategy in numerous unions, reminiscent of the Congress of Industrial Organizations' momentous mobilization in the 1930s. In addition to alternative labor organizing in the community (e.g. workers' centers) these internal reform movements within major unions are challenging the tradition of business unionism, the top-down union structure, and the acquiescent responses to corporate restructuring (Moody 1997). These movements from below no doubt set the tone for the New Voice slate and the innovative strategies employed in the service sector during the 1980s (Johnston 1994). A new social unionism, indeed a social movement unionism, began to mobilize more successful strategies for confronting the 'post-accord' assault on labor (Moody 1997).

These pressures from below became increasingly apparent during the period between 1989 and 1992. Breaking with the (1970-1992) strategy of U.S. labor isolationism and trade-protectionism, independent unions and some affiliates to the AFL-CIO began to form autonomous ties both across borders and across social movement sectors (Moody & McGinn 1992). Indeed, while many environmental organizations were forging grassroots ties across national borders, the AFL-CIO made an important, and surprising, shift in policy towards the labor movement in Mexico. The AFL-CIO broke its cold-war relations with the official state union federation in Mexico, while UAW rank and file activists began to work with independent unionists in Mexico. At the same time, activists proposed that the AFL-CIO get involved in coalition efforts to expose the exploitation and abuse of Mexican communities and workers by transnational corporations along the border. This coalition effort led to one of the most important binational groups along the US-Mexico border, the Coalition for Justice in the *Maquiladoras* (CJM). Consequently, the AFL-CIO's financial support and participation in the CJM forged a series of "weak ties" with other social movement sectors and activists, ties that would become highly salient in the development of national anti-NAFTA coalitions and continental networks.

Like organized labor, environmentalists found that their struggles and foci for action were increasingly beyond the confines of preservationist and conservationist politics (Gottlieb 1993). From the grassroots to global networks, the national organizations were pushed to further incorporate environmental justice into their political discourse and in the process, adopt a more critical position on trade, political-economy, and social justice issues. More generally, border-area groups began to form regular and cooperative relations with the larger anti-toxics and environmental justice movement. Groups such as *Sin Frontera*, Border Ecology Project, *Enlace Ecologico*, the Southwest Organizing Project, and Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste found the border as a site where multiple forms of social and environmental exploitation could be viewed as a systematic problem that the environmental mainstream was unlikely to address. Importantly, these and other grassroots groups and coalitions, despite their limited resources as local organizations, set an institu-

tional tone for the formation of broader national networks involving very large movement organizations (See Dreiling 1997).

## **Environmental-Labor Alliance Against NAFTA**

As the debate over 1991 “fast track” legislation mounted, a flurry of efforts to forge alliances followed, deepening the involvement of organized labor and environmentalists in the politics of trade. As Mark Ritchie (1993) with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy recounted, “All of the sudden, we’re finding out [free trade is] all about our daily lives. The safety of our food, the protection of our jobs, the environment, all kinds of elements we must... study and do something about.” Thus when the legislation – known as fast track – for expediting negotiations for the NAFTA was narrowly approved in 1991, organized labor and many environmental MOs deployed their concerns and visions through a complex mobilization structure.

### **Tactical and Discursive Conditions for Alliance-formation**

The coordination of inter-movement lobbying, community organizing, and constituent mobilization occurred through the vast networks of large MOs affiliated with the Citizen’s Trade Campaign (CAC), a close affiliate and hub to Public Citizen. Exemplifying the best of “pressure group” tactics, the CAC was able to bridge divisions between unions and environmental MOs with a legacy of top-down politics and Beltway mobilization. By focusing the NAFTA opposition’s resources and strategic priorities in this way, however, a more radical vision, consisting of an internationalist alternative (to fight the nationalist positions) to NAFTA was severely limited. The second coalition in the anti-NAFTA forces, the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), tried to compensate for these limits and aimed to construct a discourse on internationalist alternatives. The active presence in ART of groups such as Greenpeace, the Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), the UAW, the ‘United Electrical’ (UE) workers, and numerous progressive think-tanks revealed a strategic effort to construct an internationalist movement in opposition to NAFTA, though one lacking comparable material resources (embodied in the CAC) for realizing that aim.

Groups close to ART, such as the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and the Development Group for Alternative Policy (D-GAP), brought an internationalist vision with a “corporate accountability” angle to the anti-NAFTA frame. For six years preceding the NAFTA, the research and policy focus of D-GAP was aimed at structural adjustment policies of the IMF, allowing their work on the NAFTA to “focus on how the agreement locked in that same economic model...” (Hansen-Kuhn 1994). With established connections to activists and NGOs in Latin America, the perspective of D-GAP on this “economic model” was informed by a perspective

common to the global South. According to Sarah Anderson (1994), the extensive research and publications produced by the Institute for Policy Studies tried to:

...shift the debate about free trade from... one where people are divided by those who are pro-free trade and those who are protectionist... to one that concedes that global economic integration by multinationals was underway, [and that] the point is to try and make it happen in a way that would place the concerns of society, community, environmentalists, workers, on an even par with corporate interests... to make trade more socially responsible.

Still, a more modest, common critique was fashioned among the players of the respective coalitions – a discourse that called for transparency in international "trade" relationships. For instance, the first trinational meeting of fair trade activists in Zacatecas, MX (1991) opened with the following: "We insist that trade be part of a strategy of continental development that guarantees the distribution of wealth, the elevation of living standards, and the self-determination of our peoples." All the major networks, and many of the bi/tri-national coalitions and grassroots organizations, thus came to recognize the unregulated market and "corporate globalization" as a common threat to society (and nature). Their public literatures, formal declarations, press statements, etc., were imbued with this common understanding, though manifest within the political culture of the movements.

Activists within several unions and mainstream environmental MOs worked to incorporate political economy, environmental, global solidarity, and social justice issues. Indeed, newly ascendant social unions and the environmental justice mobilization through fourth wave and in this case, supportive "third wave" organizations, set an important context for the *construction* of a *fair* trade challenge to NAFTA, linking social justice and environmental politics. Recognizing the basis for a labor-environmental alliance, Ron Blackwell (1995) with the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE, formerly ACTWU), claimed that "the two movements have goals that are essentially related, but still distinct movements... [And] there is no essential antagonism in this relationship... though the goals of each are under attack throughout the world by the same force..., corporate power." Several key concepts formed a nexus for linking these issues. Unions, environmental groups, and consumer groups argued that the NAFTA (and GATT) would further encourage the "downward harmonization" of labor, environmental, and consumer standards by subordinating national and local political institutions to the regimen of unfettered trade. Thus, on the discursive and ideological end, efforts were stimulated to construct *alternatives* to free trade, emphasizing that an "upward harmonization of labor standards is not different in kind from harmonizing upwards environmental standards..." (ibid). This discourse was of obvious importance in framing intermovement positions and the strategic reasoning for alliance-building.

### Interorganizational Conditions for Alliance-formation:

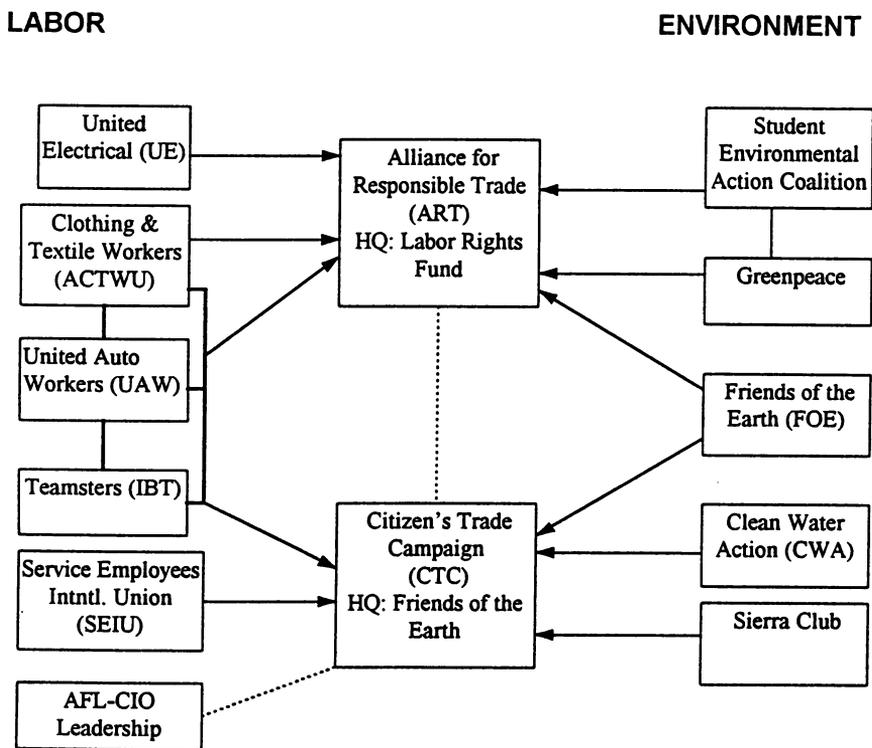
Figure 1 depicts the structure of interorganizational affiliations around the two coalitions. The eleven MOs, 5 unions, the AFL-CIO leadership, and 5 environmental groups, were all actively mobilized against the NAFTA, though in different ways. The mobilization network illuminates three clusters of actors around the two coalitions. Here, it is possible to examine how the tactical, ideological, and organizational conditions located, or informed, the positioning of the MOs in the larger, labor-environmentalist network. The first is composed of a tactical alignment of the UE with Greenpeace, and SEAC to a lesser extent. In this group, the best exemplars (at the national level) of a social movement union and a large environmental MO supportive of environmental justice, align in the ART. The second, on the other end, aligns the new social union, SEIU, with the Sierra Club, and the business union leadership of the AFL-CIO distanced even further. These organizations are closest to our business union and conservationist categories. The third, and mediating cluster forms a 'linchpin' across the movements, linking the social unions, ACTWU-UAW-Teamsters, to EJ-supporters, FOE and CWA. But this last cluster also links the organizations across wings *within* the respective movements by acting as a tie to both coalitions, the ART and the CAC. Indeed, the range of relations represented in Figure 1 suggest an alignment of movement organizations through the coalitions according to tactical and ideological dispositions. Different social movements in the U.S. were thus linked through movement organizations sharing similar strategic orientations, or "repertoires of contention" (Tilly 1978).

Indeed, the FOE and UAW-Teamsters played pivotal roles within the mobilization network. As Andrea Durbin (1994) referred to her relations within the environmental community, "I worked mostly with Sierra Club, I was very close with Sierra Club." The role of FOE as a mediator between the direct action grassroots groups and the Sierra Club (SC) cannot be undercounted. The fallout between the NWF (and other G-10 groups) and the Sierra Club during the NAFTA was made easier for the SC by having a smaller, though respectable and related organization alongside. The lobbying resources and the PAC of the SC would carry significant weight within the NAFTA opposition and signal strength in the environmental community to other social movement sectors, particularly labor. This, coupled with the defection of seven large environmental groups (who formed the Environmental Coalition for NAFTA), made more visible to labor the varying political tendencies within the environmental movement (See Audley 1995 & Dreiling 1997 for the splits in the environmental movement).

As Cam Duncan (1994) with Greenpeace noted, "By the fact that not all environmental organizations opposed NAFTA, the labor movement paid attention to the ones who did and who were their closest allies. I'm sure that will have some lasting effect." Dan Seligman (1994) with the Sierra Club recounted the development

of relations with the AFL-CIO, “John started and I maintained a very close relationship with the AFL-CIO leadership. Mark Anderson, Bill Cunningham, Greg Woodhead, and others. I spoke at a labor rally the week before the NAFTA vote in Baltimore in an AFL-CIO hall. Carl Pope, the Executive Director of Sierra, spoke at the public rally for the AFL-CIO’s annual convention out in San Francisco. Things like that.” The AFL-CIO, however, never established close relations to Greenpeace, reflecting the variance in the tactical dispositions and absence of common relations among the respective organizations.

**Figure 1: Interorganizational Network of the Labor-Environmental Alliance Against NAFTA**



*Note:* Directed arcs indicate direct participation, support and influence in the coalition. Broken lines indicate informal support and influence.

While organized labor remained unified in opposition to the agreement, there were clear differences among the 81 AFL-CIO affiliates. Twenty-seven international unions actively opposed the agreement. Eighteen formally joined the CAC and several participated formally on the steering committees of both ART and the CAC. Others, such as the Teamsters, UAW, SEIU, and the OCAW remained active both within the coalitions and independently. Some independent labor unions and economic justice organizations also participated formally in the coalitions, though the latter tended to galvanize around the Fair Trade Campaign groups and the ART. Never *formally* joining the coalitions, the AFL-CIO kept some distance from the newer movement sectors, while encouraging a few of its affiliates to maintain active ties with the coalitions.

The business union leadership of the AFL-CIO, as some internal critics argued, treated the struggle over the NAFTA too much like "Beltway politics," and hence acted more like a lobbying organization than a social movement organization, thereby failing to successfully mobilize its membership. While social unionist leadership may have resulted in greater worker mobilization, and perhaps a stronger opposition, the limitations in both conservationist environmentalism and business unionism led to important fractures and strategic failures, limiting the effect of unity between labor and environmentalists. Even with that unity, however, it was not enough to overcome what one close observer termed "a very well orchestrated business and administration effort" (Woodhead 1994).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The themes and strategic concerns raised by the intermovement alliances persist. Echoed by Ron Blackwell (1995), "neither one of us, the environmental or labor movement, is going to realize anything like its goals unless we cooperate politically and socially to build a movement strong enough to put in place a just and sustainable future." Les Leopold (1995), representing the OCAW, stressed the absence of – though encouraged the search for – proposed solutions to overcome some of the insensitiveness associated with middle-class environmentalists toward working-class jobs:

The bridge [between environmentalists and labor] is constantly being blown up, destroyed, because we have failed to seriously address the worker dislocation issue... If we don't address it we are... abdicating that ground to very powerful corporate forces, who, at this moment, are organizing and mobilizing to capture everyday working people into an alternative movement... If we're serious about sustainability, we're talking about massive jobs dislocation.... What is a just transition?

While hardly bringing to fruition a tight union between environmental and labor MOs, the struggle over the NAFTA precipitated an alignment of political forces – perhaps rehearsed in the late 1960s – that transformed their relationship in ways still unseen. During the last 30 years, the rapid internationalization of capital, communications infrastructure, production arrangements, and the consequent social and ecological dislocations have blurred the boundaries of nation while sharpening the focus on capitalist markets and global power. Workplaces conjoin community, bridging anti-toxic environmental justice with worker/community health and safety movements. Capital mobility and patterns of uneven development leave "trails" for social movements to follow and identify as sources of destruction. Patterns such as these suggest that Green issues must become more than causes for conservation, and worker concerns must extend beyond the factory floor. As Williams argued, radical ecology must enter into a "critical engagement" with the "labor movement in order to pave the way for a broad Green/labor alliance" (Raymond Williams cited in Eckersley 1992:128). Mirroring this concern, Carl Boggs suggested that "the key to any future social transformation in the advanced countries... depends upon the extent to which a sustained connection between new social movement and working-class struggles – between community and workplace, universal goals and specific material demands – can be theoretically and politically established" (Boggs 1986: 20).

In this sense, it is clear that labor politics and environmentalism need not be poised as inherently opposed tendencies for social transformation. Moreover, as recent general strikes in France, S. Korea, Zimbabwe, Canada, the Philippines, and elsewhere make evident, it is premature to ignore (or worse, reject) the role of class politics in any future political initiatives, for the environment or otherwise. Indeed, the power of labor may represent the most important source of social power outside of the state and capital for rerouting the material interchanges between society and ecosystems that are currently responsible for the growing crisis in the biosphere. For that power to be realized, so must the political potential of cross-movement alliances be solidly constructed, both in the organizational and discursive realms. Importantly, the new grassroots efforts to bring social justice to labor struggles *and* environmentalism have moved us in that direction; opening new paths for dissolving the "jobs vs. environment" rhetoric while compelling actors to forge the broad political alliances necessary to move history beyond those antagonisms.

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