



Trade Conditions and Labor Rights





Trade Conditions and Labor Rights

U.S. Initiatives, Dominican and
Central American Responses

Henry J. Frundt



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This book is dedicated to my grandfather Henry,
who researched worker compensation and equi-
table wage scales in Europe after World War I, and
to my children, Michael, Laura, James, Daniel,
Janine, and Paul, all workers in the United States,
for whom I also have great affection.





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ABBREVIATIONS

ACILS	American Center for International Labor Solidarity
ACTWU	Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union
ADOZONA	Asociación Nacional de Zonas Francas de Exportación
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIFLD	American Institute for Free Labor Development
AIP	Apparel Industry Partnership
ANACH	Asociación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras
ANC	Asociación Nacional Campesina
ANEP	Asociación Nacional de Empleados Publicos [Costa Rica]
ANEP	Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada [El Salvador]
ANTA	Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Agropecuarios
ANTEL	Asociación Nacional de Telecomunicaciones [El Salvador]
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista [El Salvador]
ASI	Asociation Salvadoreña de Industriales
ASTTEL	Asociación Salvadoreña de Trabajadores de Telecomunicaciones
ATC	Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo [Nicaragua]
ATMOP	Asociación de Trabajadores de Ministerio de Obras Publicas [El Salvador]
AVANSCO	Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala
CACIF	Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agricolas, Comerciales, Industrias y Financieras [Guatemala]
CAMI	CENTRO de Actividades Multiplef y Investigaciones
CASC	Confederación Autonoma Sindical Clasista
CATI	Confederación Auténtica de Trabajadores Independientes [Panama]
CBERA	Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act
CBI	Caribbean Basin Initiative
CENOC	Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas [Guatemala]



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CENTRA	Centro de Estudios del Trabajo [El Salvador]
CEA	Consejo de Estatal de Azúcar [Dominican Republic]
CERJ	Consejo de Comunidades Ethicas Runujel Junam [Guatemala]
CGS	Confederación General de Sindicatos [El Salvador]
CGT	Central General de Trabajadores
CGT	Confederación General de Trabajadores [Dominican Republic, Honduras]
CGT	Confederación General del Trabajo [El Salvador]
CGT	Confederación Gremial de Trabajadores [Panama]
CGTG	Central General de Trabajadores de Guatemala
CGTP	General Autonoma de Trabajadores de Panama
CIEP	Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular
CLAT	Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores
CMT	Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico
CNT	Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores
CNTC	Consejo Nacional de Trabajadores de Campo
CNTD	Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Dominicanos
COCENTRA	Confederación Centroamericana de Trabajadores
COLPROSUMAH	Colegio Profesional de Superación Magisterial Hondureño
CONIC	Coordinación Nacional Indígena y Campesina [Guatemala]
COSEP	Consejo de Sector de Empresa Privados [Nicaragua]
CPT	Congreso Permanente de Trabajadores [Nicaragua]
CST	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores
CTC	Confederación de Trabajadores de Costa Rica
CTC	Central de Trabajadores Clasista [Dominican Republic]
CTC	Central de Trabajadores de Campo [Guatemala]
CTCA	Confederación de Trabajadores de Centro América
CTD	Confederación de Trabajadores Democraticos [El Salvador]
CTH	Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras
CTM	Central de Trabajadores Mayoritaria [Dominican Republic]
CTRN	Confederación de Trabajadores de Rerum Novarum [Costa Rica]
CTRP	Confederación de Trabajadores de la República de Panama
CTU	Confederación de Trabajadores Unitaria [Dominican Republic]
CUC	Comité de Unidad Campesina



CUS	Confederación de Unificación Sindical [Nicaragua]
CUSG	Confederación Unidad de Sindicatos de Guatemala
CUT	Confederación de Trabajadores [Paraguay]
CUT	Central Unitaria de Trabajadores [Dominican Republic]
DGFP	Dirección General de Formación Profesional
ECLAC	Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FCG	Federación Campesina de Guatemala
FEASIES	Federación de Asociaciones y Sindicatos Independientes de El Salvador
FECETRAG	Federación Central de Trabajadores de Guatemala
FENASEP	Federación Nacional de Servidores Públicos [Guatemala]
FENASTEG	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores del Estado [Guatemala]
FENASTRAS	Federación Nacional Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños
FENATRAM	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Municipales [Guatemala]
FENATRAZONAS	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de Zonas [Dominican Republic]
FESEBS	Federación Sindical de Empleados Bancarios y de Seguros de Guatemala
FESINCONSTRANS	Federación de Sindicatos de Industria, Construcción, Transportación y Similares [El Salvador]
FESINTRABS	Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores de Alimentos, Bebidas y Similares
FESITRANH	Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Nacionales de Honduras
FESTRAES	Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de El Salvador
FESTRAS	Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Alimentación, Agroindustria y Similares [Guatemala]
FITH	Federación Independiente de Trabajadores de Honduras
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
FMLN	Frente Faribundo Martí Para la Liberación Nacional
FNT	Frente Nacional de Trabajadores [Nicaragua]
FOES	Fundación Obrero Empresarial Salvadoreña
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional
FTS	Federación de Trabajadores de Salud [Nicaragua]



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FUSS	Federación Unitaria Sindical Salvadoreña
FUTG	Frente Unitario de Trabajadores de Guatemala
FUTH	Federación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Guatemala
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GNP	gross national product
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
HTS	Harmonized Trade Schedule
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICIC	Iniciativa Civil para la Integración Centroamericana
ICO	International Coffee Organization
IGSS	Instituto Guatemalteco de Seguridad Social
ILGWU	International Ladies Garment Workers Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ILRF	International Labor Rights Fund
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INPEP	Instituto Nacional de Pensiones de Empleados Publicos [El Salvador]
INSAFORP	Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional
INCAP	Instituto de Nutrición de Centroamérica y Panama
ISCREL	Instituto Superior de Central America de Relaciones Laborales
ISSS	Instituto Salvadoreño del Seguro Social
IUF	International Union of Food and Allied Workers
LAWG	Latin (Central) American Working Group
NACDC	Netherlands National Advisory Council for Development Co- operation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-governmental organization
NIE	newly industrializing economy
NISGUA	Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala
NLC	National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in Central America
NYLC	New York Labor Committee
OAS	Organization of American States
OPIC	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
ORIT	Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores
PAN	Partido de Avanzado Nacional [Guatemala]
PCD	Partido Comunista Dominicana
PDC	Partido Democrática Cristiano [El Salvador]
PLD	Partido de Liberación Dominicana



PLD	Partido Revolucionario Democratico [Panama]
PLN	Partido de Liberación Nacional [Costa Rica]
PRD	Partido Revolucionario Dominicano
PREALC	Programa Regional del Empleo para América Latina y el Caribe [ILO]
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Independiente [Dominican Republic]
PRSC	Partido Reformista Social Cristiana [Dominican Republic]
PVH	Phillips-Van Heusen
SETMI	Sindicato de Empleados y Trabajadores de Mandarin Internacional [El Salvador]
SITRAIHSS	Sindicato de Trabajadores del Instituto Hondureño de Seguridad Social
SITRAMEDHYS	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Medicina, Hygenica y Similares
SITRASS	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Servicios de Salud [Guatemala]
SITRATERCO	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Tela Railroad Company [Honduras]
SOICSES	Sindicato de Obreros de Industrias de Construcción, Similares y Connexos de El Salvador
STEG	Sindicato de Trabajadores del Estado de Guatemala
STIBYS	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Bebidas y Similares
STINDE	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Instituto Nacional de Electrificación [Guatemala]
STISSS	Sindicato de Trabajadores del Instituto Salvadoreño de Seguro Social
STITAS	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Industria Textil de Algodón, Sintéticos, Acabados Textiles, Similares y Connexos [El Salvador]
SUTC	Sindicato Unión de Trabajadores de la Construcción
TPC	Tripartite Commission
UASP	Unidad Accion Sindical y Popular
UCA	Universidad de Centro America [El Salvador]
UE	United Electrical Workers
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers Union
UGTD	Unión General de Trabajadores Dominicanos
UITA	Unión Internacional de Trabajadores de Alimentos
UNE	Unión Nacional de Empleados [Nicaragua]
UNITE	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees
UNO	Unión Nacional Opositora [Nicaragua]



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UNOC	Unión National Obereo-Cambesina [El Salvador]
UNSI TRAGUA	Unión Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala
UNTS	Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños
URNG	Unidad Revolutionaria Nacional Guatemalteca
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
U.S./GLEP	U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project
USITC	United States International Trade Commission
USTR	United States Trade Representative
UTE	Unidad de Trabajadores de Escuintla
UTESP	Unión de Trabajadores del Estado y Sectores Populares de San Marcos
UTQ	Unión de Trabajadores de Quetzaltenango
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WTO	World Trade Organization





PREFACE

In 1976, while working at the offices of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility in New York, I received a tape smuggled out of Guatemala from workers attempting to organize a union at a local Coca-Cola plant. This began my journey into the world of trade unionists in developing nations and their painful struggle for a measure of respect. My journey took me through the horrible deaths of so many—labor leaders at Coca-Cola and elsewhere—and the exile of thousands of their compatriots. It also revealed the dramatic success of a small group of workers, who with the help of international labor, religious, and human rights groups gained a degree of dignity and autonomy. In Guatemala, the local Coca-Cola franchise remains an example of effective labor-management relations in the midst of a cauldron of economic dislocation and abusive work conditions. It has served as a model of how non-governmental organizations can work cooperatively to confront the social injustices that working people face everywhere.

In 1987, I documented this story in a book entitled *Refreshing Pauses*. During the years since the Coca-Cola story was told (by others as well as myself), much has changed in the international political economy, especially concerning the global coordination of production and consumption. Corporations have freely expanded their offshore operations, either directly or through subcontracting. To complement their efforts, governments have shifted away from state-led investment policies toward massive deregulation and privatization. Despite the pro-and-con debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and “fast-track” trade legislation, public attention has largely focused on the benefits of globalization. Only in the mid-1990s did the unconscionable treatment of women and children workers in maquila plants resurrect the Coca-Cola example. Corporate campaigns for international employee standards regained media interest. U.S. unions, historically quite protectionist in their solutions to world competition, finally joined the effort, realizing that if basic worker rights were to be protected, the labor movement needed to pay better attention to the needs of people in other countries as well as at home.



In a contested election, the AFL-CIO elected new leadership in Fall 1995. By 1997 the federation had begun to articulate a fresh approach to international labor issues. In the same year, at White House urging, labor joined with human-rights activists and business representatives to form an apparel industry partnership known as the “No Sweat Task Force,” which established guidelines and independent monitoring regarding the treatment of employees by outside contractors. Results testified to the importance of corporate campaigns and non-governmental efforts as antidotes to the dislocation and workplace abuse associated with international corporate expansion.

However, the intervening period has also suggested that when voluntary measures prove insufficient, government pressure has a role to play. During the 1980s, this realization led labor-rights proponents to another approach. They sought clauses in free-trade agreements that would improve local labor laws and compliance. A requirement to respect basic freedoms to organize and bargain would allow for local differences in culture and levels of development, argued these advocates, but it would also assure that international competition proceeded fairly. While there would be worker dislocations, they would be much less brutal. Ultimately, they hoped for a global mechanism that would assure compliance with basic labor rights.

Conventional economists have nevertheless been reluctant to emphasize the “employment impact” of “free global trade” much less to endorse any international standards or enforcement agency. Their view has had far-reaching influence on U.S. and European policy makers. For them, international mechanisms imply state interference in the market, which benefits a favored “labor aristocracy” and downgrades the commonweal. Until an economic crisis struck in 1997, such economists customarily cited several economically liberalized nations in Southeast Asia that had demonstrated growth and increased equality for their citizens.

Such controversies demand clear thinking. They motivated me to undertake further research on the social impact of global trade. Who was more correct: those who advocated greater state action to enforce international labor rights or those who believed the market would deliver a fairer outcome? The market argument certainly appeared more persuasive to many policy makers. Let me explain, however, why my previous experience had oriented me to the first approach. I credit my sustained interaction with workers who were struggling to form unions in Guatemala, El Salvador, and other nearby countries. Their experiences, encapsulated recently in Thomas Reed and Karen Brandow’s *The Sky Never Changes*, revealed how ordinary folks organize to protect themselves from horrendous abuse—a far cry from the “labor aristocracy” or “entrenched bureaucracy” characterization often applied toward labor unions in Latin America and Asia. With few exceptions, active labor lead-



ers in the countries I was annually visiting appeared often to be in danger and were always laboring to obtain dignity and basic necessities. They labored not only on behalf of their own unions but for everyone around them, unionized, non-unionized, underemployed, or unemployed. For most of their waking hours they urged workers facing difficult conditions to hold on a little longer, if not to win a union contract at least to demand a limited measure of justice in the way they were spoken to, in how they were treated when they were sick, in how they were informed when contracts were slow, and in how they were paid relative to what it cost them to live.

Most of their co-workers led simple but demanding lives. They were often unfamiliar with the intricacies of trade debates and policy. They became frightened when businessmen and government officials warned them of being manipulated by foreign agents. It was not that they believed such charges, but they felt their livelihoods were threatened. They understood mistreatment, however. They understood exploitation. They readily sensed basic class loyalties even when they knew overt repression and competing interests and personalities suggested caution.

So, integral to the principles of trade policy, I must acknowledge that it was the perceptions of these workers that motivated my search for an answer. I was especially interested in how they viewed changes over the past ten years—in their attitudes, for example, toward fresh investments and opportunities for industrial employment. Perhaps they agreed with conventional economists that they too benefited substantially from unbridled markets. Maybe, despite new forms of potential exploitation, they saw themselves as much better off.

I found myself overwhelmed by what these workers did and said. In the following pages I have tried to pass on to the reader a sample of their perspectives on labor rights and trade conditions. I discovered, as the reader will, that their responses demonstrate a range of complexity. Since I am testing the impact of state intervention on labor rights, I have attempted to integrate these testimonies with relevant statistical data and expert commentary. I must confess to finding the views of workers and their representatives especially persuasive. I also have attempted to present the views of businesspeople and government officials in as straightforward a manner as I could. Now I invite the reader to consider the evidence at hand.

Note on Sources

This work is based on three types of sources. The first is an extensive set of personal interviews, often in Spanish, that I conducted between 1993 and 1997. Quotations are credited in the notes. English translations of the inter-



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views are available from the author. I also consulted petitions and supportive documents filed with the GSP Subcommittee of USTR, and related labor union and USAID documents. Full references to these sources are in the notes. Most petition-related documents are stored in the USTR Archive, 600 17th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20506. Related materials are held at the ILRF, 733 15th Street N.W., no. 920, Washington, D.C. 20005; U.S./GLEP, Box 268-290, Chicago, Ill., 60626; CENTRA, Av. Sierra Nevada 615, Colonia Miramonte, San Salvador. Finally, I consulted much of the available published material on U.S. labor relations in Central America; those sources are cited in the notes and listed in the bibliography.

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