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Margaret E. Peters, *UCLA*

In 1934 with the passage of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act (RTAA), it seemed as if the Democrats had finally beaten the Republicans in the war of tariffs. Since the founding of the United States, trade had been a contentious issue, pitting farmers and plantation owners against a rising industrial sector. Republicans would raise tariffs to protect their industrial base and Democrats would lower them back down to help agriculture.

After winning majorities in Congress and controlling the Presidency, free traders in the Democratic party created what they thought was a durable solution: take Congress out of the business of setting trade policy. Since setting trade policy was the Constitutionally-protected prerogative of Congress, they settled on a new institutional form—have Congress grant the president the authority to negotiate trade agreements and then take an up or down vote on the agreement. This process brought exporters into the debate over tariffs and led to the closure of uncompetitive, anti-trade firms, leading tariff levels to decrease from about 19.6% (duties/ all imports) with Smoot-Hawley to about 1.6% today (e.g. Michael Bailey, Judith Goldstein, and Barry Weingast, “The Institutional Roots of American Trade Policy: Politics, Coalitions, and International Trade,” *World Politics*, 49(3), 1997).

But, as Kay and Evans argue, this institutional change had another, perhaps pernicious, effect: it took the politics out of trade policy. Or, at least, it did for a while. In the early 1990s, trade once again became a hot political issue with the negotiations over the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA). Kay and Evans seek to understand how activists made trade contentious once again.

Using a theory grounded in the social movements literature, the authors argue that activists were able to politicize trade policy, and gain real concessions, by using both insider and outsider strategies. Kay and Evans draw upon work on social fields and organizational theory (e.g. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 1992), arguing that social movement actors can “forge novel sources of power by leveraging across fields” (p. 29), where fields are both networks of actors and socially constructed arenas where actors compete for power.

In the case of trade, Kay and Evans argue that environmentalists and labor organizations leveraged their power in different fields to gain influence over trade policy. Labor already had an institutionalized seat in the development of trade policy in the U.S. Trade Representative office (USTR; or the “trade policy field”) and had strong ties to Members of Congress (“the legislative field”). Environmentalists had strong grassroot support and had legitimacy because they had little skin in the trade game. By forging an alliance, these two groups were able to leverage each other’s power in different fields to gain access and power. As Kay and Evans note, this theory of social movements examines how groups form their strategy rather than who joins social movements, unlike much of the social movements literature.

The authors use process tracing based on interviews with key players and an examination of the Congressional Record and publications at the time to examine their argument. They begin their empirical analysis in chapter 3 describing how the politics around trade had evolved post-World War II leading up to the NAFTA negotiations to set the stage for their analysis. Chapter 4 then traces how labor and environmentalists came together and how they framed their arguments not as protection but as “fair trade” in 1990. Chapter 5 picks up the story in 1991 through the election of Bill Clinton to describe how these activists created mass opposition to NAFTA and Chapter 6 goes through the negotiations over side agreements on labor and the environment. In Chapters 7 and 8, they then trace how these issues have affected trade politics since.

The empirical chapters offer a rich history of the labor and environmental movements around NAFTA and beyond. The evidence they provide bolsters their argument that these groups were able to leverage ties to insiders to gain additional access and power over the negotiations. One of the most persuasive parts of the book is the discussion in chapter 6 about how labor, which seemed to be the more powerful group, ended up with a weaker side agreement. Kay and Evans argue that labor’s decision to oppose any deal on NAFTA weakened their position. Essentially, this move broke the labor’s ties between the trade policy field and the legislative field because trade negotiators no longer needed to placate them. Instead, trade negotiators focused on getting the support that they could elsewhere. In contrast, some important environmental groups signaled that they would be willing to support NAFTA if the side agreement was good enough – which prompted the trade negotiators to make a better deal.

Kay and Evans description of these two social movements—organized labor and environmental groups—and their fight over NAFTA make for fascinating reading for any trade scholar. Yet, the book is not without flaws. In a book about mobilization and mass politics, electoral politics were surprisingly absent. Most importantly, at no point in the book do the authors discuss what role, if any, Ross Perot played. Perot—one of the most successful third-party candidates in American Politics—famously campaigned on an anti-NAFTA platform, arguing that “there will be a giant sucking sound going south” if NAFTA passed. Further, he used the rhetoric similar to that Kay and Evans show that labor and environmental groups used. Was Perot simply appropriating the already successful rhetoric of these groups or did these groups reach out to Perot once they learned of his anti-trade stance? After the election, how did Perot’s success at the ballot box affect politicians’ to labor and environmentalists’ arguments?

A second short coming of the book is that it does not engage with alternative explanations as much as one would like, especially the role of the international bargaining process. Specifically, what were the preferences of the Canadian and Mexican governments? While the preferences of the Canadian government may have been much like that of the US—generally free trade oriented but with concerns from their own labor and environmental groups—those of Mexico were likely to be very different. NAFTA was negotiated when Mexico still had an authoritarian government. It is not surprising, then, that the PRI did not want to allow greater labor rights—especially more collective bargaining and organization rights—as that would threaten its own power. It was, thus, likely easier for the PRI government to give ground on environmental issues that were less likely to threaten its ability to stay in office.

Throughout the book and especially in the conclusion, Kay and Evans argue that the anti-democratic nature of the trade regime has led, at least in part, to the backlash against free trade. Because the USTR negotiates agreements without much input from the political process, the losers of globalization face not only their economic and social losses but also feel a loss of political power with the lack of representation. Kay and Evans do not test this assertion empirically, but it is an interesting area for future scholarship: how much of the recent backlash to trade can be blamed on the structure of negotiations versus other processes, like rising inequality, automation, or decline of organized labor, or other policies, like decreases in the social safety net?

Normatively, Kay and Evans argue that the process of negotiating trade agreements should be much more open. Yet, I wonder what the counterfactual would have been had Congress not delegated the authority to negotiate more or less in secret to the executive branch? Delegation has allowed the US to continue to cut trade barriers, greatly increasing world trade. Increased trade and the globalization that it sparked have pulled millions of people out of extreme poverty in a way that few, if any other, policies have done. Without delegation, it is unlikely that the US would have opened its borders as far as it has or that the world would have become so globalized. On the other hand, perhaps with greater openness in trade negotiations, there would have been more support for the policies of embedded liberalism that might have stemmed the backlash.

In the end, Kay and Evans present a very detailed and rich history of how labor and environmental groups gained greater power in the realm of trade and suggest that these experiences may serve as a model for other groups. Yet, I can't help but wonder if labor and environmental groups have thrown the baby out with the bathwater with their opposition to trade agreements. TPP is going forward without the US and the labor and environmental chapters are weaker than they were; Trumps' trade wars and tariffs have created or saved few, if any jobs; and somewhat paradoxically Trumps anti-free trade stance has made free trade more popular than it has ever been in the US.