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The Consequences of Collective Action: The Blue-Green Coalition and the Emergence of a Polanyian Social Movement

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Introduction

In his classic work, *The Great Transformation* (1944), Karl Polanyi argues that the creation of the artificial commodities of “land, labor, and money” would cause the destruction of human society as social values are subjugated to “the utopia of the self-governing market” in capitalism. This process would result in a double movement, “personified,” he says,

...as the action of two organizing principles in society, each of them setting itself specific institutional aims, having the support of definite social forces and using its own distinctive methods. The one [is] the principle of economic liberalism, aiming at the establishment of a self-regulating market, relying on the support of the trading classes, and using largely *laissez-faire* and free trade as its methods; the other [is] the principle of social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization, relying on the varying support of those most immediately affected by the deleterious action of the market – primarily, but not exclusively, the working and the landed classes – and using protective legislation, restrictive associations, and other instruments of intervention as its methods. (1944, 132)

Put differently, “On one hand are social forces urging capital, labor and nature to submit to the principles of a market economy unleashed from the social requisites of economic and environmental justice, while on the other are those urging the protection of the social and natural bases of life from the unfettered market.” (Dreiling 2001, xvi) Capitalist businesses in pursuit of profits have what might be termed “natural” collective interests, whereas while they compete with each other for profit, they all have an interest in undervaluing the costs of production on the natural world and creating labor markets which drive competition amongst workers with decreasingly realistic options for exit and pushes “labor costs,” their wages and benefits, down, decreasing business costs and increasing profits. It is not clear, however, how the disparate sectors of society

constituting the second “principle,” those social classes, groups, and organizations that would protect society and nature from the degradation of the market mechanism, might cohere into a movement.

Given that the interests of the “landed classes” have largely been absorbed by agribusiness and extractive enterprises which more resemble economic organizations than the landed classes of his time, Polanyi’s hypothesis regarding the character of the forces which would protect society from the market, the working and landed classes, has proven incorrect. There emerged at the start of the twenty-first century a large number of diverse organizations worldwide, from traditional labor unions to environmentalist and human rights groups to food sovereignty and anti-privatization movements and more, which are actively seeking to counter the very same deleterious effects Polanyi argued economic liberalization would generate. How it might come to be, however, that such a variegated and geographically dispersed set of organizations and movements, with no obvious overwhelming intersection of ideologies or interests, which compete for resources, and often actively oppose one another, might come to form an “organizing principle” of society, or, put more clearly for my purposes, a single social movement oriented towards the placement of social values above those of the market mechanism is unclear in Polanyi’s formulation.

I argue that the means to the creation of a more coherent movement resembling Polanyi’s socially protective forces is not necessarily only possible as the result of intentional, strategic coalition formation. I argue instead that *collective struggles themselves forge collective identities*, and, as identities shape interest-definition, disparate actors who find themselves fighting together can potentially come to define themselves in

the same terms through the very fact of collective action, allowing for the potential emergence of further collective action as past actions are justified, future ones theorized, and as interests are defined in common from that point forward. That is, movements need not be theorized in advance of collective action, and, in fact, the rationalization of collective action itself can lead to a cohering of disparate social entities, justifying and propelling future action.

I use the case of the Blue-Green Coalition, the alliance forged between labor unions and environmental groups in the U.S. during the struggle against NAFTA in the early 1990s, to demonstrate that collective action produces moments in which identities can expand and overlap, merging perceived interests, even when both of these aspects of movement organizations had previously been seen as inherently contradictory (as was the case of some segments of the labor movement and many conservationists and environmental organizations in the U.S. throughout the 1980s and in previous eras). (Obach 2004) While the social movements literature has given us tools with which to analyze the circumstances under which individuals will join or support movements, when organizations will enter into coalitions, and when these collective actors will succeed or fail at achieving their goals, it provides us with few tools for understanding what the consequences of such collective action is for these actors themselves and the implications of post-struggle theorization on the potential array of allies and strategies likely to be employed in future political collective action.

The picture the literature paints of the labor-environmental coalitions (and of strategic coalitions in general) is one of rational actors who gauge to what extent their interests overlap with each other and how badly they need each others' various forms of

resources in order to achieve their goals. If the resources are appealing and the interests not seriously opposed, organizations will cooperate on the specific issue at hand. There is, however, little in the literature regarding organizations' and movements' tendency to persist over time and what the consequences of previous coalitions are for later action. I argue that when organizations and individuals which initially see themselves as different act together, they face significant possibilities for changing themselves (and hence their potential for broad-based coalition formation over time) as they seek to change the world.

Collective Identities

Sociological and literary theory provides a wealth of resources for the understanding of the formation of collective identities. Poletta and Jasper (2003) argue that social movements literature has used the concept of collective identity to fill in the gaps of structuralist and rationalist accounts, as well as to build on culturalist approaches to mobilization, but has not been utilized to understand to what extent *collective action might actually proceed collective identity*. In order to fill this theoretical gap and demonstrate how collective action can form more or less spontaneously, while thereafter leading to the elaboration of common identities, I choose to draw on two quite different sources, Frantz Fanon's discussion of individuals and collectivities in decolonizing Africa (1963) and Rick Fantasia's (1988) elaboration of the "cultures of solidarity" which formed amongst U.S. working class communities in the 1930s.

During his discussion of the nature of decolonization and postcolonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon argues that collective identities, which had been in formation before the contemporary era, but pushed aside by native intellectuals under the

sway of colonial thought, are given a concrete legitimacy and renewed urgency in the time of imminent struggle.

... [D]uring the struggle for liberation, at the moment when the intellectual comes into touch again with his people, this artificial sentinel [of Western intellectual values] is turned to dust. All the Mediterranean values – the triumph of the human individual, of clarity, and of beauty – become lifeless, colorless knickknacks. All those speeches seem like collections of dead words; those values which seemed to uplift the soul are revealed as worthless, *simply because they have nothing to do with the concrete conflict in which the people is engaged.*

Individualism is the first to disappear. ... The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought. Now the native who has the opportunity to return to the people during the struggle for freedom will discover the falseness of this theory. *The very forms of organization of the struggle will suggest to him a different vocabulary.* Brother, sister, friend – these are words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie, because for them my brother is my purse, my friend is part of my scheme for getting on. ... Such a colonized intellectual, dusted over by colonial culture, will in the same way discover the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of people's committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupments. *Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interest of all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred – or everyone will be saved.* The motto "look out for yourself," the atheist's method of salvation, is in this context forbidden." (1963, 46-7; my emphasis).

The erasure of colonially-legitimate theories and valorizations of collective life is, therefore, effectively rendered moot as the characteristics of the struggle are experienced. The "colonialized intellectual" may later theorize these collective formations, but he is able to "rediscover" the extant collective social formations and their value mobilized especially and thrown into sharp relief as the battle lines are drawn and sides clearly marked. It is the act of struggle in and of itself which lays bare who is on which side, without and even often against the theorists' explications. In the case of environmentalists and labor activists, the struggle in which they engaged against NAFTA laid bare the potential community that had not been theorized previously. The sides were clearly drawn and who had what to lose became apparent as the business interests lobbied against all social movement attempts to moderate the Agreement's free trade form. If collectivities are defined through opposition, then struggle lays bare the foundations of

those oppositions which are salient in the moment in which collectivities might be relevantly formed with or without prior strategic calculations or narratives of collective interests.

Further elaborating the idea that collectivities can form through the practicality of struggle, Fantasia (1988) describes the ways in which workers and their communities mobilized in support of class-based struggles without theorizing them as such or exhibiting any sort of explicit class consciousness.

During the course of [the] struggles [of the 1930s], “cultures of solidarity” were constructed by workers. That is, *tactical activities, organizational forms, and institutional arrangements were employed that represented the expression of solidarity and its creation simultaneously in the process of their development.* These cultures of solidarity took myriad forms in response to the specific features and demands of particular struggles. (20; my emphasis)

Unlike narrow collective bargaining emphasized in many contemporary U.S. labor unions, the Teamsters mobilized an entire ad hoc community in support of their 1934 strike. The unemployed were incorporated into the movement so as to minimize the potential of strikebreaking. Pickets were well organized, and a hospital and machine shops were set up to support the effort. Roads were blocked to non-union trucks, and a “mobile guard” was organized to sent picketers anywhere in the city “at a moment’s notice.” All of these processes emerged as workers and their communities confronted the practicalities of fighting the struggle in which they found themselves. As Fantasia says,

The importance of this class conflict lies in the *processes* of solidarity. The organization and maintenance of flying squadrons, food distribution centers, clinics and communications networks, and the mobilization of family members, union and non-union workers, and farmers in support of the Teamsters were all emergent institutions, practices, and organizational forms *that at once created and expressed solidarity.* A ‘counterhegemony’ emerged to replace the social institutions and cultural practices that dominated working-class life in Minneapolis in 1934. The culture of solidarity that developed had not existed previously, and though episodic in the sense that it may not have been maintained in the same form at the same level of intensity afterwards, its impact on class relations in Minneapolis and on labor history nationally was not negligible.” (21-22; my emphasis)

The consequences of the mobilization through the development of a culture of solidarity were long-lasting and far-reaching, with effects for worker movements beyond the boundaries of the specific act of collective struggle in which they deployed.

Furthermore, consciousness of a class struggle was unnecessary for its emergence:

The cultures of solidarity formed to accomplish these tasks and objectives represented in practice a clear opposition to existing class relations, a struggle that prefigured its objective. This suggests that militant activity created the context in which class consciousness emerged.

Revolutionary society may not have been envisioned by workers beforehand, but in the course of the struggle, they in effect created a new 'society.' The demands of the conflict necessitated new social arrangements, which in the process of their creation reveal the richness of the class consciousness of the period." (22; my emphasis)

Therefore, solidarity and common identities can develop through practical acts which emerge as responses to extant problems devoid of necessarily conscious elaboration.

Each takes its own form, some as simple as informal "venting sessions" where workers find their complaints are not theirs alone as they sit and talk over coffee after work and develop a feeling of common cause and trust with each other. (1988, 137) Confronting authority and organizing labor demonstrations, while initially intimidating to the nurses in another episode Fantasia recounts, gradually developed militancy as workers became confident in the support they could count on from each other simply by meeting together.

What Fanon and Fantasia have to offer to the study of social movements is that they both offer the possibility that people and groups can work together without having any rationalization for doing so. This theory is opposed to both rational-choice and resource-mobilization theories as well as to the perspectives which reference networks and commitment to a cause common in social movements theory.¹ Fanon and Fantasia argue that people often find themselves in the midst of a struggle and choose to act based on what makes sense in the moment, only later theorizing the "group" of which they

¹ See for example McAdam et al 2001.

became a member by the fact of their prior collective action.² Even further down the theoretical roadmap of some collective action is the development of routinized forms of inter-organizational cooperation and a priori explicated rationales for their existence.

Social Movements and Framing

The sociological study of social movements has traditionally limited itself to a few specific questions. There has been a thorough investigation into the social-psychology of individual commitment to social causes (Snow et al 1986, Snow and Bendford 1988, Jasper and Poulsen 1995) as well as the conditions under which groups or organizations will align (e.g. Kay 2005, Rose 2000, Obach 2004, and Evans and Kay 2008 with regards the labor and environmental movements). These explanations range from rationalist accounts which take interests as pre-established and more or less stable and actors as more or less rational, to structuralist accounts which privilege the relative positions and strength of different organizations given existing political institutions, policy arenas, and historical legacies. More agentive explanations tend to emphasize the strategic use of resources ranging from the material to the symbolic.

These strategic explanations of social movement mobilization of support and the accomplishment of movement goals came to adapt Erving Goffman's (1974) method of frame analysis in order to explain social movement successes in particular cases.

However, frame analysis was originally conceptualized to encompass much broader phenomena, namely, the cognitive and ideological categorization of specific instances into more abstract types. That is, more generally, frames categorize infinite distinct

² It is also possible that sometimes people join movements or organizations based on network affiliations or moral commitments, but that these organizations and movements work together because of collective struggles.

phenomena into interpretable categories, or types, with specified social meanings and associated implications for (social) action.

The use of frame analysis was popularized with regards to social movements by Snow, Benford, and colleagues (e.g. Snow et al 1986, Snow and Benford 1988). Snow and Benford pioneered the use of framing in social movements, emphasizing a narrow, strategic approach to its analysis which became the standard method for the study of frames in social movements. In fact, it is difficult to find a study of social movements and framing which does not begin with Snow and Benford's work as a guide for how to conceptualize frames as well as what sorts of questions they can help answer. The concept of framing has largely been utilized in these studies to explain the mobilization of support for causes in strategic campaigns, including the recruitment of individuals and the success of specific campaign goals through "resonance" with larger societal values or "alignment" with the values of individuals or collectivities.

While frame analysis has been used to show how certain values and meanings are created in cultural objects through the routines of their production (e.g. Tuchman 1980 with regards to new media), sociological studies of social movements have largely focused on the agency rather than the structured aspect of meaning-making. Instead of using frame analysis to describe the ways in which social structures and processes insinuate themselves into cultural products, these studies have traced the projects of meaning entrepreneurs who take up the task of defining situations in particular ways, in accordance with their desires, successfully shaping the way a broader segment of society interprets the phenomenon at hand (Benford 1993a, 1993b; Jasper and Poulsen 1995;

Dreiling 2001) and thereby altering access to the available landscape of various resources for particular actors.

Benford (1997) argues that social movement theorists who invoke the idea of framing are following the symbolic interactionist framework in which people act towards objects because of the meaning with which they are imbued; but that meaning, he says, is not inherent in the object and is therefore the potential and actual site of contestation, making meaning-making a relevant site of social movement activity insofar as its control is a precursor to changing social behavior.

From a cognitive perspective, frames are problem-solving schemata, stored in memory, for the interpretive task of making sense of presenting situations. They are based on past experience of what worked in given situations, [sic] and on cultural templates of appropriate behavior. Early forays into frame analysis emphasized the social and cultural processes by which frames were generated, but they also preserved the essential definition of a frame as a mental structure that organized perception and interpretation.

Subsequent elaboration of the framing perspective... tended to shift the focus away from cognition and toward collective and organizational processes appropriate to mobilization.” (Johnston 1995)

As Johnston argues in the quotation above, the ways in which people frame situations have implications for action. That is, frames imply how to act because of the way in which they present the meaning of certain situations and how this meaning aligns with previous experiences of the same type. My contribution in this paper is to utilize the broader potential of frame analysis to demonstrate shifts in organizational identities, bringing the use of framing back towards the cognitive end. The changing ways in which social movement organizations frame their struggles have implications for the types of action they will engage in, including what sorts of coalitions make sense. I demonstrate that coalitions can form strategically, without the development of a common frame, but that this kind of framing can emerge through collective action. And, in this case, since the frame which emerged aligned the fundamental interests of the labor and

environmental movements, it provided the motivation and justification for ongoing cross-movement collaboration in line with Polanyi's socially-protective forces.

Hunt et al (1994) argue that framing is a means of constructing identities and that coalitions are formed through the provisional construction of identities for the purpose of incorporating diverse actors. My data, however, implies that these identities, forged through collective action, have consequences – and not just for individual participants – they have significant staying power and potential long-term effects on organizational and movement identity with consequences for the organizations' interests, ideology, strategy, and actions. Though I do not explore the consequences for organizational behavior that changes in organizational identity have directly in this paper, I support the proposition that framing changes potential alliances and forms of collective action because of the theoretical proposition outlined above that frames imply the definition of a problem as of a certain type, and, therefore with certain reasonable ways of being solved based on prior experience. The frames deployed by the organizations explored below imply an ongoing alliance between labor and environmental movements by claiming that each movement's respective problems are caused by a common set of enemies: market liberalism, unresponsive government, and corporate power. To be clear, I am not conflating frames and ideology. (Snow and R. D. Benford 2005) Rather, I am utilizing framing of a particular issue, trade, as a way to track changes in organizational identity emerging from struggles in the political arena via the organizations' changing representations of themselves and their relationship to the politics of trade.

The Effects of NAFTA on Cross-Movement and Transnational Coalitions

Collaboration between particular unions and environmentalists on isolated issues, especially those where their interests easily overlap (e.g. on workplace health and safety issues) is nothing new. A variety of case studies and broader sociological works describe the history of environmental-labor relations in the U.S. and elsewhere and attempt to explain when the two movements or certain organizations within them might ally on specific political issues (Obach 2002, 2004; Siegmann 1985). Obach's (2004) impressive work investigates the different factors that have affected the presence or absence of labor-environmental alliances on certain issues in different periods of U.S. history. Labor's uneasy position which both aligns and opposes their interests to employers is often exploited by business, Obach argues, mobilizing the threat of lost jobs and wages to convince workers to oppose environmental legislation.³ Moreover, workplace health and safety issues constitute an area where it is easy to imagine overlap between the interests of workers and environmentalists narrowly conceived. Obach argues that a variety of factors, including the broader political climate, the organizational structures and dominant strategies of unions and environmental groups, and the relative breadth or narrowness with which the movements' actors define their interests and goals at specific points in time all affect whether or not alliances will form between environmentalists and labor activist organizations around specific issues in any given moment.

Obach's approach to understanding the relationships between labor and environmental organizations over time produces a typology of different types and degrees of cooperation possible between the two types of organizations (2002), as well as a

³ This ambivalence combines with labor's relatively more privileged position vis a vis the political arena than environmentalists (derived from their economically strategic positioning) to make the choice whether to align or not usually labor's to make.

theory of when cooperation will emerge (2004). However, he also incorporates into his analysis a recognition that labor organizations' choices about when to align with environmentalists, which ones, and in what ways – or whether to align with them at all – cannot easily be read off of the likely effects of proposed legislation on the material interests of the workers concerned. For instance, the SEIU came out strongly opposed to NAFTA, though the service sector employees who compose the majority of the SEIU's membership had little if anything to lose from the potential threats to workers posed by the agreement, largely because of the union's social movement organizational structure and broadly defined interests. It is the broader definition of movement interests which I trace through the framing of trade issues in this paper.

Evans and Kay (2008) discuss the reasons for the blue-green alliance specifically with respect to the NAFTA coalition. They argue that, on the NAFTA issue in particular, both movements had an interest in allying with each other. The environmentalists, they say, had no credibility in the arena of trade, and union activists needed the environmentalists' internationalist reputation to shield them from charges of protectionism and narrow self-interestedness. While the coalition forged during NAFTA is said to have led to the WTO protests' possibility, this claim is either made without explanation or explained as an unproblematic extension of the realignment of the political opportunity structure and economic pressures of the contemporary global system (e.g. Kay 2005). I trace the changes in two organizations central to the environmental and labor movements and renowned for their relative conservatism in order to offer a partial explanation as to the persistence of broader blue-green cooperation over time by pointing towards the consequences of collective action for collective identity.

While the opposition of social movement organizations (SMOs) to certain international trade arrangements has become relatively commonplace as of the beginning of the twenty-first century, as recently as 1990 social movement involvement in matters of international trade was minimal. (Dester and Balinti 1999) There was, of course, the popular pressure to impose sanctions on South Africa in order to end Apartheid, and labor unions and human rights groups had encouraged the imposition of trade sanctions on countries thought to be violating human rights, such as China. However, social movement concentration on matters of international trade underwent a transformation in the U.S. in the 1990s, both in the types of trade arrangements that took center stage as well as the problems the social movement actors perceived and the explanations they employed for their actions. These changes embodied both a continuation with and a shift from the groups' previous definitions of their interests and understandings of the problems confronting them. They constitute a vision of economic order and a model of global society, as well as an associated logic that links the interests of traditionally differentiated spheres of social movement concerns not only strategically but fundamentally. That is, the problems of central concern to environmentalists, unions, human rights groups, and other types of social movement organizations are, according to this logic, inherently linked as *expressions* of a common problem. This problem has come to be defined under a number of labels, including economic liberalization (“neoliberalism”) and the increasing power and mobility of capital, and it is associated with an increasingly structural critique of global power dynamics as well as the decline in liberal faith in the state as a moderator of competing and equally natural interests. The villains are “big business,” “corporations,” and “transnational capital,” and the heroes are

those groups representing and constituted by “the people.” I demonstrate that the AFL-CIO and the Sierra Club, as proxies for the conservative element of their respective movements, came to adopt this common framework after they were involved in the mutual struggle over NAFTA. Even the more bureaucratic and narrowly-focused organizations, predicted by Obach to resist collaboration (2004), picked up this way of understanding the global economy: And so enters Polanyi’s socially-protective force.

Theories of collective identities, representations, group-formation, “communities of fate”, and so on help us to understand the nature of collectivity-formation and how it might emerge through struggle or collective action. However, the mechanisms through which struggle might lead to the formation of collective identities, even amongst initially or at least previously opposed groups or categories of individuals has yet to be elaborated here. Obach (2002) and Kay (2005) provide more concrete ideas about the ways in which coalitions form in practice in their narrations of blue-green and international union coalitions, respectively. It is as organizations come into contact with one another because of certain political issues, for instance, the health and environmental hazards posed by a polluting tannery in a small community or unions from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico because of NAFTA, through their individual representatives in particular, that the practical aspects as well as the ideological ones of coalition-formation concretely emerge in actuality. Working on similar issues – even if initially on opposite sides, as with the tannery in Obach’s account – provides the potential for interactions between individuals who, as they voice the concerns, positions, and evaluations of themselves, their organizations, and their constituencies, can find openings to reflect and (re)consider their initial positions and often eventually do find common ground on which to leverage a

working cooperative relationship despite business interests' attempts to drive a wedge between various segments of civil society concerned with social protections.⁴ (2004, 5-6)

Data and Methods

I conducted a content and frame analysis on all feature articles⁵ concerning trade in the national periodicals⁶ of the AFL-CIO (*The AFL-CIO News* and *America@Work*) and the Sierra Club (*Sierra Magazine*) from 1990 through 2005. I chose this period to capture the emergence of the NAFTA coalition, its aftermath, the lead-up to the WTO protests, and the series of struggles surrounding multilateral trade agreements thereafter, primarily the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Most importantly, the period captures a significant time after NAFTA was passed, allowing for the analysis of the potential consequences of the Blue-Green coalition during NAFTA for the organizations thereafter. *The AFL-CIO*

⁴ This process is commonly elaborated in theories of deliberative democracy (see e.g. Poletta 2008 and Fung and Wright 2001).

⁵ "Feature articles" were operationalized differently depending on the format of the periodical. Feature articles in *The AFL-CIO News*, because of its newspaper format, were "front page stories". The *Sierra Magazine* and *America@Work* magazines' articles were considered features if they either were the cover story or were listed under the "features" section in the table of contents (as opposed to "letters," "action alerts," suggested books and films, and regular content such as the AFL-CIO's "job tracker" which detailed industry- and sector-job loss and gain trends).

⁶ The Sierra Club published a single nationally-distributed periodical for the entire period of analysis, *Sierra Magazine*. *Sierra Magazine* is the current Sierra Club periodical, although the organization has produced regular publications since 1893 as the *Sierra Club Bulletin*. *Sierra* has been published bimonthly in various incarnations since the 1940s. As of 2006 *Sierra Magazine* had a readership of 1.4 million in the U.S. It is sent to individual activists, donors, and others as requested, as well as to institutions and libraries. The *AFL-CIO News* was the biweekly newspaper of the AFL-CIO published from 1968 through 1996, at which time it continued as the monthly magazine, *America @ Work*, which was published until March of 2005, after which point the confederation stopped publishing national print periodicals and switched its focus to its weblog at <http://blog.aflcio.org/>. *Sierra Magazine* and *America@Work* are both magazines: glossy, fewer articles with larger print, various features such as letters to the editor, action alerts, "fact sheets," and other types of content not generally found in the newspaper-formatted *AFL-CIO News*.

Because the blog appeared significantly incomparable to the other periodicals analyzed because of its vastly different format and quite likely different audience, the period of analysis was concluded spring 2005. Because the AFL-CIO changed its periodical format, as well as because it stopped publishing a print periodical in March 2005, most quantitative results are presented in terms of relative proportions rather than absolute values. Where absolute values are presented, they conclude in 2004 for the sake of year-by-year comparability and consistency.

News and America@Work ranged from 50-52 pages in length, and *Sierra Magazine* had a modal length of 80 pages.⁷ The final data set included 113 articles categorized as feature articles primarily about trade issues, 92 AFL-CIO articles and 21 Sierra Club ones.⁸

There were both methodological and practical reasons for choosing to analyze the documents of the Sierra Club and the AFL-CIO. Practically, because these organizations both produce nationally-distributed periodicals and have for the entire time period of analysis, they provided the opportunity to produce a complete data set whereas many other organizations do not produce regular publications or have not done so for the entire time period. Methodologically, the primary reasons for choosing these organizations had to do both with the nature of the organizations and the type of periodicals they produced. Many environmental movement organizations are considered part of the “new” social movement organizations (Hunt et al. 1994; Larana et al 1994) because they are “values”-oriented (that is, the material interests of their membership are not easily derived from the organizations’ goals), as opposed to class-based social movements like unionism. The NSM theory has been critiqued thoroughly as all social movement organizations’ goals include both material and non-material or ideological components. Regardless, the Sierra Club can be said to be more of a “business” social movement organization as it has a large staff and a primarily “checkbook” rather than activist constituency, as well as an established lobbying rather than direct action presence on the national political landscape. It was also established quite some time before the NSMOs of the post-1960s (in 1892).

⁷ The 50-52 page length range belies a considerable contraction in text content in the AFL-CIO publications, as many more and larger photographs and various non-article content formats were introduced when the publication converted to magazine from newspaper format.

⁸ Again, the change in format of the AFL-CIO publication during the period makes comparison with Sierra Club numbers difficult in absolute terms, as there were many more articles in *The AFL-CIO News* than in either of the magazine-formatted publications.

For these reasons, as well as its cellular, national bureaucratic structure, the Sierra Club is more comparable to a traditional national U.S. labor union organization than many other environmental groups of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Beyond comparability, the AFL-CIO and Sierra Club are both useful for the purposes of this analysis (using a very small set of organizations to gauge changing trends in national movements as a whole) for the very reasons some might object that they are not representative of the numerous, locally-active, or more progressive organizations in their respective movements. The AFL-CIO, while an umbrella coalition of many different international unions which themselves have numerous union locals, is a nationally-recognized and influential coalition⁹, but because of its voluntary structure, it tends to only act on or even take a stance on issues upon which there is no dissent (in other words, complete unanimity) amongst the internationals it represents, leading the AFL-CIO to maintain largely conservative positions and only taking a stand when a position has gained general acceptance across a broad swath of U.S. labor unions. The Sierra Club is also not known as a radical organization and has embraced conservation and species protection, though its issues have ranged into human health and (as the data will show) workplace health and safety in recent years.

The issue of using documents to make claims about the identities or practices of organizations or social facts in general is always problematic, especially when dealing

⁹ While the split off from the AFL-CIO of the Change to Win Coalition in 2005 may alter the significance of the analysis presented in this paper for the AFL-CIO specifically (e.g. because Teamster President Ron Carey was quoted often in the trade articles), especially because the Teamsters, SEIU, UNITE HERE, and the several others which formed Change to Win were amongst the more radical internationals involved in the AFL-CIO prior to the split. However, since the AFL-CIO has a voluntary structure, as stated above, the confederation would not have been very likely to publish positions not representative of all the unions they represent (as discussed in Obach 2004), so the abandonment of the Change to Win unions from the AFL-CIO ought not to have great significance for the results presented herein and what they mean for the labor movement more generally in the U.S.

with organizations whose very structures make them tend towards a divide between elites (staff) and rank-and-file or base membership. However, the publications I chose to analyze were produced explicitly for the purpose of expressing to the national membership constituency, the base, what the organizations' identities, goals, and stances were, as well as what the elites wanted the membership to think of what they were doing on the membership's behalf. Therefore, these documents are the most appropriate of any potential ones for documenting changes in organizational identity and goals overall, rather than interviews with elites or transcripts of legislative proceedings which might have more to say about the practicalities of working in Washington than what the attitude of the membership is about what the organization ought to be doing. There is always the potential that the elites who write these documents are mistaken, having misread the membership, but without evidence to the contrary, it seems plausible to assume that they represent the organizations' best attempts to present themselves as they wish their memberships to see them, therefore as representations of organizational identity and perspective.

The frames presented below were developed through careful qualitative coding which allowed the themes to emerge from the texts as they were analyzed. Keywords such as "corporations" or "race to the bottom" were noted as were the points made by quoted persons and the quotations' use in the articles, and arguments that appeared repeatedly were analyzed for their central points. As new arguments appeared, earlier articles were reexamined to make sure this argument was not missed in the initial analytic stages. Impressions were checked against conversations with social movement participants in a small series of informal interviews for salience.

Results

The analysis I conducted revealed several major patterns. First, there appeared an initial period in which both organizations diverged significantly in their level of interest in trade issues and the ways in which they framed their discussion of trade followed by a later period of significant convergence. Both organizations also increased their overall discussion of trade issues, as well as their concern with cross-movement issues¹⁰.

NAFTA emerged as a central trope through which all other trade issues were understood to present a common problem perceived as emerging from the failure of national governments (either through weakness or collusion) to prevent “corporate domination” through “market liberalization” and privatization and their detrimental effects on society and the environment. Further, the focus of the organizations shifts from national governments towards international agreements and transnational organizations, such as the World Trade Organization.

These transitions can be seen as both continuous and discontinuous, showing a general increasing tendency towards convergence on the common critique of market liberalization as well as a “NAFTA” and “WTO/FTAA” dual periodization. I will first present document exemplars of each period for both organizations and then provide a quantitative assessment of the content analysis.

Document Exemplars: Early and Later Periods

Period	Early	Early	Later
Organization	AFL-CIO	Sierra Club	Both
Master Frame	National Development	Legislating Conservation	Justice through the Global Economy

¹⁰ That is, the AFL-CIO discussed non-labor issues and the Sierra Club discussed non-environmental issues. These mentions included both discussion of each other’s respective movements’ concerns, as well as others, including human rights and religious organizations and their goals.

Goal	Protect jobs and wages; economic growth in the U.S.	Environmentally sustainable development	Global justice
Problem With Trade	Encourages outsourcing	Some countries' protections more lax than the U.S.'s	Trade agreements are expressions of a vision of global order which benefits corporate interests at the expense of society
Solution	Restrict trade, keep jobs in the U.S., raise labor standards abroad to make U.S. more competitive globally	Add environmental protections to trade agreements	Reinsert morality into the economy
Strategy	Pressure legislators	Petition legislators	Direct action (teach-ins, rallies, marches, demonstrations) because new global order undermines states' sovereignty and politicians are corrupt and working for corporate interests; international alliances across all movements representing society's interests

Figure 1. Master Frames, Early and Later Periods

Early AFL-CIO: National Development

The article, “Study: 1 Million Apparel Jobs at Risk with U.S. Policies” (*AFL-CIO News* February 19, 1990, p. 1 and 9) provides an example of a typical "early" treatment of trade by the AFL-CIO. It discusses primarily balance-of-trade deficits and the subsequent costs. The primary problem indicated with contemporary trade arrangements is the imminent loss of jobs in the apparel industry and directly related suppliers, as well as the higher tax burdens on the middle class from the erosion of the tax base and increased welfare costs that would follow.

The jobs of a million U.S. textile and apparel workers are in danger of being wiped out in the next decade unless the government abandons trade and industrial policies that encourage and subsidize foreign apparel imports, the Economic Policy Institute warned. ...

The study, titled "Keeping Jobs in Fashion: Alternatives to the Euthanasia of the U.S. Apparel Industry," predicted that in addition to the loss of jobs, the death of the domestic industry would mean:

Large increases in welfare costs since the economy has no comparable alternative employment to offer the rural women, blacks, Hispanics and other immigrant workers who make up the bulk of apparel manufacturing employment. ...

Severe reductions in the 580,000-person workforce now employed in other sectors directly dependent on the health of the domestic apparel industry, including cotton farming, wool growing, and textile and apparel machinery manufacture.

And,

Despite a series of international agreements to control the growth of apparel imports, the study reports the U.S. has been "uniquely reluctant" to enforce these agreements. The result has been a surge of apparel imports from developing nations at rates many times those prescribed by the Multi-Fiber Agreement and its predecessor treaties.

The problem is understood to be import surges caused by the U.S. government's lack of enforcement of protectionist measures and agreements to maintain a balance of trade.

While the article invokes inequalities in education and opportunities, it does not address or hypothesize about these inequalities' causes or categorize them as unjust.

The vast majority of those whose jobs are in jeopardy are women, minorities, and immigrants, the institute said. Women make up 75 percent of the industry's workforce. Black and Hispanic men and women hold 36 percent of the jobs, and the proportion of Asian and Hispanic immigrants employed by the industry is rising sharply.

"These largely poorly educated workers - many facing either the difficulty of dealing with language problems or the limited job opportunities of one-industry rural towns - are the least able to adjust to dislocations caused by import competition," the [Economic Policy] institute emphasized.

Instead, the tendency for women, rurally-located workers, poorly educated people, people of color, and immigrants to be disadvantaged in the workforce is taken as a given. It is the gross loss of jobs that is the primary concern of this article and it addresses secondarily that those who will lose their jobs will have little alternative opportunities. The fact of the limited alternatives for these groups of people is noted primarily in the context of increased welfare burdens on the middle class, as the article says that, "Higher tax burdens for middle-income workers to make up for lost worker and industry tax payments and to underwrite the cost of social programs to meet the needs of the unemployed" will be one of the significant outcomes of the decline of apparel manufacturing in the U.S.

The solutions recommended involve what one might call "protectionist" measures, calling for the enforcement of arrangements that protect the domestic market from import surges.

EPI called for immediate government action to assure strict enforcement of import growth restraints under the Multi-Fiber Arrangement.

While insisting that protection without other reforms will not help the industry in the long run, Rothstein warned that “years of failure to enforce these rules have left the industry so disadvantaged that new import surges could threaten its existence before other reforms have a chance to work.”

The study also urged creation of government programs to promote cooperatives, enabling small apparel contractors and subcontractors to pool their efforts; measures to bring together domestic buyers and sellers of apparel products; and federal action to encourage apparel exports.

Similarly, it is suggested that exporting nations ought to follow internationally recognized labor standards. However, these standards are not phrased in the language of rights.

Rather, it is argued that the U.S. apparel industry is uncompetitive in comparison to poorly paid workers abroad. “To breathe life back into the domestic apparel and textile industries, EPI said, exporting nations should be required to observe internationally recognized minimum labor standards.” The article also mentions that severely underpaying a country's workforce is a misguided practice, not because it is unfair to the workers, but because it is not promoting that country's development.

According to the report, paying Third World teenage girls less than 25 cents per hour to produce goods for export not only destroys U.S. apparel employment but does nothing for the development of the exporting nations' own economies

This article might be seen as representative of the earlier period in AFL-CIO discourse because it involves concerns with U.S. trade agreements' possible affects on the job market at home. It blames the U.S. government for *not* putting economic goals among others, including military and diplomatic ones:

A wide-ranging study prepared for the institute by Richard Rothstein, a research fellow at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, charged the government with having “given away” large portions of the U.S. apparel market “in pursuit of military or diplomatic goals.”

While the incentive structure promoted by the U.S. government is seen as helping companies leave the U.S. for the Caribbean and elsewhere with lower production costs, why such incentives exist is not questioned. Generally, this article is nationalist,

concerned with development, and focuses on the loss of jobs and lowering of wages. It exhibits what Carroll and Ratner (1996a and 1996b) term the “liberal” conception of justice, where resource distribution is taken as a given rather than a matter of injustice. Liberal democratic institutions are not problematized, but are rather invoked as the mechanisms of change. The article does not mention environmental issues or organizations, nor does it invoke human rights. Direct, grassroots actions are not suggested or discussed, rather, it is the public policy agency and its calls for government protectionism that are involved. Other countries’ development is mentioned, but instead of seeing other nations’ and their workers’ fates as intertwined with those of the U.S., the U.S. is seen as in competition with other countries, whose workers’ plights are seen as distant and symptomatic of developing countries, generally unrelated to the issues facing U.S. workers.

Early Sierra Club: Legislating Conservation

In 1990 there appeared a single article about international economic issues in *Sierra Magazine*, “Default or Deliver” (September/ October 1990, p. 24-28), not about trade, but about the World Bank. It discussed the World Bank’s development projects, and argued that while the intentions were good, the projects were often ill-conceived. The problem invoked was “non-sustainable development,” and its primary consequences of interest were deforestation and destruction of habitats through damming. The article also mentions that people in the places where these projects are undertaken are excluded from planning. “The people are not allowed to articulate their concerns. They have no voice in the matter,” Vijay Parnjpye of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural

Heritage was quoted as saying. The solution is articulated as reforms leading the World Bank to pursue “sustainable development,” but there is little hope that such reforms are possible given the structure of the Bank itself:

“Even with the reforms in place, the kind of sustainable development we have in mind is unlikely. There are limits to how environmentally or socially sensitive big institutions can be. They were set up to do large-scale development, which by its very nature causes ecological harm, dislocation, and social disorder,” said Barbara Bramble, international director of the National Wildlife Fund.

The article does not mention “justice” or “rights,” and labor issues are not addressed. It also does not link “development” abroad with domestic issues. It does, however, discuss human rights problems, such as displacement of indigenous peoples from traditional lands as well as the threats to people’s health that live in areas whose environments are adversely affected by development policies. There are no ties made to the U.S. government, nor organizations outside of the environmental movement, and while a problem is defined, its causes and possible solutions are not discussed.

The first article to appear in *Sierra* during the period analyzed that is directly about trade is called “Borderline Issues” and appeared in the September/October issue of 1991 (p. 22-23). It was written by then Sierra Club Assistant Executive Director Carl Pope, who would write a third of the articles about trade published in *Sierra* between 1990 and 2005. The article discusses the trade agreement between the U.S. and Mexico that would come to be called NAFTA. It mentions the “free trade” versus “fair trade” debate, but explicitly does not align itself with either. Instead, the article proposes a new take on the trade debate: “eco-trade.” It does not question the idea that “free trade” will promote economic growth. Instead, it motivates the idea that environmental protection and economic development are often, if not fundamentally, at odds:

Free-trade advocates contend that such agreements [like NAFTA] are needed to accelerate advanced technologies, eliminate obstacles to economic growth, and increase geographic and financial opportunities for businesses.

But rapid economic expansion can also speed up environmental destruction. We must ask not only how fast a given trade policy will move us, but where it will take us. Poorly designed, a free-trade agreement could grant polluters license to run roughshod over the continent; properly thought out, such a policy could drive not only economic growth, but environmental protection.

The problems posed by NAFTA as seen in this article are primarily those of eroding national laws.

To ensure a healthy planet as well as a thriving economy, international trade agreements must first preserve the right of all governments – national, state, and local – to set health and environmental standards for products sold to their people. ... [G]overnment efforts to protect the environment need to be exempt from challenges under trade rules.

Governments are seen as the primary vehicles of protection of the environment, and negotiations with the first President Bush and members of Congress are the primary means through which the article suggests the environmental movement promote its desired ends. Trade agreements are seen as malleable and negotiable, and “free trade” is seen as having the possibility of promoting economic well-being, but needs to be constrained by environmental protections.

The concerns are environmental only, and while human health in areas polluted is discussed, it is not the primary concern. The problem the article addresses is the need for environmental protections to be injected into trade agreements with countries that do not have them themselves. That is, Mexico’s lax environmental protections are seen as the problem, and it is argued that the solution is to require that Mexico enforce stricter environmental regulations before they can trade with the U.S. The author is somewhat concerned with the effects that such an agreement would have on U.S. environmental laws, and cites protections for dolphins and the preservation of biodiversity and habitats. Pollution is the primary concern, and the article proposes that businesses operating along the U.S.-Mexican border be required to follow at least stricter if not as strict as U.S. environmental protections.

The article says that, “A trade agreement that protects everyone is the neighborly thing to negotiate.” Only environmental concerns are addressed, no other movements’ organizations are mentioned, and the liberal conception of justice and faith in democratic institutions as discussed above persists throughout. Legislation is the primary vehicle for protecting the environment, and it is recommended, as a secondary consideration, that the U.S. use trade agreements to promote the enforcement and increasing stringency of environmental protections in Mexico. Finally, there is no mention of “transnational” capital or corporations. Rather, it is suggested that companies based in the U.S. be forced to follow U.S. standards and laws regardless of where they operate.

Later AFL-CIO and Sierra Club: Justice through the (Global) Economy

In 2001, the AFL-CIO publication *America @ Work* was filled with features about trade issues. Prominent in the issues discussed in that and the years following were the negotiations of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). One of these articles, “A Week for Global Justice” (*America @ Work* September 2001, p. 19-21), not only discusses the FTAA, however. It talks about NAFTA, the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF, as well. This tendency to discuss multiple trade agreements and international financial organizations (IFOs) in a single article is characteristic of the later period in the discourse analyzed. What is particularly interesting about the inclusion of multiple issues in a single article is that, while in some mid-period articles the connections between issues is made explicit (for instance, the FTAA is said to be an “extension of NAFTA”), not all articles do, especially towards the end of the period.

It also discusses environmental and human rights issues, as well as a variety of different types of SMOs within the context of a description of direct, collective action (a demonstration in Washington, D.C., in September through October 2001). While the actions (including rallies, marches, and teach-ins) were aimed to coincide with the annual IMF and World Bank meetings, the issues addressed included privatization of jobs, debt relief, the high cost of HIV/AIDS medications, Fast Track trade negotiating authority, and others. The article makes reference to earlier actions, specifically the WTO protests in 1999, and it discusses the FTAA as an extension of the “flawed policies of NAFTA.”

While the FTAA negotiations would fall apart and the U.S. would pursue bilateral agreements with Latin American countries thereafter, the domestic campaign against it was as heated as those about NAFTA and the WTO before it. Interestingly, while the article does tie the FTAA in content to NAFTA, it invokes the WTO protests as a model for action. Instead of recommending negotiations with public officials, the article emphasizes direct action. It questions not only the ability of free trade to promote economic well-being but also the fundamental separation of the economy from morality and social issues. “‘The global economy raises fundamental moral issues veiled under the label of free trade,’ says The Rev. William Monroe Campbell, co-chair of the Ministers Against Global Injustice, an AFL-CIO coalition partner in the fight to stop Fast Track [Authority]. ‘If you breathe the air, drink the water, work for a living or care about your family, you have a stake in making the global economy more fair.’” The primary frame of reference is global justice, and the means of achieving and preserving global justice are seen to lie in international trade and financial institutions.

In its September/October issue of 2001, *Sierra Magazine* published four articles about international trade, constituting one-fifth of the magazine's total pages. The articles include a profile of a doctor who worked in a border community in Mexico mired in pollution and lacking sanitary services, as well as a condemnation of NAFTA's ill effects in Mexico and the U.S. There is also an article that charges that current trade arrangements are extremely costly indeed ("Just don't call it free..."), and that there is an alternative way to arrange global economic institutions.

In one of these articles, "Tricks of Free Trade," labor and human rights issues and organizations, in addition to environmental concerns and organizations, are central. It mentions a variety of trade policies and IFOs and charges that they are related in their underlying principles, those of "market fundamentalism":

Future historians will certainly marvel at how trade, originally a means to obtain what could not be produced locally, became an end in itself. In our age it has become a measure of economic and social progress more important even than the well-being of the people who produce or consume the traded goods. President George W. Bush recently declared free trade "a moral imperative." His predecessor, Bill Clinton, was prone to making wild economic claims for unfettered trade—for example, that it had added to employment and growth in the 1990s, contributing to the longest business-cycle expansion in American history. This is an economic and accounting impossibility, since our trade deficit, now running at a record \$400 billion annually, actually ballooned during Clinton's presidency. Nevertheless, such assertions are rarely challenged in the press.

The article argues that free trade policies have cost jobs and caused a balance of trade deficit, as well as charges that the state and the media are complicit in implementing these costly policies. It also involves the "Free Trade Myth" frame:

Technically, "free trade" refers to the absence of tariffs or other barriers that hinder the flow of goods and services across international boundaries. But it has recently morphed into a marketing tool to sell a *whole range of new property rights for investors and corporations* through an alphabet soup of sweeping international pacts: NAFTA, GATT, MAI, FTAA. In the last few years the environmental movement has increasingly opposed these agreements. Together with organized labor, environmental groups were a major force in the collapse of the World Trade Organization's Millennium Round in Seattle at the end of 1999. More recently, they helped organize mass protests at the April 2001 "Summit of the Americas" in Quebec City. [my emphasis]

These two articles argue that corporations dominate trade policy determination, and that they are given further power by these policies. That corporations now have more power

than governments, that these policies were not determined democratically, and that governments are complicit in the implementation of unfair trade practices are all characteristic claims of the later period in trade discourse. Sovereignty, democracy, and justice are threatened, as well as are jobs, wages, the environment, and human rights. Power is seen as self-reproducing and the state as incapable of or unwilling to protect society from markets and corporate interests. All of these problems are understood as interrelated, and the implications point towards internationalism, cross-movement coalitions, and a distancing from lobbying and other (now reimagined as ineffectual and inappropriate) methods towards the adoption of direct action strategies. Further, collective actions, such as protests, play a central role in these latter-period narratives.

Content and Frame Analysis

Figures 2 and 3 show that the increased interest in trade issues by both organizations in absolute and relative terms, especially for the AFL-CIO during the NAFTA period but continued for both organizations throughout the period of analysis. While social movement organizations had prior to the 1990s been largely absent from the realm of trade negotiations, previously framed as technocratic issues best left to experts and therefore out of the arena of potential political contestation.¹¹

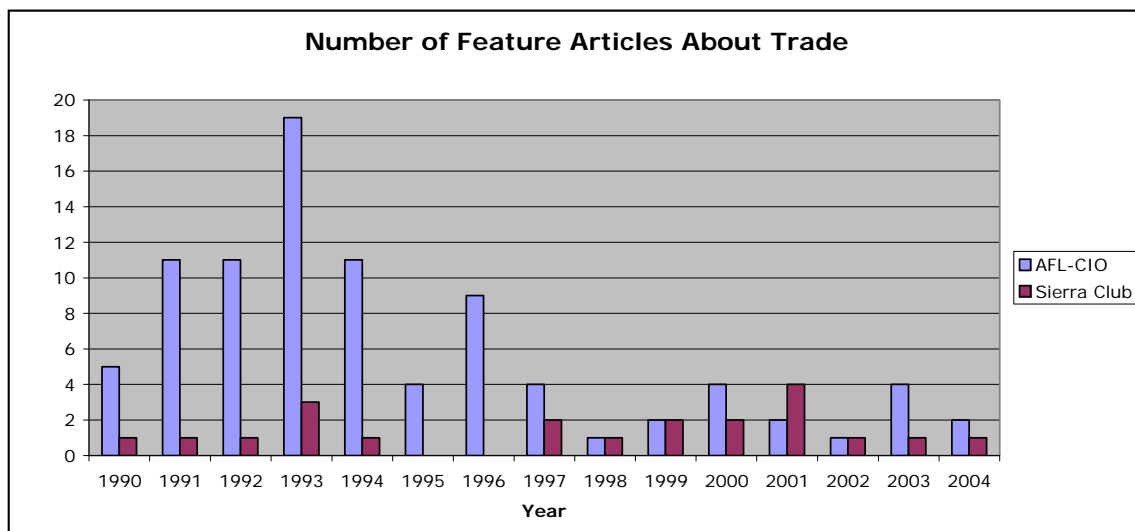


Figure 2. Number of Feature Articles About Trade

¹¹ For an investigation into the ways in which “rendering technical” removes issues from public debate see especially Tanya Li’s (2007) discussion of the political consequences of technocratic domination of development programs in Indonesia. Not only are issues removed from potential contestation as they are declared the arena of expert purview, the rendering technical of issues tends to favor powerful groups as political actors block technical influence in locally-sensitive arenas, leaving open only the spaces in which few powerful actors lay claim, usually pushing out the claims of the less powerful under the guise of technocratic privilege.

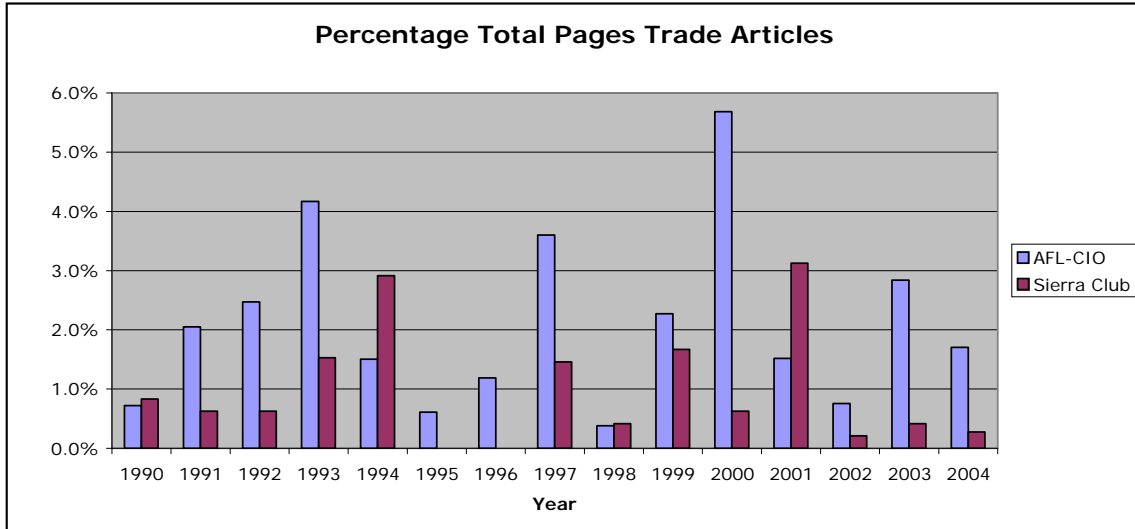


Figure 3. Percentage of Total Publication Issue Pages About Trade

Although trade features are most prevalent during the years leading up to the passage of NAFTA and tend to appear when struggles over IFIs or trade agreements (such as CAFTA in 2004 or the WTO in 1999), they are not isolated to those time periods. Moreover, as shown in Figures 3, 4, and 5, NAFTA continues to appear in articles about trade well after it had exited the political arena. NAFTA became the standard by which other economic issues seen to be expressions of a model of global economic order are compared to and made sense of.

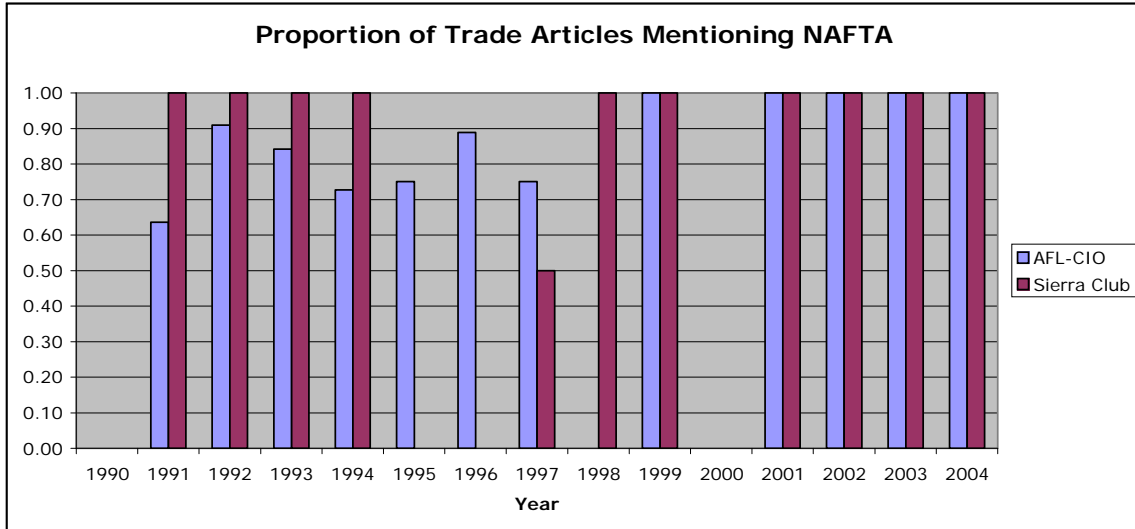


Figure 4. Proportion of Trade Articles Mentioning NAFTA by Year

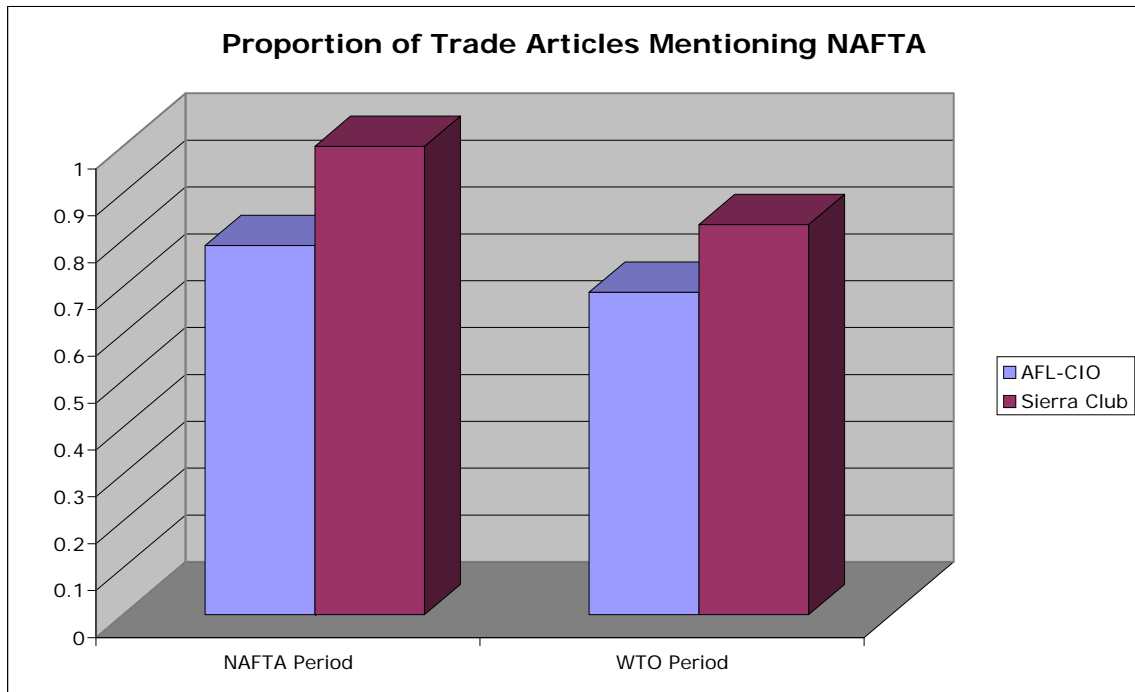


Figure 5. Proportion of Trade Articles Mentioning NAFTA, Two-Period Comparison

Figures 6, 7, and 8 demonstrate increased internationalism (the idea that the organizations' interests are tied to others in different countries because of a common threat) and cross-movement issues (where the AFL-CIO mentions environmental issues and the Sierra Club mentions labor issues) throughout the period. The frames used to characterize trade issues also demonstrate a convergence on a common model between the two organizations, showing a movement towards a common representation of what trade means for the global order as well as an increase in the tendency to see corporate domination as the primary threat to society posed by trade and the patterns of their emergence and appearance.

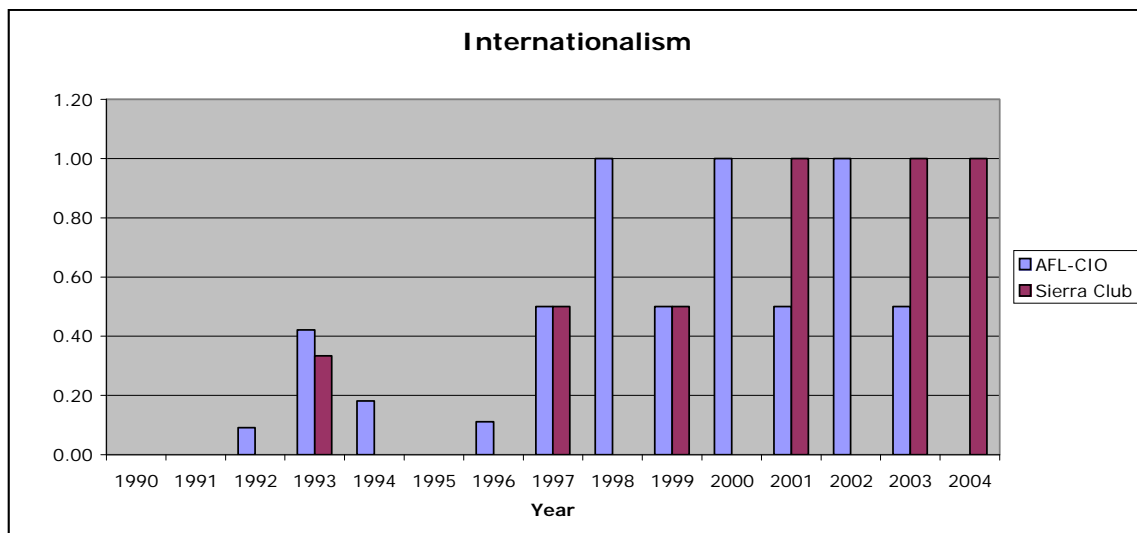


Figure 6. Internationalism

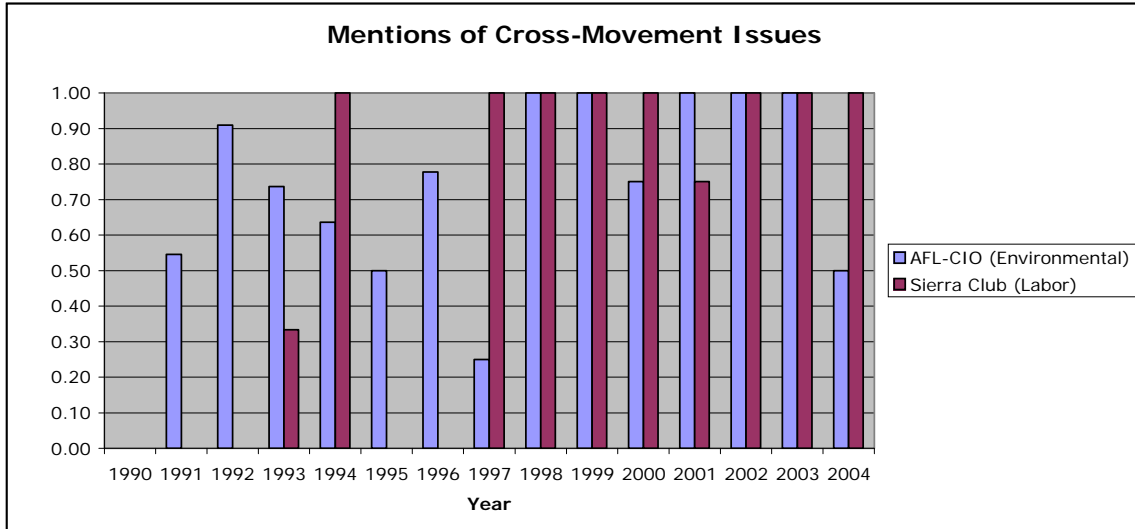


Figure 7. Mentions of Cross-Movement Issues as Proportion of Trade Articles by Year

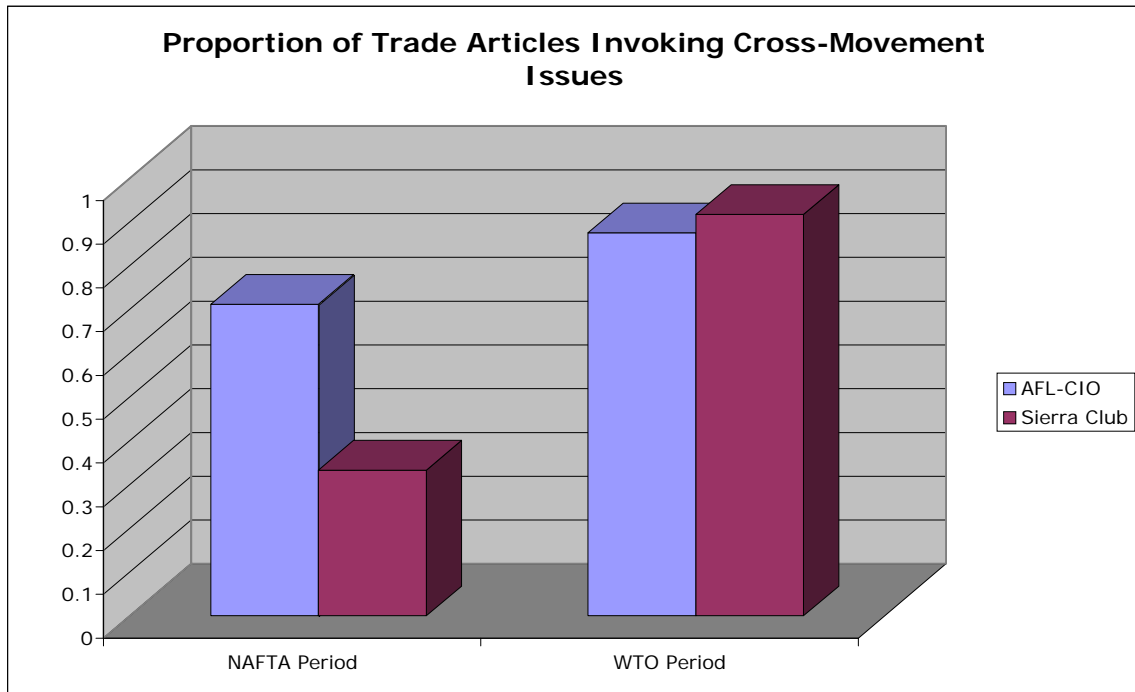


Figure 8. Mentions of Cross-Movement Issues by Period

Harmonization and Sovereignty

Figures 11 and 12 show the patterns in the emergence and development of the use of the Harmonization/Sovereignty frame. Harmonization with reference to trade arrangements refers to bringing into alignment national standards with regards to property rights as well as labor, environmental, and other regulations. The “Harmonization and Sovereignty” frame involves the mobilization of harmonization as a threat to national sovereignty that will inevitably weaken labor and environmental protections:

The federation warned about ‘the potential surrender of U.S. sovereignty – and particularly the right of Americans to make democratic decisions on a wide range of public issues – to a new international bureaucracy or ‘superauthority.’ The revised GATT would create a Multilateral Trade Organization with broad powers to interpret and enforce GATT rules over the objections of individual member nations. (*AFL-CIO News* January 3, 1994, “GATT ‘May Harm Workers’”)

Early examples of this frame invoke economic development as a reason to insist on the protection of sovereignty in trade agreements.

To ensure a healthy environment as well as a thriving economy, international trade agreements must first preserve the right of all governments – national, state, and local – to set health and environmental standards for products sold to their people... Second, government efforts to protect the environment need to be exempt from challenges under trade rules. (*Sierra Magazine* September/ October 1991, “Borderline Issues”)

The inclusion of growth is subordinated in later examples, however, to concerns for justice and sustainability. Figures 11 and 12 show that the Harmonization/Sovereignty Frame, quite commonly used by the Sierra Club in the NAFTA period, appeared rarely in AFL-CIO articles. However, the two organizations’ trade discourse aligned during the WTO period, appeared at increased rates in the AFL-CIO publications and decreasing in the Sierra Club’s.

National laws, according to the “Sovereignty” frame, are threatened by international trade agreements and institutions like the WTO because of the ways in

which they define “trade barriers”. Under the trade agreements at issue, national laws such as environmental standards can be challenged as “barriers to trade,” and companies can and have sued countries for lost potential revenue as a result of such standards. For example, dolphin-safe fishing laws requiring certain standards be met by companies wishing to import into the U.S., as well as requirements that companies follow internationally-recognized human rights and labor standards before being allowed to export to the U.S. have been the subjects of lawsuits. The “Sovereignty” frame seizes upon these examples and uses them as evidence that current international trade arrangements erode national laws and limit the ability of nations to provide labor and environmental protections within their borders: “NAFTA has no provisions to remedy degradation that already exists along the U.S.-Mexican border and would in fact ‘expose U.S. health and safety standards to being challenged as ‘barriers to trade’,’ [Donahue, then AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer] said” (*AFL-CIO News* September 28, 1992, “NAFTA: Boon for Investors”). And,

In effect, the proposed MAI would give corporations equal standing with nations, guaranteeing them the right to directly sue national governments. This might happen with some regularity, because among the MAI's many corporate bonbons are "takings," provisions even more extreme than those already rejected by the Senate: even a "lost opportunity to profit from a planned investment" would be grounds for mandatory compensation. For example, a foreign timber company owning land in the Pacific Northwest could sue the United States for damages if efforts to save the salmon prevented it from logging to the waterline. To resolve such disputes, countries would give their unconditional consent to go before an industry-friendly tribunal of the complainer's choice—the International Chamber of Commerce, for instance. Guess who would have the edge before that body?

Such cases are already being brought under current, weaker agreements. Under the "expropriation" language in NAFTA, the U.S.-based Ethyl Corporation is suing Canada for \$251 million for banning the company's gasoline additive MMT, a suspected neurotoxin. Under the MAI, similar suits could become commonplace, forcing governments to pay dearly for the privilege of protecting their citizens. (*Sierra Magazine* July/August 1998, “All Hail the Multinationals”)

Frames I presented earlier charged that certain trade arrangements are undemocratic and benefit corporations and capital at the expense of workers, the environment, consumers,

and others. If nations' power to control what happens within their borders is threatened by trade agreements, who or what is threatening national sovereignty? Whose governance structures are inserted in their stead? The answer provided by arguments invoking the "Harmonization and Sovereignty" frame is, once again, employers, big business, transnational corporations, capital, and those who control and benefit from them.

The body [of MAI] was dead, perhaps, but the soul migrated to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Proponents are portraying the new treaty as a helping hand to low-income countries because it creates a single open market that spans the hemisphere. But the helping hand is actually reaching out to corporations, offering them—as with the MAI— veto power over nations' environmental and public-health regulations.

The biggest threat posed by these commercial agreements and institutions is their usurpation of a nation's authority to rule in the interest of its own citizens. This is part of a long-term trend that has increasingly removed economic decision-making from parliamentary and other national institutions—which are at least potentially accountable to the wishes of an electorate—to unaccountable supranational bodies. (*Sierra Magazine* September/ October 2001, "Tricks of Free Trade")

A variation of the "Sovereignty" frame involves a criticism of the narrow understanding of sovereignty employed in trade arrangements. "The [GATT dispute resolution] panel decreed that countries are entitled to protect only those natural resources within their own borders; the global commons – the skies and seas – are a free-for-all zone. Consequently, under GATT's interpretation of international trade law, many of the hardest-won gains of the U.S. environmental movement would be illegal" (*Sierra Magazine* January/February 1992, "Trading Away the Environment").

This frame is also related to coalition-building, at least in the Sierra Club's eye. One explanation of the formation of a coalition between labor and environmental groups that is given by the Sierra Club is that trade agreements constitute a common threat to the interests and goals of both:

The reason for the transformation is the recent metamorphosis of international trade. First under GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and more recently under the WTO, trade policy has become the vehicle of choice for the world's large corporations to advance their

interests—at the expense of the environment and workers' rights. For the WTO, national laws protecting dolphins or sea turtles or prohibiting the products of sweatshop labor are just “illegal barriers to trade.” (*Sierra Magazine* March/April 2000, “Trading Away Democracy”)

Contemporary trade policy, according to this view, represents corporations’ interests and undermines national sovereignty. Further, the legislation that will and has come under attack in light of these trade policies, the argument goes, represent hard-won concessions to both labor and the environmental movement. That is, the argument that current trade arrangements undermine sovereignty is significant for coalition-building because the specific laws that are being threatened are the products of labor and environmental struggles. Therefore, labor and environmentalists have a common enemy in “corporate-driven” trade policies.

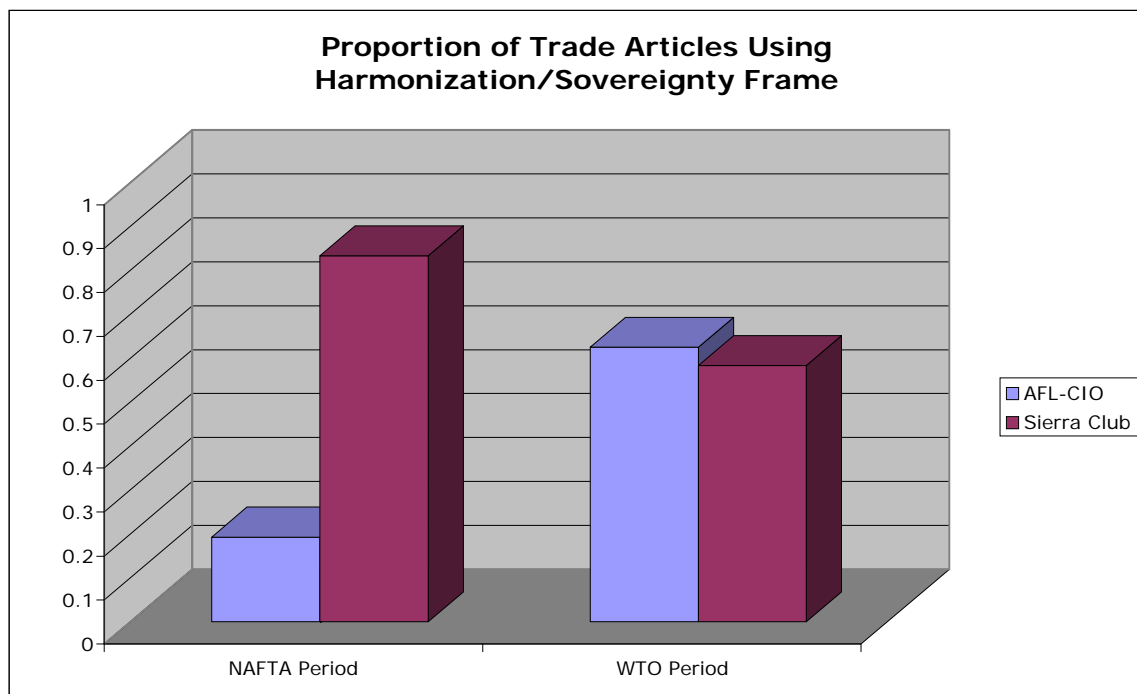


Figure 9. Two-Period Comparison, Harmonization/Sovereignty Frame

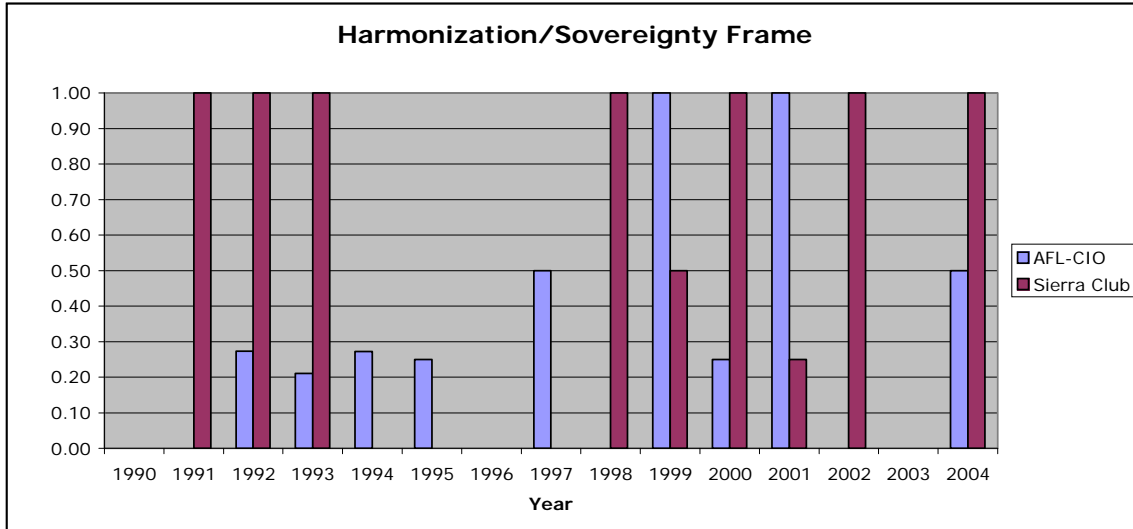


Figure 10. Harmonization/Sovereign Frame as Proportion of Trade Articles by Year

(Un-)Democratic Practices

The “(Un-)Democratic Practices” involves the criticism, rejection, or opposition of a given policy, organization, process, or practice because it is understood to be fundamentally undemocratic (dominated by elites in government or business, conducted behind closed doors and without the input, oversight, or control of the public or relevant outside authorities). This frame implicates government in the powerful position of business and capital, trying to explain why the government seems to “side” with the interests of companies no matter how hard other interests lobby and campaign. Policies and agreements that are developed undemocratically are objectionable, regardless of their content: “Jane Perkins, president of the Friends of the Earth, charged that the NAFTA accord was flawed from the beginning because citizen representatives were locked out of the negotiations” (*AFL-CIO News* September 14, 1992, “Bush Should Withdraw Flawed NAFTA”). It is suggested that unfairly negotiated policies will inherently generate undesirable outcomes:

“We consider that the way the FTAA is being implemented, consulting the employers while at the same time excluding the unions and other sectors of civil society, will only generate worsening economic and social situations in our countries and especially for the workers,” said Luis A. Anderson, secretary general of the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers. (*AFL-CIO News* April 22, 1996, “Trade and Credibility Gaps Widening”)

And they are of questionable merit:

“The lobbyists, Capitol Hill horse traders and White House spinmeisters had to really hustle to pull this one [Fast Track Authority] out,” says John Cavanaugh, director of the Institute for Policy Studies. “We will never know how many millions of dollars in campaign contributions or pork deals were needed to eke out a win. All this last-minute manipulation makes it impossible for them to claim that Fast Track passed on merit.” (*America @ Work* January 2002, p. 13)

If so-called representatives are not responsive to counter-business lobbies, the question remains how to influence the trade policies they pursue and how they are arrived at.

Direct action is one way to “go around” representative democratic institutions that are felt to have failed their constituents. The WTO protests in 1999 are explained, in part, as having the goal of re-democratizing trade.

By the hundreds and thousands, union members and their allies streamed into Seattle with a critical mission: To make the Nov. 29 – Dec. 3 World Trade Organization meeting the historic beginning of a new era, one in which the world’s trade rules no longer are devised by high-ranking government officials working at the behest of multinational corporations behind closed doors.” (*America @ Work* November/December 1999, “Make the WTO Work for Working Families”)

This strategy [of elite-negotiated trade], naturally, did not sit well with the Sierra Club, Public Citizen, the United Steelworkers of America, and other organizations opposed to corporate power that have been educating their members about the growing power of the WTO. Those efforts helped shift the politics of the debate. When the American people learn that their hard-won rights are being taken away by secret trade tribunals, polls reveal, they aren't inclined to defer to think-tank experts or career bureaucrats. Rather, they're ready to tell the WTO to take its undemocratic rules and get out of town. (*Sierra Magazine* March/April 2000, “Trading Away Democracy”)

The “(Un-)Democratic Practices” and “Corporate Domination” frames combine with talk about threats to sovereignty to develop an image of a world order where trade agreements are arranged undemocratically by elites and business interests, and these unfair, undemocratic, unjust agreements undermine national sovereignty – in effect, *trade is understood to be the vehicle through which global society is built and through which the*

possibility of democracy and justice is destroyed. The struggles of previous social movement campaigns may have resulted in protections for the environment and beneficial policies for workers, but the work of the past is rendered ineffective in the face of this system.

Boosters of the World Trade Organization praise it as a “rules based” trade system. If that's so, then it's legitimate for citizens of a democracy to ask what the rules are, who makes them, and who referees them. It turns out that the WTO's rules are made of, by, and for the transnational corporations, and adjudicated by anonymous judges meeting in secret with confidential legal briefs. Hidden from public view, they decide whether to accept or reject the Clean Air Act, or whether Europeans should be forced to eat genetically engineered food. This isn't playing by the rules, it's making them up and forcing them on the rest of us. And it doesn't matter if the WTO's rules are good, bad, or indifferent: Secret trials are a sign of tyranny, whether they take place in Geneva or Stalinist Russia. (*Sierra Magazine* March/April 2000, “Trading Away Democracy”)

Figure 13 and 14 demonstrate that appeals to democratic process were more commonly used by the Sierra Club than by the AFL-CIO during the NAFTA period, but became increasingly used by both, and at comparable levels, during the WTO period.

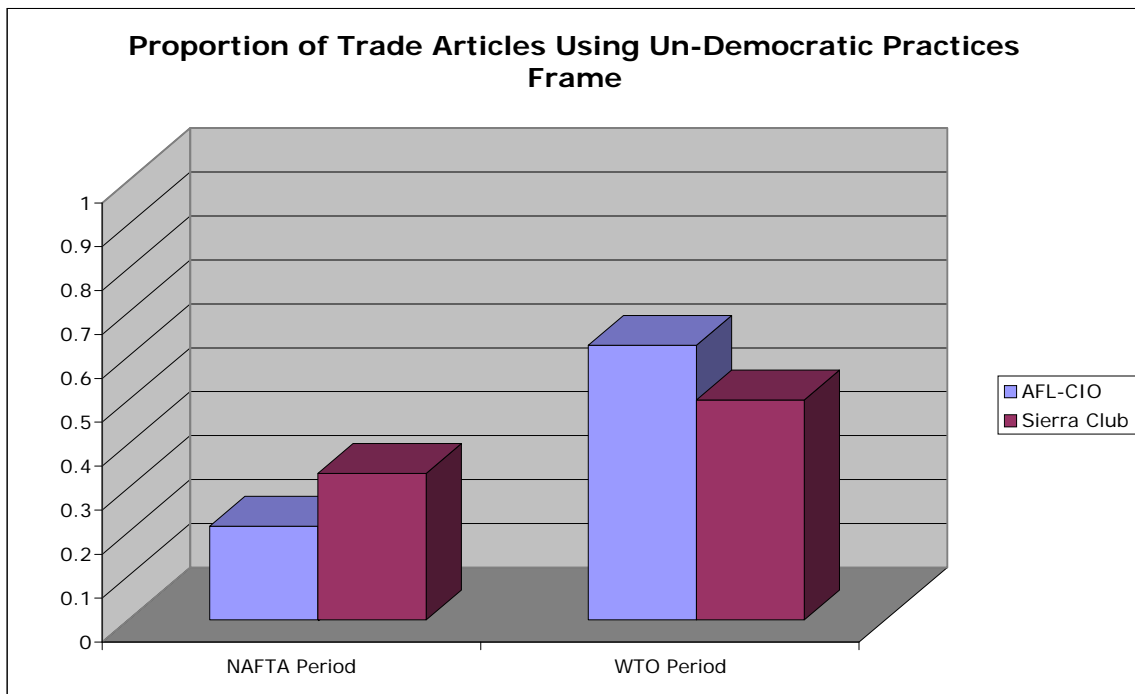


Figure 11. Two-Period Comparison, Undemocratic Practices Frame

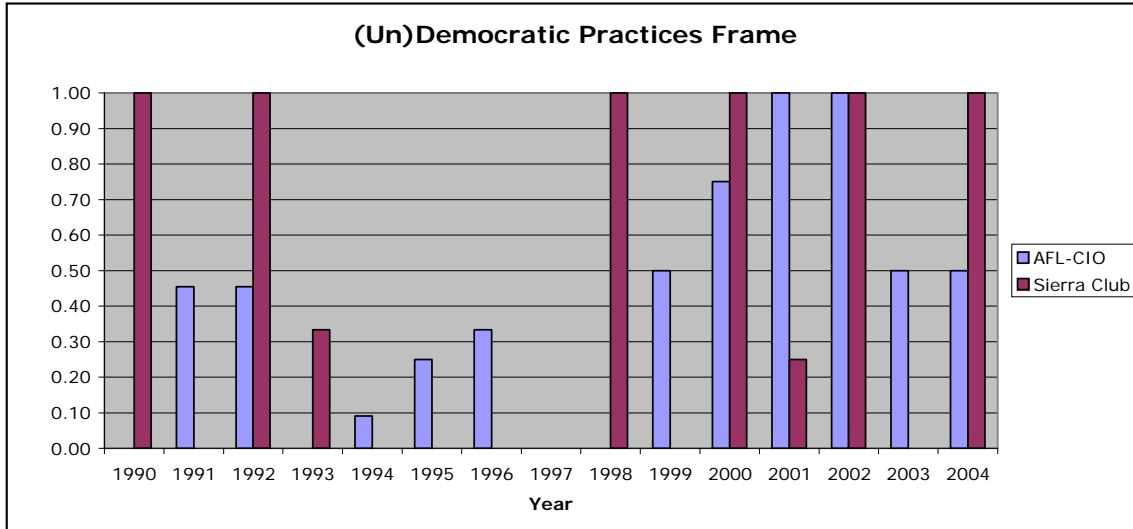


Figure 12. Undemocratic Practices Frame as Proportion of Trade Articles, by year

Corporate Domination

The “corporate domination” frame involves a range of perspectives and arguments that explicitly associate power in certain spheres (e.g. the government or the global economy) with corporations particularly or businesses generally, often in association with the mobility of capital. This frame may or may not involve a structural critique of global political economy, inequality, or political power. However, it often does. Early incarnations of this argument suggested that the powerful position of business was limited to some countries and was the result of corruption. For example:

The governments of many developing countries have cozy relationships with multinational corporations like Nike and Reebok, resulting in minuscule wages and outrageous working conditions, Rev. Jesse L. Jackson told the Executive Council in August. (*AFL-CIO News* August 26, 1996, “Worker Rights in Mexico”)

As is shown by Figures 15 and 16, while the Corporate Domination frame was entirely absent from the Sierra Club trade features during the NAFTA period, the frame’s usage rose and kept pace with its increasingly prevalence in the AFL-CIO trade discourse during the WTO period.

These arguments involve concerns about the inability of national laws to regulate transnational capital and reference the amorality of these types of firms: “Multinationals are often based in the United States, but they respect no flag and are loyal to no one but their officers and shareholders” (*America @ Work* July 1999, “The Corporate Agenda,” p. 11). One *Sierra* article connects corporate domination and trade as follows:

If corporations are persons under the law, what do they dream about? Turns out it's just what we always thought: world domination. They're getting there via an international treaty you probably never heard of called the Multilateral Agreement on Investments. The MAI purports to "liberalize" the rules for international investing. It's sort of like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but global; like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), but more powerful; like the Constitution, but for corporations, not people. You don't believe it? Listen to Renato Ruggiero, director general of the enforcement arm of international trade, the World Trade Organization: “We are writing the constitution of a single global economy.” And he's not asking for your opinion. (*Sierra Magazine* July/August 1998, “All Hail the Multinationals”)

Most frequently, frames about the power of business, corporations, or employers emerge from attempts to explain policy outcomes that are perceived as defeats by the labor and environmental movements. Therefore, the “corporate domination” framing of trade is often linked to the “(Un-)Democratic Practices” frame:

Coming on the heels of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the GATT agreement represents ‘another test of whether Congress serves the public interest or just the special interests of corporate management,’ said Teamster President Ron Carey at a press conference called by the Citizens Trade Campaign.... (*AFL-CIO News* October 3, 1994, “AFL-CIO urges congress to kill job-losing GATT”)

If governments are not representing “the people,” the question arises just who they are representing. And the answer in the publications analyzed often came back, “the corporations,” “big business,” “business interests,” “employers,” “investments,” or “capital.”

Donahue [then-Secretary Treasurer of the AFL-CIO] cited a sharp contrast between the loose and ineffective labor rights provisions and the clear and effective remedies for investors and owners of patents and copyrights [in NAFTA].

“We can only conclude that the financial interests of big business will continue to be far better protected than the rights and interests of workers,” he said. (*AFL-CIO News* June 28, 1993, “U.S. Proposals on NAFTA”)

Unionists have expressed their outrage that Bush's NAFTA agreement pays no attention to workers rights, labor standards and environmental concerns but is very solicitous of guarantees for intellectual property rights, transfer of capital and protection for investment in Mexico. (*AFL-CIO News* May 3, 1993, "Not This NAFTA Campaign")

Domingo Gonzalez of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras told the crowd that, "if NAFTA passes, Mexicans will be eating beans and rice, Americans will be flipping burgers and a few folks on Wall Street will be trading on our sweat and blood." (*AFL-CIO News* October 12, 1992, "AFL-CIO Insists: Dump NAFTA, Start Over")

In other words, the interests of capital, those who possess it, and the companies that serve as its organizational counterparts, have control over policy-making to the exclusion of "workers," "the public," and others who voice "social" or "environmental" concerns.

These arguments also, however, have implications for action. If the powerful are the corporations, if governments are complicit with them or ineffectual against them, international alliances amongst the grassroots can provide a solution by campaigning to secure rights and standards globally.

"Truck drivers can't continue to go it alone against the corporate interests that are behind NAFTA," agreed Jim Johnston, president of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association.

"These corporations care about short-term profits and have little or no regard for highway safety or job security." (*AFL-CIO News* March 25, 1996, "Truckers Pledge Multinational Effort on NAFTA")

The harsh reality in the new global marketplace is that – as the share of the workforce represented by unions has declined – the power lies in the hands of the multinational corporations scouring the globe for the lowest wages and least worker protection.

One way to help restore the balance of power is through the inclusion of workers' rights and basic human freedoms in all world trade agreements. (*America @ Work* April 1997, "Crossing Borders")

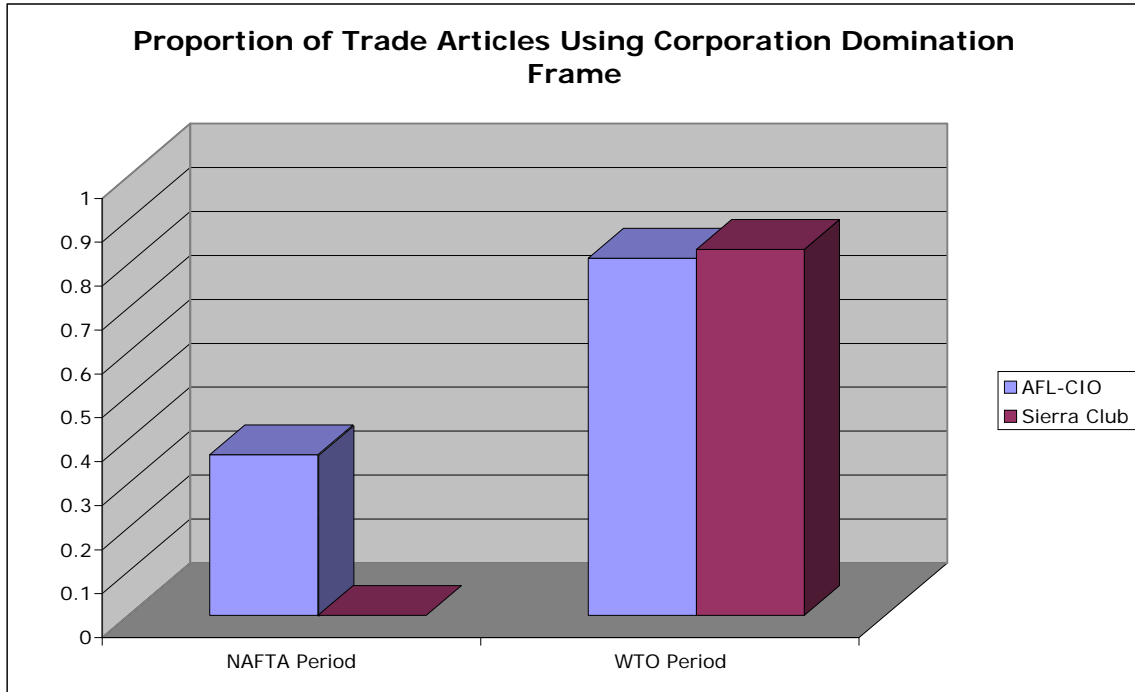


Figure 13. Two-Period Comparison, Corporate Domination Frame

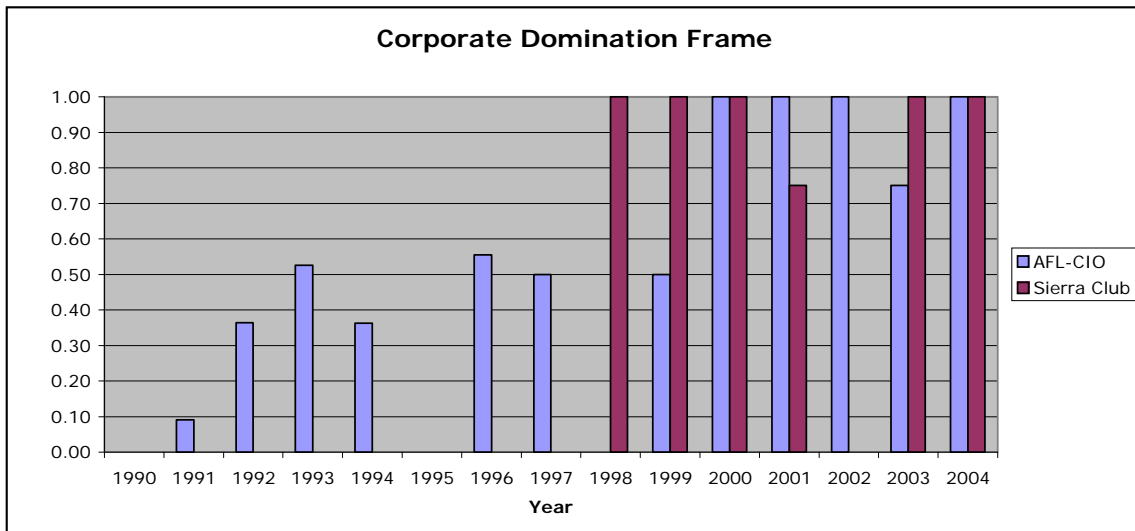


Figure 14. Proportion of Trade Articles using Corporate Domination Frame by Year

Summary

As the charts presented in this section have demonstrated, there was significant convergence around a variety of frames during the WTO period. While most of these frames emerged to a greater or lesser extent during the NAFTA debate, the AFL-CIO and Sierra Club publications show a striking convergence in the type of frames utilized and the frequency with which they appear. While the Sierra Club initially used the Harmonization/Sovereignty frame more than the AFL-CIO did, and likewise, the AFL-CIO used the Corporate Domination frame during the NAFTA debates while the Sierra Club did not pick it up until the late 1990s during the lead-up to the WTO protests, both organizations utilized the frames as a similar proportion of their total discussion of trade issues during the later period. Further, both organizations take on an increasingly “internationalist” perspective. Not only that, but the extent to which each references the movement of the other is such that they even began quoting each other’s representatives (e.g. the AFL-CIO quoted Sierra Club president and oft-contributor to the *Sierra Magazine* Carl Pope in one of their articles on trade).

Conclusions

The sociological literature on social movements has generated a large number of thorough case studies, as well as an insightful and amply-critiqued body of theoretical contributions to understanding the particular forms of collective action it has chosen to take up. It has also thoroughly utilized a particular, though quite narrow, methodological application of framing to shed light on how social movements gain support and why they do or do not achieve their goals. However, the literature has focused on the

instrumentalist potential represented by frames, neglecting the cognitive aspect of frames elaborated by Goffman in *Frame Analysis* (1974).

In the political struggle which surrounds contested meanings, the ideal outcome would be to supplant (or preserve) the current meanings surrounding some social phenomenon with those which the framer desires so as they eventually become, after a period of becoming conscious and articulated through the struggle, the taken for granted interpretations generally applied to “this sort of thing.” Anti-NAFTA activists’ (now, more generally, anti-market liberalization activists enacting Polanyi’s socially-protective movement) would prefer to have NAFTA imply the undemocratic implementation of market liberalization and that this economic order be perceived as so destructive as to be omitted from the range of potential options for organizing the global economy. The business-side of Polanyi’s double movement would prefer to either instill the explicit valorization of the market mechanism or obscure the very fact of its domination so as to render contestation impracticable (e.g. through making markets “obviously” the most effective means of organizing productive exchange workers are stripped of the potential to resist exploitative wages and so forth because their lives are commodified as “labor” which must, too, be subjected to the efficiency of market forces).

I have used frames taken as collective representations of two organizations expressed by leadership to a membership base to trace changes in organizational identity. Given that identity has implications for interest-definition and subsequent action, even a discontinuous or fragile continuation of the collaboration heralded during the WTO protests as the coming of a new era of alliances and the elimination of conflict across social activist sectors does not indicate the erasure or even initial cynicism of earlier

claims to a common cause, as the organizations continued to utilize common frames to understand the global economy and national politics even when not directly engaged in collective actions, indicating a more deep-seated shift in organizational identity than rhetorical moves by Washington insiders during a critical lobbying moment would generate. This discursive means of measuring the emergence of an ongoing process which one might characterize an overlapping of fields is supported by other developments such as the rise to prominence of leaders like Ron Carey and Carl Pope who promulgated the larger social justice approach to their respective movements. The emergence of new organizations such as the Blue-Green Alliance (formed by the United Steel Workers, the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Communication Workers of America, among others) as well as the growing strength of the “Green Jobs” movement also support my claims made on the basis of content analysis.¹²

The development of common identities, I have argued, may develop through collective struggle, even if the collective action is initially undertaken as an isolated act of cooperation or mutual self-interest. While environmentalists and unions have sporadically united in common cause when their interests were seen as overlapping or they felt they could not succeed without each other’s support, the environmental and labor organizations in the U.S., when they collectively fought against NAFTA, and especially after they continued to and expanded their engagement with each other and various other types of organizations as expressed most famously in the WTO Protests in

¹² The fact that the Teamsters and other more progressive internationals within the AFL-CIO such as SEIU left to form Change to Win, as well as that new organizations are forming along the lines of the supposed overlap, begs the question as to whether these phenomena represent the overlapping of preexisting social fields or the emergence of a new one. I do not speak to this question here.

Seattle in 1999, enacted the opportunity for collective re-imagination through collective political action in the trade arena. Working together allows for the definition of an “us” versus the common enemy (“them”) which, in the case of trade, has come to be broadly defined as either multinational corporations or a neoliberal model of global economic order. It also provides the opportunity for the emergence and subsequent resolution of cognitive dissonance, where groups intermittently¹³ opposed, especially in the decade or so before NAFTA was introduced when conservatism dominated not only national politics but also characterized the labor and environmental movements, rationalize the broad-based cooperation of their organizations through the development of a collective representation which fundamentally aligns the two movements.

It is also possible that the very structure of struggle or the participation in collective action themselves promote the formation of a common identity, though the question would then be raised, “Why now and not before?” Kay (2005) contends that the political opportunity structure which emerged under NAFTA presented the possibility for internationalist union cooperation and ideology to emerge. A similar phenomenon could be occurring across movement boundaries, where Polanyian social movements do not spontaneously emerge but have the possibility to develop because of the appearance of a broader site of potential collective action. It is important to begin to theorize how a more broad-based social movement comes to identify itself. The answer that I give for why now is because the two movements worked together at a national (and even international level) as they never had before, allowing the potential for a culture of solidarity to emerge

¹³ Or continuously, in the cases of some sectors of each respective movement, such as “zero-growth” environmentalists or coal-miners. Waves of collaboration and opposition, both historical and contextual and issued-defined, characterized previous moments in blue-green relationships, though some organizations and actors in each movement continuously supported or opposed the other for ideological or interest-perceptive reasons.

beyond the local and radical enclaves which had previously represented the center of cross-movement collaboration as broader frames developed, potentiating collective action not entered into on the basis of issue by issue calculations but because of an ideological recognition of “free trade” as opposed to both labor and environmental interests more broadly conceived.

In the battle for definition of what is the “general” or “public good” and who legitimately represents it, these articles indicate that the AFL-CIO and the Sierra Club initially positioned themselves as against NAFTA for specific reasons (not enough environmental and labor protections narrowly envisioned). Later, however, the organizations converged on a broader, more inclusive conceptualization of the problem *not as a specific trade agreement, but as an economic model* expressed through that trade agreement and other multi- and trans-national institutions such as the World Bank and the proposed FTAA. Both organizations’ publications invoke the language of justice and rights and align themselves through their common vision of the global economy and the threats market liberalism poses to society. After their collective struggle against NAFTA, these two organizations expanded their definition of their identities to include them in a global, general social movement and of their interests as linked through their representation of the public good across national boundaries, bound together in a “community of fate” (Holden 2000) by the expansion of market liberalization through trade agreements and IFIs pitting business against society.

Not only does my data provide evidence for the staying power of collective representations developed in the course of collective struggle, it shows that perhaps rather than typologizing and tracing framing projects, we can more fruitfully use frames to trace

other processes such as the emergence and development of cognitive schema and their implications for social action (Benford 1997). More specifically, we can use frame analysis in this way to investigate the formation of collectivities by examining their emergent representations and thereby try to explain how Polanyi's socially-protective movement might cohere productively. While I cannot make direct claims as to the consequences of these shifts in collective identity for organizational behavior, my research indicates that there is significant potential for studying the labor movement, even in its more bureaucratic and less social movement and community-oriented forms, not in isolation, but rather as part of a broader social formation in the realm of collective political action, as an emergent part of a global movement aiming to protect society from the destructive effects of the market of which Polanyi warned.

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