

Report on Sabbatical Leave for Spring Semester 2007
Dr. Norman Caulfield
Professor of History

General Project Objective

Complete work on a book Titled: “Globalization and Labor in North America.”

Project Background

Conceptualization of this project began while working on my first book, *Mexican Workers and the State: From the Porfiriato to NAFTA*, which Texas Christian University published in 1998. While that work focused primarily on Mexican labor, sections of the book covered labor in the United States, especially as it related to the historical interfacing between unions in the two countries.

After completing that project, I initiated research on how labor in the U.S. and Mexico has been affected by economic liberalization policies pursued by both countries, and especially since 1994, when NAFTA went into affect. Advance work on the project, already had began before taking the sabbatical in 2007, and it included the publication of an articles in *Labor History* as well as work as a researcher at the Secretariat of the Commission for Labor Cooperation, an organization created as part of the labor-side agreement to NAFTA, the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC). All of this activity was to lead up to a book-length study envisaged as an outgrowth of my first monograph.

While working at the Secretariat in Washington, DC, I was privileged to have access to materials and information that otherwise would have been beyond my reach in Hays, Kansas. Serving as Secretariat Research Director in 2004 and 2005 furthered my access to these materials and I acquired “insider” knowledge of the NAALC and its workings. In so doing, I made numerous personal contacts and developed good working relationships with NAFTA government staff from the three countries. In addition to giving me an “insider” perspective, my experience at the Secretariat also resulted in the development of new themes to include as projective objectives.

Among those new themes, which is treated in the book manuscript, is an extensive analysis of the history of the NAALC, the first international agreement on labor to be linked to an international trade agreement.

Book Contents

Introduction and Chapter 1: The Social Question Internationalized

The bulk of the introduction, which also serves as the first chapter, is an extensive literature review of studies that have focused on globalization and its labor dimensions. A

substantial portion of this review is devoted to examining what is known in scholarly circles as “race to the bottom” literature. The major thrust of my study is discussed here and placed within the existing body of literature on globalization and labor. Here, the reader finds the work’s thesis; i.e. the current era of globalization is most intense within the NAFTA trade bloc, and as a consequence, the building of competitive pressures are having a major impact on workers, unions and the institutions of the state which have traditionally regulated labor activity. Discussion then moves to describing how these processes are presented in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 2: Globalization and the Trade Unions

This chapter provides background on labor and political economy in Mexico, the United States and Canada. It overviews the formation and history of trade unions in the three countries and makes comparisons not only within the NAFTA bloc, but globally. The remainder of the chapter is an extensive examination and analysis of the trade union response to globalization.

Chapter 3: North American Labor Systems: Past and Present

This chapter is a detailed report on the history of the establishment, consolidation and two countries labor relations systems. Presentation of the material entails description and analysis of the country specific features of these systems. The discussion provides details on the inception and growth of the US and Mexican labor movements as well as how the governments of the two countries regulated labor activity. This is followed by discussion that describes and analyzes how the labor institutions that developed in the countries as a result of these processes functioned over time. The discussion is folded into the broader context; i.e. the respective political economies in which both country systems operate. Sources for this chapter are primarily drawn from the secondary literature, although when feasible, data from government sources, such as historical information on union density are integrated into the discussion.

Chapter 4: Mexican Political Economy and Labor

This chapter describes and analyzes how these labor relations systems and the institutions they operated in have interfaced with current trends in Mexican political economy. Special attention is given to the development of “protection unions” and the growth of independent unions that present challenges to the 70 year-old labor relations system.

Chapter 5: Union-Management Relations in the U.S.

This chapter examines the stress that the US labor relations system has endured from 1980 to the present. It is based upon the literature written on this development and is grounded in a framework that considers North America and its place within a changing global economic environment. Accordingly, much discussion is devoted to the

development of economic liberalization and government policies that have accommodated this trend, especially the creation and implementation of NAFTA. In particular, the trend toward concessionary bargaining as a union response to these developments is examined and analyzed.

Chapter 6: The North American Auto Industry

This chapter is a history of the integration of the North American auto industry and its focus is on the labor dimension involved in that process. Covered is the splitting of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), the development of independent unions in the Mexican auto sector, and the United Auto Workers' Union (UAW) response to North American integration, and especially its lead in the area of concessionary bargaining. The chapter ends with analysis of the most recent round of negotiations concluded by the UAW and the Big Three automakers.

Chapter 6: Labor Mobility and Workers' Rights in North America

This chapter is a statistical portrait of official government data from the three countries on trends that have developed regarding labor mobility. The chapter concludes by making comparisons with earlier periods in which labor mobility played an important role in the economic integration of the North American territories and it analyzes the responses, both historically and in the current period of labor organizations to these trends and developments.

Chapter 7: The NAALC and its Political Impact

This concluding chapter is an extensive examination and analysis of the NAALC, as it evaluates its 13 year history and its current affect upon the negotiation and implementation of post-NAFTA treaties such as the Central American Free-Trade Agreement (CAFTA); the US-Chile Free Trade Agreement and a future free-trade zone of the Americas.

Sources used in the writing of this chapter are drawn primarily from the NAALC archives in Washington, DC, of which I have easy access. Numerous sources are also employed, including reports on NAFTA prepared by think tanks, the World Bank and the Inter American Development (IDB). The book ends with an attempt to assess the current situation with regard to free trade and its labor dimensions. In the process, a modest prognosis for the immediate future of labor and political economy in North America is offered.

Outcomes

Almost all of the writing for this project has been completed. The last section to be included in the text is the 2007 round of negotiations between the UAW and the Big Three automakers. Several publishers have indicated an interest in the work. Since the

University of Illinois Press has a labor history series, and they were the first to express a willingness to consider the work for publication, I will begin by sending it there.