JUGGLING MULTIPLE AGENDAS IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM: THE CENTRAL DE TRABAJADORES DE LA ARGENTINA, 2002-2010

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the virtually ‘parallel agendas’ that the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) developed at the national, continental and international levels for almost a decade. The CTA played a key role in the resistance to neoliberal reforms on the national level. While carrying out these activities, it also participated in the main continental campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). However, these were largely parallel agendas in which the CTA’s transnational activism did not significantly influence its domestic strategic plans. The chapter will show how although the CTA was actively participating in the continental campaigns against neoliberal globalization, its participation in these campaigns was the result of a nationally-focused agenda. Moreover, since the 1990s, the only CTA program of action at the international relations has been on the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR), and has not suffered from any significant changes as a result of the CTA participation in the campaigns against the FTAA. The goal of this chapter is therefore to study and analyze the reasons for the CTA application of three contemporary parallel agendas of action in an attempt to answer the problem of the influence of transnational activism on national contentious actors during their resistance to neoliberalism.
Introduction

Starting with the question about how the transnational participation of an organization affects its activism on the national scale (Silva, 2010), the purpose of this chapter is to narrate and analyze the process of coordination in Argentina that concerns the resistance to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and its aftermath (2002-2010). This will be done through the study of the role played by the main national coalition created for precisely this resistance, and in particular, through the role played by the main actor in this coalition: the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) union. This chapter will provide an explanation for the virtually ‘parallel agendas’ that this trade union had developed at the national, continental and international levels for almost a decade.

The CTA has been a very important actor in the resistance to neoliberal reforms on the national level. While carrying out these activities, the CTA also participated in the main continental campaign against the FTAA. However, despite the similarity of the time frameworks, the two agendas were simply parallel and the CTA’s transnational activism did not have any significant influence on the domestic strategic plans. In other words, in this chapter I will show how though this trade union was actively participating in the continental campaigns against neoliberal globalization, its participation in these campaigns was the result of a nationally-focused agenda. Moreover, since the 1990s, the only CTA program of action at the international relations level has been on the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR, Southern Common Market), and has not suffered from any significant changes as a result of the CTA participation in the campaigns against the FTAA. However, the case of the CTA shows that “Not all activism that is relevant to transnational politics takes place in the international arena. Relevant processes are found within domestic politics in the transitions
from the domestic to the international level, and between states and within and around international institutions” (Tarrow, 2005: 30). The goal of this chapter is therefore to study and analyze the reasons for the CTA application of three contemporary parallel agendas of action in an attempt to answer the problem of the influence of transnational activism on national contentious actors during their resistance to neoliberalism.

This chapter profits from some of the results obtained in some research done on the Autoconvocatoria No al ALCA, No a la Deuda, No a la Militarización y No a la Pobreza1 (Rossi, 2006; Bidaseca and Rossi, 2008), and is based on some interviews done in 2005 with the main members of the Autoconvocatoria, as well as the CTA representatives in it. In 2010, this research was expanded through some interviews with the people in charge of the Secretary of International Relationships of the CTA for 1992 to 2010. Additionally, the main documents elaborated by the CTA and the Autoconvocatoria about the FTAA, MERCOSUR and continental neoliberal processes have also been used. Finally, the author carried out direct observations of the Autoconvocatoria activities and meetings during 2004-2005 in Buenos Aires, as well as ethnographic observations of protests, public gatherings and private meetings during the 3rd People’s Summit in Mar del Plata on November 2005.


In 1992, the CTA was founded as a result of the efforts of some unions that had rejected the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) agreements with the Carlos Menem government (1989-1999). The CGT adopted a strategy of self-preservation that led to the

1 Self-Convocation Against the FTAA, Against Debt Payment, Against Militarization and Against Poverty. ALCA stands for Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas, FTAA in English.
acceptance and –in many cases- also support of the Menem neoliberal state reforms (Etchemendy, 2001; Murillo, 2001). The CTA has as its core constituency the main victims of neoliberal reforms: state workers, teachers and the unemployed. This particularity of the CTA developed a movement-type of trade unionism that has promoted and organized some of the main national mobilizations against neoliberalism in Argentina.

Although the CTA is a fundamentally domestic actor, it does not neglect the international context: the Secretariat of International Relationships has existed since 1992 and has been an active section of this union. While the nexus with some non-Argentinean trade unions has been promoted since its founding in order to receive political or economic support for the CTA project², the main area of action of this Secretariat has been in the Foro Consultivo Económico – Social (Socio – Economic Consultative Forum) of the MERCOSUR. In 1996, the CTA was accepted as a member of the Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur (CCSCS, Coordination of Southern Cone Trade Unions) thanks to the support of the Brazilian Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), notwithstanding CGT disagreement with this decision.

Since 1986, during the re-democratization period, the CCSCS has been the main unifier of Southern Cone unions and has become the main coordinator of the role played by unions in MERCOSUR negotiations (Badaró, 2002; Portela de Castro, 2007). The CCSCS has become a very stable area of regional action for the CTA and other unions because the “... MERCOSUR was proposed as a future common market, and not merely as the creation of a free trade area, [which] gave labor organizations a horizon of many years of negotiations on

² The most long-standing international relations of the CTA have been with the Central Única dos Trabalhadores of Brazil, the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro, the Confédération Générale du Travail of France and the União Nacional dos Trabalhadores Angolanos.
delicate issues such as labor mobility, a process they felt they could not be excluded from” (von Bülow, 2010: 60).

In addition, since the 1994 Summit of the Americas (Miami) all the Americas’ presidents (except for Cuba) were put together for the first time to begin a negotiation process for the creation of a FTAA that would emulate the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA). For the unions and movements, the NAFTA was considered to have had negative consequences on the Mexican, US and Canadian workers and farmers. Simultaneously, the FTAA was planned as a closed and state-only process coordinated through the Organization of American States. In order to counterbalance state FTAA negotiations, trade unions increased their coordination towards a common strategy against the FTAA with the goal of preventing social consequences that would be similar to the NAFTA while aiming to have their voices included within the FTAA negotiations process (Korzeniewicz and Smith, 2004).

The struggles against the FTAA (2002-2005)

For the CTA and other domestic actors, the emergence of the FTAA process represented an US imperialist project that would reduce the national autonomy of Argentina. This project therefore needed to be resisted, while it was considered that the MERCOSUR should be simultaneously promoted and improved. This latter was seen as a South American counterbalance to resist to the US advancement over the whole continent. A document of the CTA argued as followed:
“At the moment the FTAA is presented to us as the US option which will cover the whole of the American continent to establish their hegemony in this vast territory and avoid any possible [resistance] from us. ... For this reason, one of our main action fronts is to struggle against the FTAA. This, we believe, must be done by starting from a strong commitment to the MERCOSUR countries. Our goal is to consolidate this regional space, changing it with respect to the way it is now, and prioritizing policies of industrialization, complementing our economies and fundamentally the interests of the workers” (6th National Congress of Delegates, document elaborated by the Secretariat of International Relationships, CTA, Mar del Plata, 2002)³.

In other words, the CTA support for the MERCOSUR was seen as an alternative to the FTAA within an anti-imperialist master frame (cf. also: Arceo, 2003). This rejection of the FTAA was shared by other unions in the MERCOSUR⁴, as well as in the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT)⁵. Since the 2nd Summit of the Americas (1998, Santiago de Chile), and due to the exclusion of trade unions participation, the ORIT decided to organize the 1st People’s Summit; this would put pressure onto states to insert a social agenda in the FTAA process. During the 3rd Summit of the Americas (2001, Quebec), mobilizations by the alter-globalization movement were so important that the official meeting

³ Original in Spanish: “En el momento actual el ALCA se presenta como la opción estadounidense para avanzar sobre todo el continente americano, plantear de antemano su hegemonía y evitar posibles frentes en este vasto territorio. ... Por este motivo uno de nuestros principales frentes de acción es la lucha contra el ALCA, que creemos debe ser encarada a partir de un fuerte compromiso con los países del MERCOSUR, con el objetivo de consolidar este espacio regional, otorgándole un contenido diferente al actual, en el cual se priorice una política dirigida a la industrialización, la complementación de nuestras economías y fundamentalmente los intereses de los trabajadores”.

⁴ Cf. “Ahora MERCOSUR: por una integración política, social, económica y cultural”, presented by the CCSCS at the 5th Union’s Summit (Montevideo, December 2003).

⁵ The ORIT (in English: Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers) was the regional body of the Confederación Internacional de Organizaciones Sindicales Libres (CIOSL, in English: International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, ICFTU).
failed in its goals, showing the ORIT that there was the need to incorporate social movement organizations (SMOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the process. This led to the creation of the *Alianza Social Continental* (ASC, in English: *Hemispheric Social Alliance*, HSA) as a space to integrate non-ORIT unions and social organizations in a hemispheric campaign against the FTAA.

Meanwhile, at the domestic level, Argentina had been going through a cycle of protest since 1997, the years from 2001-2002 being one of its peaks (Schuster et al., 2006; Herrera, 2008). Indeed, the intensity of this social unrest led to the resignation of President Fernando De la Rúa (1999-2001) on December 2001. The CTA was a very important and contentious national actor, mostly among state workers and teachers, while also supporting some of the *piqueteros* or unemployed workers’ movement, but was not crucial in the December 2001 crisis. During the same period, the CTA was fully concentrated on the organization of the *Frente Nacional contra la Pobreza* (FRENAPO, *National Front against Poverty*) referendum to put pressure on De la Rúa for the application of a universal citizenship income right that could solve poverty and massive unemployment. The FRENAPO referendum was organized from 15-17th December, with a turnout of 2,700,000 voters. However, the CTA had no time to present their results to De la Rúa, because after a week of urban food riots (Auyero and Moran, 2007), on 19-20th December spontaneous *cacerolazos* (saucepan-banging protests) emerged to force the end of the government, and this actually happened immediately after. Within this context of social unrest, a new movement of neighborhood and popular assemblies was created, calling for a renewal of the political elite (Rossi, 2005).
Within this context of increased national and continental contention, the decision to create the coalition Autoconvocatoria No al ALCA, No a la Deuda, No a la Militarización y No a la Pobreza was the result of the combination of several networks within the general spirit of self-organization and anti-establishment popular mood that dominated during the 2001-2002 crisis. Between 2002 and 2005, this coalition was composed of some of the main SMOs of the human rights movement, the piqueteros movement, the cooperatives’ movement, some Communist Party-related political, social and academic organizations, Christian-based NGOs, and the CTA. In particular, the Autoconvocatoria was founded in 2002 by Jubilee South (Americas) and the Campaña por la Desmilitarización de las Américas (CADA, Campaign for the Demilitarization of the Americas). In 2003, the CTA incorporated to the Autoconvocatoria with the FRENAPO network (Bidaseca and Rossi, 2008: 54-58; Rivkin, 2008)⁶.

The Autoconvocatoria involved the integration of the main claims of three regional campaigns, and one national coalition as seen in Figure 1. Jubilee South (Americas) introduced the topic of the non-payment of the external debt, the CADA the US militarization of the region, the ASC/HSA the FTAA, and the CTA poverty alleviation and universal citizenship income.

⁶ In 2001, a march was organized by the CTA and the CGT (dissident sector) against a secret meeting of the diplomacy that was held in Buenos Aires. This was the only prior mobilization on the FTAA issue. After this protest, this temporary coalition dissolved.
Abbreviations:

ASC/HSA: Alianza Social Continental/Hemispheric Social Alliance
ATE: Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado (Association of State Workers, union)
ATTAC: Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens’ Action
CADA: Campaña por la Desmilitarización de las Américas (Campaign for the Demilitarization of the Americas)
CLACSO: Consejo Latinoamericano en Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Council for Social Sciences)
CPL: Corriente Patria Libre (Free Homeland Division, political party)
CTA: Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (Argentinean Workers’ Union)
ENDEPA: Equipo Nacional de Pastoral Aborigen (National Team for Aboriginal Pastoral)
FJIA: Federación Judicial Argentina (Argentinean Judicial Federation, union)
FRENAPO: Frente Nacional contra la Pobreza (National Front against Poverty)
FTV: Federación de Trabajadores por la Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat (Federation of Workers for Land, Housing and Habitat, piqueteros SMO)
IMFC: Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos (Institute for the Mobilization of Cooperative Funds)
MOPASSOL: Movimiento por la Paz, la Soberanía y la Solidaridad entre los Pueblos (Movement for Peace, Sovereignty and Solidarity among the Peoples)
MTL: Movimiento Territorial Liberación (Territorial Liberation Movement, piqueteros SMO)
PC: Communist Party
PC-CE: Communist Party – Congreso Extraordinario (PC – Extraordinary Congress)
SERPAJ: Servicio de Paz y Justicia (Service for Peace and Justice)


Figure 1: Networks that constituted the Autoconvocatoria No al ALCA, No a la Deuda,
No a la Militarización y No a la Pobreza, 2002-2005

The Autoconvocatoria was originally created as an independent coalition, so it was different from the Brazilian and Chilean cases. While in Argentina the Autoconvocatoria was set up as a temporary coalition that incorporated the anti-FTAA campaign, in Brazil and Chile these domestic coalitions were sustained networks within the ASC/HSA (cf. van Bülow, 2010: 120, figure 7.1 for Brazil and Chile). As the Autoconvocatoria was created before the ASC/HAS arrived to Argentina, it had to integrate actors with different priorities and so it developed the already mentioned four topics as its goals (cf. Figure 1). However, this changed when the FTAA became the predominant topic as a result of the Autoconvocatoria being designated as the official ASC/HSA branch for Argentina in 2003. From then, it followed the ASC/HSA agenda, but none of its members were related to the ASC/HSA organizer –the ORIT.

The ORIT was considered by the CTA as an US Pan-Americanist institution that had supported the US Department of State policy during the Cold War. As the CTA positioned
itself on the Latinamericanist anti-imperialist stand, it had considered the ORIT as an organization opposed to the CTA goals. The relationship between the CTA and the CIOSL/ICFTU-ORIT was only indirect, based on the participation of some affiliated unions in the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions and the International Metalworkers Federation. However, the CTA accepted participating in the ASC/HSA campaign because of a mix of international and domestic realignments. Internationally, the union controlling the ORIT, the American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, changed its position regarding the US foreign policy for Latin America. Simultaneously, the main continental ally of the CTA, the CUT of Brazil, became an ORIT member and a very influential actor within it (Wachendorfer, 2007; van Bülow, 2009). Domestically, the ASC/HSA continental campaign was adopted by the CTA on account of the opportunity it represented for the General Secretariat to coordinate its local political agenda with the one of the national government during Néstor Kirchner’s mandate (2003-2007). The increased coordination with Kirchner government was sustained notwithstanding the refusal of the CTA to integrate the ORIT, within a climate of internal tension, creating the atmosphere that would eventually lead to CTA split.

Since 2003, the CTA had participated in the Autoconvocatoria and was actively involved in the coordination of a national referendum promoted by the ASC/HSA for resisting the FTAA and the opening of US military bases in South America. The first referendum was part of an ASC/HSA strategy. Organized from 26-27th November 2003 by the Autoconvocatoria, it was carried out reproducing the logic of a similar one set up by the ASC/HSA in Brazil in 2000, and the 2001 FENAPAPO experience. It involved asking the population about their opinion concerning the support or not to the FTAA process, the payment of the external debt, and the allocation of US military bases in Latin America. This referendum was a success, with 2,500,000 people voting, and mobilizing 20,000 activists.
Even though the FRENAPo network was crucial for its success, the CTA did not take any formal national decision to participate in this process due to some internal conflicts that prevented the national authorities from reaching an agreement (Bidaseca and Rossi, 2008: 71-73).

In 2004, a second referendum was called, also integrating the poverty issue. This second referendum was not part of an ASC/HSA strategy, but was a domestic decision of the *Autoconvocatoria* on the attempt of some internal sectors to push this coalition towards the Kirchner government position. The *Autoconvocatoria* was composed of some government supporters such as part of CTA and the *piqueteros* SMO *Barrios de Pie*, but also by many other SMOs in the opposition, such as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora*, the *Servicio de Paz y Justicia* (SERPAJ), the *Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens’ Action* (ATTAC) of Argentina, etc. As a result, this event failed as it was not fully supported by all the *Autoconvocatoria* members (Bidaseca and Rossi, 2008: 76-79).

*The 4th Peoples’ Summit: the subordination of the international agenda to domestic politics*

During 2005, the 3rd *People’s Summit* at Mar del Plata (Argentina) was organized in order to confront the official 4th *Summit of the Americas*. This presidents’ meeting was considered crucial because the FTAA agreement was to be signed in 2005. Simultaneously, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and President Néstor Kirchner of Argentina openly rejected the FTAA. The *People’s Summit* was a massive event, with around 12,000 activists involved, mostly from Argentina, but with quite a few participants from Bolivia, Brazil,
Cuba, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. The activities were organized in parallel to the Summit of the Americas, with the aim of building a common declaration calling for the end of the FTAA and the other three claims of the Autoconvocatoria\textsuperscript{7}. After the People’s Summit a march was organized which included several pro-government SMOs such as the piqueteros SMO Federación de Trabajadores por la Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat (FTV) and the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Another group composed of Trotskyist parties and the radical flank of the human rights movement organized the Autoconvocatoria No a Bush (Self-Convocation against Bush), which called for a march against both summits. In addition, the local alter-globalization Grupo Bristol prepared a concert with Manu Chao. Each of these domestic groups came together in the main march that boasted around 40,000 people (Rossi, 2006). As can be seen in two manifestos, the main mobilization was called to defend “Latin American dignity”, and this can be interpreted as a nationalist anti-imperialist master frame (cf. Figure 2, left). On the People’s Summit manifesto, this is clearer (cf. Figure 2, right): while using a redefined version of the World Social Forum’s (WSF) motto as “Another America is Possible”, it also focuses on their rejection of the visit of the US President George W. Bush to Argentina, in a clearly anti-imperialist stance. Finally, it lists the Autoconvocatoria goals. In other words, the Autoconvocatoria and its campaigns were based on a national coalition that coordinated its actions continentally through the ASC/HSA. The Autoconvocatoria defined the conflicts framed by an anti-imperialist nationalist rhetoric that is rooted in the left Peronist tradition of the 1970s. Consequently, the main antagonist of the Autoconvocatoria was the US and what it was considered as ‘its instruments of oppression’, which included the FTAA (Bidaseca and Rossi, 2008). The FTAA added a hemispheric issue to the CTA and other domestic Argentinean actors, but did not change the identity and

\textsuperscript{7} The final document of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} People’s Summit can be found at: http://www.cumbredelospueblos.org (website visited 5\textsuperscript{th} November 2005).
priorities of these actors. In the case of the CTA, it maintained its own self-definition as a domestic actor, and its main national and international agendas were the same. In theoretical terms, what the struggle against the FTAA shows us is that even though a domestic actor may be confronting an international process, this does not necessarily mean that it is internationalizing itself. For this process to happen, it should also be understood whether this same actor is simultaneously developing a cognitive change (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 8). In other words, neither the members of the Autoconvocatoria nor the CTA in particular changed their domestic-centric understandings of the resistance struggles against neoliberalism, even though they had actively participated in the ASC/HSA campaign.

Figure 2: Manifesto for the final march (left), and manifesto for the People’s Summit (right), 1st-4th November 2005 (Mar del Plata, Argentina)
This series of events –amongst others- allowed for the application of the FTAA program as promoted by the US to be boycotted. However, despite the CTA’s wide and active participation in the Autoconvocatoria and the 3rd People’s Summit, its international relationships agenda remained unaltered. During this same period, at the MERCOSUR level, the CTA continued with its usual participation in the CCSCS, which was focused on the implementation of the MERCOSUR Working Plan 2004-2006. The CCSCS aimed to expand the integration process to a common market, and it participated in the MERCOSUR Summit of Ouro Preto (Brazil, 2004), but without making much impact on the final outcome of this meeting. During 2004-2005, the CCSCS coalition of unions increased its participation in the MERCOSUR negotiations, but did not manage to achieve its main goal: the incorporation of social and labor issues in the MERCOSUR agenda. It was only in 2006 that the CCSCS managed to insert the question of employment creation in the MERCOSUR agenda (Portela de Castro, 2007). As can be seen, the CTA participation in the CCSCS followed its own path, which was quite different from that of the FTAA. The parallel agendas followed by the CTA in these two different types of regional integration can be seen, firstly, in the contentious politics and coalition building that dominated the FTAA process, the CTA’s aim here being to link the domestic resistance against neoliberalism to the foreign policy of the Kirchner government. The second, and contemporary, agenda followed by the CTA can be seen in the diplomatic and routine political style that dominated the MERCOSUR process. This latter was, of course, a longer process than the former. Although the unions did not in fact manage to extend much influence over the governments’ agendas in the MERCOSUR process, they did manage, all the same, to increase their participation in this long-term process of negotiations.
Contradictory as it might seem, while the CTA played an active supportive role in the ASC/HSA campaign promoted by the ORIT, it was never a member of the ORIT, and it rejected this regional organization. In order words, given its national agenda and domestic dynamics, the CTA participated in the regional ASC/HSA campaign. First, due to an increase in the political opportunities as a result of the 2001-2003 acceleration of the cycle of protest during the collapse of the De la Rúa government, the CTA was pushed to expand its actions for resisting neoliberalism. This happened without pursuing any cognitive change regarding its self-understanding of its level and focus of action. Second, the CTA know-how on coordination with SMOs made this possible. This know-how came out as a result of the experience of the national coalition FRENAPO in 2001. Third, the General Secretariat of the CTA support of the Kirchner government helped to build a campaign that fitted within the Argentinean foreign policy of backing the MERCOSUR and rejecting the FTAA as if they were incompatible processes. As stated by the Adjunct of the Secretariat of International Relationships from 1992 to 2006: “[Since Kirchner’s mandate.] Even though we don’t participate in the national Ministry of International Relationships... the CTA Secretariat [of International Relationships] has been greatly absorbed by national topics. This is a period when international issues have been overshadowed by the national processes in order to focus on them” (Eduardo Menajoski, interviewed December 2010)⁸.

In brief, within these dynamics, the CTA considered the ASC/HSA and the Autoconvocatoria as just two “tools” among many others for the main goal “of resisting the neoliberal offensive” in Argentina (Adolfo Aguirre, interviewed December 2010).

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⁸ Original in Spanish: “Si bien no tenemos participación en la Cancillería... a la Secretaría la absorbió fundamentalmente los temas nacionales. Es una época donde se opacaron los temas internacionales en función de poner la atención en los procesos nacionales”.

The aftermath of the struggles against the FTAA (2005-2010)

Once the abovementioned series of events had taken place, and the US agenda for the FTAA was considered by many to have failed, two alternative processes can be identified as defining the evolution of the CTA program from 2006. On the continental and international dimensions, as a result of the reconfiguration of trade unions’ internationals under a post-Cold War schema, the CIOSL/ICFTU-ORIT was dissolved (Wachendorfer, 2007)\(^9\). This new schema favored the decision of the CTA to become member of an international trade union confederation for the first time ever. This participation also increased the international relationships activities of the CTA, enriching it with extra-Americas bilateral sustained relationships with trade unions in France, Italy, Spain, South Africa and South Korea.

On the national dimension, instead, the increased tension produced by the alignment of the General Secretariat of the CTA with the Kirchner government mentioned above created a conflict among the two main fractions inside the CTA. While the General Secretary Hugo Yasky’s fraction supported the government, the former General Secretary Víctor de Gennaro’s sector did not, and formed part of the opposition\(^{10}\). This conflict resolved itself through the constitution in 2006 of a mixed national leadership which went on to collapse in 2010, causing the CTA to split into two. Before this split, a division of roles within the CTA General Secretariat was agreed, and the CTA international relationships agenda became part

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\(^9\) In simultaneous, and as part of the same process, was also dissolved the Confederación Mundial del Trabajo (CMT, in English: World Confederation of Labor), and its regional body the Confederación Latinoamericana de Trabajadores (CLAT, in English: Latin American Labor Confederation).

\(^{10}\) While Hugo Yasky was Secretary General from 2006 to 2010, Victor de Gennaro occupied this position from 1992 to 2006.
of the non-government supportive sector, thereby increasingly detaching the CTA from the national government foreign policy since 2006.

*The consequences of the domestic alliance with the government*

Since 2006, the internal distribution of power in the CTA has led to the emergence of a Secretariat of International Relationships that has attempted *not* to follow state foreign policy. While this new position of the Secretariat has not yet produced any important outcomes, the consequences of the CTA’s domestic alliance with the government have become clear\(^\text{11}\). In 2010, this conflict generated two Secretary Generals: Pablo Micheli (Víctor de Gennaro’s fraction) and Hugo Yasky. Both consider themselves to have won the internal elections of 2010, leading to two parallel CTA organizations based on the position taken by each fraction *vis à vis* the national government.

The CTA division into two was not the result of the FTAA process, but, rather, it was a consequence of the series of decisions taken by the Kirchner government that pushed the de Gennaro’s fraction into passing to the opposition. The first reason for this was that the government has not legally recognized the CTA as a trade union, maintaining the CGT as the only legally existent trade union. This decision has been sustained even though the CTA

\(^{11}\) The internal tension produced by the link with the Kirchner government was mentioned in different interviews by Pedro Wasiejko, the last Secretary of International Relationships (2002-2006) and government supporter, and by Adolfo Aguirre (2006-2011), the current Secretary and an opponent of the government (both Secretaries were interviewed in December 2010). Both, Wasiejko and Aguirre believed that national dynamics are the most important factor explaining the modifications made to the Secretariat priorities and agenda.
General Secretariat has backed the government. The second reason was that Kirchner failed in his attempt to build a national-populist front that did not rely on the Peronist clientelistic organizations. Due to his failure in this, he redesigned the government coalition, giving more power to the traditional Peronist leaders. In addition, he took it away from those organizations that had been crucial during the resistance against neoliberalism in the 1990s-2000s, such as the *piqueteros* and the CTA. So, even though the rejection of the FTAA and the defense of the MERCOSUR as an alternative, were goals shared by both fractions inside the CTA, it was not the international level that determined the evolution of the CTA, but rather the domestic one.

The different interpretations of the Kirchner mandate also affected most of the main social movements in Argentina. Soon after the *People’s Summit*, the *Autoconvocatoria* was renamed as *Movimiento Sí de los Pueblos* (MOSIP, Yes Movement for the Peoples), but thereafter no major proposal was presented by this coalition, and its mobilization capacity decreased substantially. This was done in order to solve one of the main limitations of the *Autoconvocatoria* coalition, which was the huge collection of diverse actors unified by the rejection of what was interpreted as US imperialism, while lacking any common alternative project. As claimed by the CTA representative in the *Autoconvocatoria*/MOSIP: “*We started by identifying this issue... that it is not enough to resist [neoliberalism], and that the only way to definitively stop the domination project [of the US] is by having our own project. Therefore, we not only need to consider the ‘against’, but we also need to start thinking about the ‘pro’*” (Juan González, interviewed August 2005). This positive agenda was never

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12 The government has also ignored the International Labor Organization’s request to legally recognize the CTA.

13 Original in Spanish: “*Nosotros venimos con este planteo... que es que no alcanza con resistir, y que la única forma de parar definitivamente el proyecto de dominación es teniendo un proyecto propio.*”
agreed, as some members considered the Kirchner government as a solution to most of the claims of the MOSIP, while others considered that the goals had not yet been fulfilled by any government. Since 2007, the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner presidency has solidified this division in the CTA and most social movements.

*The emerging international agenda versus the continued stability of the MERCOSUR agenda*

In 2008, as a result of the dissolution of the ORIT, the CTA became a member of the new regional body for unions, the *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de las Américas* (CSA/TUCA). Simultaneously, the CTA’s active support for the MOSIP came to an end. This was as a result of the domestic dynamics that led to a lack of consensus inside the MOSIP, together with the creation of the new regional institution for trade unionism. The reasons for this change were, nationally, that the CTA was also increasingly discussing the best way of interpreting the Fernández de Kirchner presidency. And regionally, that the MOSIP was considered to be *de facto* linked to the anti-FTAA struggles of the ORIT. The CTA’s participation in the CSA/TUCA has been unrelated to the FTAA struggles, and up to

Por lo tanto, había que plantearse no solamente los contra, sino que había que empezar a plantearse los pro’.

14 The CSA (in English: *Trade Union Confederation of the Americas*, TUCA) is the regional body of the *Confederación Sindical Internacional* (CSI, in English: *International Trade Union Confederation*, ITUC). The ITUC/CSI was created in 2006.

15 As already said, the *Autoconvocatoría/MOSIP* connection with the ORIT did not mean that the members of the former shared the latter’s agenda or that any of the SMOs in the *Autoconvocatoría/MOSIP* were members of the ASC/HSA-ORIT. However, the *Autoconvocatoría/MOSIP* became part of the ASC/HSA and so was very closely associated with the ORIT, an organization that—as already said- was politically rejected by the CTA and that disappeared in 2006.
the present was only used for the coordination of a common continental strategy for unions during some state officials’ meetings on environmental issues. Moreover, the only relevant document that the Americas unions have to date written with the purpose of unifying their positions is the “Plataforma Laboral de las Américas” (“Latin American Labor Platform”), which was written for the 2005 Summit of the Americas of Mar del Plata, and which is being used to create common ground for the CSA/TUCA (cf. CTA, 2006; Godio, 2007). As a result, for all the CTA authorities interviewed, the CSA/TUCA has not yet played any relevant role. Since the 2009 WSF, the South-South informal coordination has been more important for the CTA. This has been carried out with the CUT of Brazil, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions of South Korea. These unions share an interest in a movement-type of trade unionism and they have unemployed and informal workers among their constituency. Although this South-South cooperation has not yet been much put into practice apart from one meeting in South Korea, these shared qualities are expected to be used to build an alliance that can counterbalance the US, German and British unions’ moderate stand regarding the reforms of world capitalism inside the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC/CSI).

Meanwhile, the CTA has preserved its single international relationships agenda where it participates actively in the CCSCS, and the MERCOSUR economic and social regional meetings. Due to the parallel nature of the CTA agendas, the increased tension inside the CTA has not affected the MERCOSUR agenda, which continues with its stable course of action, based on participation in state-controlled negotiations. Until recently, the conjoining of the CTA agenda with that of the national government (something that also happened in Brazil and Uruguay) has benefited a more dynamic process of negotiations and the integration of union members in governmental posts. However, this has implied that there was “… a subordination of the international politics to the national one” (Eduardo
Menajoski, interviewed December 2010). In addition, the CCSCS is the only supranational coordinator that integrates all the Southern Cone unions, notwithstanding affiliation. In other words, while the CSA/TUCA expanded the ORIT’s original number of unions, it still does not include those unions affiliated to the Communist World Federation of Trade Unions, and some independent unions like the Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional Trabajadores of Uruguay.

During this period, the CTA continued to be focused on participating in the Foro Consultivo Económico – Social of the MERCOSUR, and, in particular, in the Grupo de Alto Nivel (High Level Team) created in 2004. The Grupo de Alto Nivel was the first of its kind fashioned for the developing of common regional policies related to employment. The main task of the CCSCS has been to lobby for the creation of this space, and for the production of policies on this area. In 2006, the first big success was achieved with the elaboration of the “Estrategia MERCOSUR de Crecimiento del Empleo” (“MERCOSUR Strategy for Employment Growth”). In 2008, the CCSC developed a proposal for the creation of an Instituto del Trabajo del MERCOSUR (MERCOSUR Labor Institute) to further expand and implement common regional policies related to labor issues following the 2006 document. For the CTA, the MERCOSUR continued to represent a crucial area, with advances and setbacks, but based on a sustained agenda of diplomatic negotiations rather than contentious actions. Again in this period, the CTA participation in the MERCOSUR has followed a dynamic parallel to that of the international and national dynamics.

**Final words**

The CTA history of struggles against neoliberal regional processes was not a result of the constitution by this union of a specific regional agenda, but, on the contrary, is a consequence of its local alignment along with the national government’s regional agenda as part of the CTA’s domestic struggles against neoliberalism. However, the CTA’s nationally-focused level of action did not indicate a lack of an international relationships agenda. The international agenda of the CTA was, indeed, one which was active and sustained up to the present, though it was unrelated to the ASC/HSA-ORIT continental campaign.

Therefore, the question presented by the CTA is that of explaining how the same actor simultaneously plays at different levels, and how these multiple levels influence on each other. In this chapter I classified and defined a process of what I called ‘multiple parallel agendas’ at the national, continental and international levels. The argument of this chapter was that none of these agendas determined the pace of the other, but, instead, the CTA simultaneously developed all these agendas as differentiated processes. Inspired on von Bülow (2010: figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3), the ‘multiple parallel agendas’ of the CTA can be schematically presented as done in Figure 3.
Figure 3: The Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina ‘multiple parallel agendas’, 1996-2010

The Autoconvocatoria moved from periods of ‘periodic internalization’—when linking the ASC/HSA campaign with the national coalition agenda (2003 and 2005)—to phases of ‘sustained internalization’, when domestic political events determined many of the Autoconvocatoria’s dynamics (2002 and 2004). The People’s Summit of 2005 was a peak of ‘periodic transnationalization’ for the Autoconvocatoria and the CTA, as increased coordination with hemispheric actors was required while simultaneously mobilizing national actors. This combination effort was, however, not continued afterwards. The CTA agenda in the MERCOSUR has been part of a longer, parallel process, with pendular swings. On the one hand, it went through what I will call an ‘increased transnationalization’ when the CTA became more involved in the CCSCS (1996-2002), and on the other, there were periods of fairly strong ‘sustained internalization’, when the CTA mostly followed the government’s foreign policy agenda (2003-2010). This latter has, however, evolved only slowly and with
only a few small advances until recently. In fact, the domestic alliance with the Kirchner government has been more important in promoting the success of the anti-FTAA coalition than for its achievements in the MERCOSUR. Finally, the CSA/TUCA is a promising ‘sustained transnationalization’ agenda, but is, so far, too recent as a process. There have not yet been any relevant outcomes from the CSA/TUCA, apart from the important unification of most of the trade unions in the Americas. This is also related to a crucial change in the CTA. As a result of the creation of the ITUC/CSI, for the first time ever the CTA became affiliated to a trade unions international organization, abandoning more than 15 years of a non-alignment stance. Still, if any of these agendas should be considered as the most important one in the determination of the CTA pace and development, this is arguably the domestic one. The CTA is a deeply nationally rooted trade union that emerged as a result of domestic neoliberal state reforms in the 1990s, and this has been its main locus of action to the present. The widely debated possible end of the neoliberal period in Argentina is what has produced most of the main conflicts inside the CTA, as it has been faced with the dilemma of redefining its role.

In brief, this chapter provided a descriptional analysis of virtually parallel national, continental and international agendas. These agendas have sometimes taken place simultaneously, but their impact on each other has been less important than might have been expected, given the political results obtained on each level of action during this period. This chapter offers insights into the unions’ ongoing nationally focused agendas and levels of

17 Two crucial results are the collapse of neoliberalism in Argentina and the failure of the FTAA process. However, the success achieved in some important political struggles does not mean that the CTA was the only actor in these processes, or that the CTA intervention in them is the crucial element. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny that the CTA has been an active and important actor in these processes at the domestic level during the 1990s-2000s.
action, as it has also been observed for the CGT (Palomino, 2000; Badaró, 2002) and in other countries (Tarrow, 2005; Portela de Castro, 2007; von Bülow, 2009), and the stability of unions-state international agendas, notwithstanding the national/regional cycles/waves of protest that dominated Latin America in the 2000s.

References


