

TRADE UNIONS AND THE SOCIAL CLAUSE: A NORTH SOUTH UNION DIVIDE?

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ABSTRACT

The notion that the right to engage in international trade should be linked to respect for core labour standards has become one of the more contentious issues in the current globalisation debate. Within this debate conflicting claims have been made about the level of support for this stance found among unions in developing economies. This paper draws on surveys of the industry-level affiliates of two global union federations and of the national-level affiliates of the main international union confederation to assess the validity of these competing claims. We conclude that Southern unions - unions from developing economies - are strong supporters of linking international trade with recognition and enforcement of core labour standards.

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INTRODUCTION

Proposals to link workers rights with international trade have a long history (Charnovitz 1994: 30). These proposals centre round the proposition that core labour standards should be incorporated into a "social clause" in international trade agreements. With the renewal and intensification of debates around globalisation from the 1990s onwards, this issue of linking labour standards with trade has assumed increasing importance and immediacy. It has engendered ongoing and vigorous debate amongst academics, governments, policy makers, non-government organisations (NGOs) and unionists (Brown 2000: 1). Along with issues such as environmental protection it ranks among the key contentious issues within the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Tsogas (2001: 21-22) categorises the various protagonists in this debate into two groupings. The first group consists of neoclassical economists and free traders, major international employers and transnational corporations, third world governments, political and economic elites, and some NGOs. The arguments advanced by this group centre around two themes: that social clauses are a form of disguised protectionism for developed economies and that they are a form of neo-colonialism, imposing western values on other cultures. In the second group Tsogas includes neo-Keynesian and neo-institutionalist economists, international employers who have developed "ethical" codes of conduct, national and international trade unions, some developed country governments and a plethora of NGOs, including human rights and religious groups (Tsogas 2001: 22). This group advances arguments about human rights, economic efficiency and skills development.

Despite the inclusion of trade unions in this second group, it has been broadly asserted by opponents of a trade-labour link that many trade unions in developing economies – Southern unions - do not support the social clause campaign led by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). For example, according to the Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS), Indian unions are determinedly against any linkage between trade and labour within the WTO (CUTS 2001: 6). Newland (1999) also views the social clause debate as a North-South divide amongst workers and unions. She asserts that:

Workers in poorer and less-developed nations often view unions based in the advanced industrial countries as defenders of privilege. Their suspicions persist that such unions' insistence on increased wages, conformity with labour standards, and environmental safeguards for Third World workers is simply a disguised form of protectionism, designed to undercut the developing world's main source of comparative advantage: low labour costs (Newland 1999: 56-57).

Maitland (1999) has been more explicit declaring the trade-labour rights demand enjoys no support amongst the people or the trade unions of the developing nations. He weakens his case, however, by citing the views of Southern governments as his supporting evidence. That Southern governments oppose a social clause or a trade-labour linkage is not in question. For example, meeting in Bangalore, India, in August 1999, the Group of 15 developing countries (G-15) - including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Zimbabwe - rejected any linkage between trade and core labour standards, and decided to resolutely oppose any renewed attempt to raise the issue in the WTO (Bridges Weekly Trade News Digest 1999). The issue is whether unions in these countries similarly oppose linking international trade with a social clause.

Very little empirical research has been conducted on union attitudes to a social clause. In 1996 Egger and Schumperli conducted a survey of NGOs, research centres and trade unions of the South and of Eastern Europe. Of the 82 respondents, 67 were from the South but only 19 of these Southern respondent organisations were trade unions (Egger and Schumperli 1996). Thus, while the results revealed overwhelming support for the introduction of a social clause in international trade, the findings were representative more of the views of NGOs than of trade unions. Nevertheless, they provide some strong contra indication to the general assumption in the broad literature that the position advocated by developing country governments is also the position shared by the workers or their unions of these nations.

No subsequent empirical work appears to have taken place to elicit the views of workers in the South or their representative organisations on the issue of a trade-labour linkage. Accordingly, this paper analyses North-South union attitudes towards the demand for incorporation of core labour standards into the program of the WTO. Specifically, we test the validity of the perceived divide by comparing and contrasting the views and opinions of Southern union activists and leaders with those of their Northern colleagues. The paper begins with an overview of the arguments surrounding the trade-labour linkage debate and with some observations on the manner by which the protagonists in the trade-labour debate have advanced their respective positions. It then presents empirical data, based on surveys of union activists and leaders in the education and metal industries in more than 80 countries, and from ICFTU affiliates attending the International Labour Conference in Geneva in 2002.

THE TRADE-LABOUR RIGHTS DEBATE AND THE SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE

The single most common reason cited against the inclusion of labour standards in international trade agreements is the claim that it is a form of protectionism or “disguised protection” by the North designed to undermine developing countries comparative advantage, namely low wages (Tsogas 2001; Salazar-Xirinachs 2000; Fields 2002). Cheap labour is viewed as an unfair competitive advantage by developed countries, according to Panagariya (2000a), who claims that this is essentially 'the age-old pauper labor argument that labor unions have repeatedly used to seek protection for labor-intensive industries in developed countries'. Khor (1994; 2000) maintains that any form of linkage between labour issues and the WTO can only be detrimental to the interests of developing countries and workers in the South. He argues that such a linkage is likely to be employed by developed countries as a protectionist device against the products and services of developing countries, and may harm the overall economic interests of the South by eroding their international trade advantage, lower labour costs. These views are supported by Dubey (1996) and Shaffer (2000), with the latter referring to the demand for a trade-labour linkage as a ‘western perspective’ as it is ‘almost solely a demand of western nations and constituents’, evidenced by the fact that many developing country NGOs, often harsh critics of their government internally, steadfastly support them in their opposition to a trade-labour linkage in international fora.

Few authors opposed to linking trade and core labour standards refer to the views of organised labour. Rather the assumptions are made that either Southern unions oppose this linkage or that formal government statements represent the attitudes and opinions of workers in those countries. Two exceptions are Panagariya (1999, 2000a) and Bhagwati (2002). Panagariya argues that a large number of Northern unions, as well as those from the South, oppose a social clause. His evidence, however, seems to be that the ‘World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), with 110 million members in over 100 countries, opposes bringing labour standards into the WTO’ (Panagariya 2000b: 3). Panagariya’s reliance on WFTU to support his argument is problematic. Created in 1945, WFTU traditionally represented or was associated with communist trade unions from Soviet

and Central and Eastern European countries. Due to the communist ideological underpinnings of the WFTU, in 1949 western and non-communist affiliates formed a new international trade union movement, the ICFTU (Herod 1998: 167). While less partisan today, WFTU remains strongly anti-neo-liberal in policy terms (Herod 1998: 177). For example, its current *Policies and Priorities for Action* states that 'neo-liberal capitalist globalisation must be confronted and defeated (WFTU 2000a), and one of the resolutions adopted at its 14th World Congress in 2000 'reaffirms its total support to the workers and people of Korea in their struggle for defending and consolidating the socialist regime in the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] (WFTU 200b). WFTU is not opposed to the social clause *per se*, but rather is opposed to the whole process of globalisation and free trade, a position unlikely to be shared by Panagariya. Further, any WFTU claim to represent a large number of workers worldwide is highly questionable. As Herod (1998) and Waterman (2001) point out, many of the significant Southern union federations, such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT) Brazil, and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, as well as former WFTU affiliates from Lithuania, the Czech republic, the Slovak Republic, and Romania, have now affiliated with the ICFTU.

Bhagwati (2002) refers to the opposition to a social clause by the Indian trade union movement as if this somehow concludes the issue. However, he fails to discuss the nuances or differences of opinion within the Indian community on the social clause proposal. Certainly, in 1995, all the major Indian unions attending the 32nd Session of the Standing Labour Committee, endorsed the Indian government's opposition to a trade-labour linkage, support based upon the notion of anti-imperialism and national sovereignty (Nigam nd: 8). However, the debate leading to this statement of support revealed sharp differences within Indian unions. A background document by the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) in New Delhi, points out that:

Extremely differing perspectives were presented. But everyone listened [to] the other with appreciation and acknowledgement. Some preferred an outright rejection of the proposal to link labour standards with international trade. On the contrary, some favoured the strategic use of the proposal, to demand better standards for the workers. While the representatives of the organised sector were mostly for a rejection of [a] labour standard WTO linkage, the representatives of the unorganised sector was [sic] not as clear in their position. They were concerned about the blatant violations of labour rights in the informal sector. Some openly advocated the need for an external pressure to improve the working and living conditions of the workers in the informal sector (CEC, undated).

Also it would appear that there may have been some recent changes in Indian attitudes towards a social clause. For example, Hensman (2001) notes that, on the whole, the proposal for a workers' rights clause in WTO agreements has been greeted in a positive light by informal sector activists as these activists see little hope of securing rights for workers through purely domestic action, a view supported by Nigam (nd: 7). Palo *et al.* (2000: 383) refer to the Commission on Labour Standards and International Trade appointed by the Indian government to examine the issue of linkage. The Commission, headed by Subramanian Swamy, former Minister of Commerce, suggested that:

There are some desirable core labour standards which deserve to be uniformly enforced internationally for which trade sanctions are ultimately necessary to obtain serious compliance. India should give up its defensive approach and play a proactive role in global forums, particularly in the World Trade Organisation, in evolving a moderate 'Middle Path' concept of [the] social clause (Commission quoted in Palo *et al.* 2000: 383).

Further evidence of support for a social clause among Southern unions, along with some diversity of views, was also evident at the 1996 meeting of the Democratic Labour Caucus, in Manila. In a statement titled *A Conditional "Yes" on the Issue of Social Clause in Trade Agreements*, participants offered qualified support for a social clause. The statement rejected a framework of trade without social responsibility and favoured the inclusion of a workers' rights clause within the WTO. However, participants argued that such a development should be conditional on agreement being reached that only core labour standards would be linked to trade and that outright sanctions would not be allowed. Rather, trade incentives and trade preferences would be encouraged, and sufficient compliance time would be given to violators (SALINGAN 1996). The statement included twenty-six signatories from trade unions and labour organisations from Hong Kong, South Africa, the Philippines and Germany. Similar views were manifest in 1998 at a conference organised by SOLIDAR and the Spanish Trade Union Institute for Co-operation and Development (ISCOD). Held in Madrid, the conference explored the possibility of linking 'The World Trade Organisation and Core Labour Standards' and was attended by thirty-five participants from Northern and Southern NGOs and trade unions. At the conclusion of the debate, worker representatives from Senegal, Gabon, Mauritius, Malawi, Madagascar, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Tunisia and the Philippines expressed support for the social clause proposal whilst those from Egypt, Zimbabwe and Tanzania did not (SOLIDAR 1998).

The caution and diversity illustrated in these exemplars make it apparent that, during the 1990s, there was a range of views within the world labour movement. Opponents of a social clause have simply failed to recognise this diversity, a failing sometimes shared by its supporters. On occasion, labour leaders have shaded the existence of these divisions as is exemplified in the contribution to the trade-labour rights debate made by Jay Mazur, Chair of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) International Affairs Committee. When discussing labour's "new internationalism" Mazur speaks of the position of the labour movement on trade as if the views of the movement are homogenous. It is true he justifies this stance by noting that 'virtually every independent labor federation has endorsed the ICFTU's call for building labor rights into the global trading system' (Mazur 2000). However, he does not explain why the qualifier "virtually" is applied and he offers no empirical evidence to support his implied claim that there is a unity of views amongst the world's trade unionists. This is despite the fact that he clearly believes such evidence is important as is shown by his provision of survey data regarding the relevant views of the AFL-CIO membership.

Overall, a major problem within the trade-labour rights debate is the fact that many participants have failed to show that their perspective is compatible with that of Southern labour; in particular, few even attempt to provide empirical evidence to support their positions. A second major problem that we now briefly address is that much of the debate is characterised by strategic moves that appear designed primarily to capture the moral high ground. While this is an acceptable debating tactic, resort to morality in debate becomes a matter of concern when this is done in order to cloud the fact that one does not have the support of those for whom one asserts the right to speak. This is a particularly difficult problem for the opponents of a trade-labour rights link because organised labour has the advantage that it can at least claim that it directly represents working people. Moreover, organisations such as the ICFTU have been careful to contain their opponents' capacity to establish a sound moral argument by highlighting the fact that what they demand is respect for fundamental human rights. The campaign by the ICFTU and its affiliates relates only to core labour standards. As Dessing (2001: 3) points out:

Core labour standards are considered enabling human rights; they set standards concerning processes (e.g. freedom of association). They seek to realise the conditions reflected in the very strong assumptions underlying neo-classical economic models, namely freedom of

choice, equal bargaining power, and full information. Substantive labour standards, on the other hand, set standards concerning *outcomes* (e.g. actual wage levels or specific content of health and safety standards). Hence, unlike substantive labour standards, core labour standards do not bear on production costs (with the exception of forced labour and slavery). They do not impair a country's relative comparative advantage.

The care taken by the international union movement to make it clear that its trade demands are not quantitative makes it difficult for their opponents to argue from a high moral position. This is because they are forced to argue against procedures that aim to provide workers with basic bulwarks that can protect their humanity. The weakness of the critics' moral situation has, unfortunately, induced some of these contributors to adopt offensive arguments. Thus, Bhagwati has sought to give a moral basis to his position by putting himself forward as the defender of non-whites - he has asserted that the labour rights demand is in reality an attempt by Northern unionists to 'secure the "white man's gain"' (Bhagwati 1997: 501). Similarly, Krugman (2000) defends his opposition to a trade-labour rights link by arguing that Northern advocates of this reform are guilty of the sin of selfishness in that they would deny to the South the affluence they themselves enjoy. He observes that what the poor of the South do not want is 'affluent Westerners telling them ... what a terrible thing the modern world is'.

In an attempt to show that their support in the South extends beyond 'corporate interests and malign governments', and perhaps concerned by the growing support for a trade-labour rights link, a number of Southern intellectuals and NGOs opposed to linking trade and labour rights jointly issued a declaration in September 1999. Titled *Third World Intellectuals and NGOs' Statement Against Linkage (TWIN-SAL)* this document, initiated by Bhagwati, declared that the signatories unambiguously opposed any linkage of labour and environmental standards by the WTO or the inclusion of any labour provisions in trade agreements. The premise of their statement is that growth and prosperity are best achieved by unhindered free trade. Those opposed to this perspective are characterised as falling within two groups; 'the politically powerful lobbying groups that are protectionist' and 'the morally-driven human rights and other groups'. The humanitarian concerns of the latter are 'fulsomely applauded' but their means are rejected because the standards they promote have supposedly been chosen to highlight outrages in the South while violations of labour standards in the North are ignored.

The ICFTU responded to this document with a statement titled *Enough Exploitation is Enough: a response to the Third World Intellectuals and NGOs Statement Against Linkage (TWIN-SAL)*. Denying the charge of selectivity the ICFTU noted that the standards it emphasised were not determined arbitrarily but were 'the ones which have been endorsed explicitly time and time again by all UN member states in global conference'. (ICFTU 1999) In shaping its reply, the ICFTU took care to challenge the signatories' claim that they spoke for 'the poor in the South' by pointing out that, at that time, the ICFTU represented 124 million workers in 143 countries and that two-thirds of their affiliates were from developing nations. What makes this a telling point is that an examination of the TWIN-SAL statement reveals that, of the 99 signatories, 57 are associated with universities or research centres, the great majority being professors, including a number based in the North; 31 are professionals associated with NGOs in the areas of aid and development, consumer protection and the environment; 3 are lawyers, 2 are public servants, 2 are from church organisations, 1 a retired foreign secretary, 1 a Judge and 2 unknown. Clearly, those who signed the document opposing the introduction of instruments designed to protect the fundamental human rights of workers are decidedly of the middle class and include no workers or worker representatives.

Why the statement failed to provide any evidence that its views were shared by Southern labour is difficult to understand given that, as noted above, it is true some union bodies in the South have

expressed concern at the notion of a trade-labour rights link. One consideration that may explain this omission is that the number of union bodies that hold such views seems to be decreasing. Another problem is the fact that an increasing number of Southern unions have joined in issuing public statements endorsing a trade-labour rights linkage (see, for example, ORIT 1997, SALINGAN 1996).

The failure of the Southern based middle-class activists who oppose a trade-labour rights link to provide evidence that Southern workers endorse their views is also manifest in publications generated by their peers in the North. This omission was highlighted, for example, by an open letter published by the United States-based Academic Consortium on International Trade (ACIT), issued in July 2000. The letter was addressed to presidents of American universities that were imposing, or were considering responding to the anti-sweatshop campaign by imposing, Codes of Conduct on American firms that manufacture apparel in poor countries that bear university/college logos. By June 2001 some 352 academics had signed this letter with the signatories including a number of the leading members of the economics profession.

The letter charged that many institutions are establishing codes of conduct without:

- adequately consulting experts knowledgeable in the relevant fields,
- ensuring there exists monitoring bodies capable of ensuring an effective and unbiased regime of governance,
- confirming the views of the anti-sweatshop movement are representative of the views of governments, non-governmental organisations and workers in developing countries directly involved in the apparel industry,
- ensuring that activists and the main monitoring organizations understand that establishing codes of conduct may actually harm the very low-wage workers in developing countries they are trying to help.

The signatories declared that 'decisions on these matters by universities and colleges should be made only after careful research, discussion, and debate in a manner appropriate to informed decision-making'. In concluding their letter, the ACIT signatories invited the recipients to visit the ACIT web site where 'further information on this and other issues involved in the anti-sweatshop campaign is posted'. As the ACIT invitation suggests, a visit to its web site is indeed illuminating. However, this is not necessarily in the ways implied by the signatories, for one of the most revealing aspects of the site is the fact that ACIT does not include any endorsements of its views from labour organisations. In short, as with TWIN-SAL, it is the views of the middle class and of intellectuals that are presented, while the opinions of workers - whose rights are being debated - are simply missing.

In response to ACIT's lobbying of university administrators the US-based *Scholars Against Sweatshop Labor* (SASL) produced a statement discussing the anti-sweatshop movement on college and university campuses in the United States. The overarching aim of this body is simple:

[T]o make a contribution toward eliminating 'lives of fines and beatings' for workers throughout the world, in the same way that previous generations of activists fought to eliminate slave labor, child labor, and the 12-hour workday. The anti-sweatshop movement wants workers worldwide to be able to work under decent conditions, exercise basic human rights, and earn at least decent minimum wages (SASL 2001).

Released on October 22, 2001, the SASL document was sent to the chief administrative officers of more than 1,600 colleges and universities in the US together with endorsements of some 434

scholars. It highlights a number of key problems with the ACIT document but most importantly for our purposes it takes up the charge that the views of the anti-sweatshop movement are not representative of the views of workers in the developing countries. The SASL signatories replied to this charge by noting that at least one of the key monitoring bodies that SASL believes may be capable of providing an effective monitoring service - the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC) - has governing and advisory boards comprised of academics, university administrators, labour rights activists and NGOs from developing countries, and is committed to maintaining transparent procedures for monitoring firms and disclosing the results of their inspections. An examination of the WRC website confirms that on its Advisory Council sit worker representatives from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, South Africa and Hong Kong. In contrast to ACIT, these activists do appear to have support among worker representatives in the South.

Given this background of vigorous debate on a trade-labour standards link, of claim and counter claim, and the lack of empirical evidence, we decided to research the views of trade unions, particularly the views of Southern unions. While it would obviously be of great value to directly assess the attitudes of workers, such a task was beyond our resources. Instead, we have come as close as we can to this goal by focusing on the views of full- and part-time union officials and activists using the medium of Global Union Federations (GUF), supplemented by the views of ICFTU affiliates. GUFs, known until 2001 as International Trade Secretariats, group together unions from the same industry on a worldwide basis. The next section of this paper reports on the results of multilingual questionnaire surveys administered to delegates to the world congresses of two of these GUFs, the Education International (EI) congress held in Jomtien, Thailand, in July 2001 and the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) congress held in Sydney, Australia, in November 2001. The attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of delegates regarding the inclusion of core labor standards in international trade agreements were the focus of these questionnaires. In addition, twenty-four interviews were conducted with Congress delegates, mainly full-time union leaders from Southern countries. We decided to research these GUFs for two reasons, one representative and one pragmatic. The representative reason was that this choice facilitated the collection of views across both type of worker (blue-collar and white-collar) and sector (public sector and private sector). The pragmatic reason was that both GUFs were scheduled to hold their world congresses during calendar 2001, thus facilitating access to worldwide representative delegates. Combined, the two GUFs, the largest of the ten such organisations, represent over 500 national unions with a combined membership of close to 50 million unionists. To supplement this industry focus, we also researched the same issues at the international level of the union movement. The same multilingual questionnaire, with slightly varied or more generalised questions allowing response from all sectors, was administered to all affiliate delegates of the ICFTU at the 90th International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2002. In contrast to the EI and IMF surveys, the ICFTU affiliated unions covered all industry sectors, including metals, textiles, woodwork, mining and transport. In addition, 6 interviews were conducted with conference delegates, including unionists and ILO employee representatives.

THE SURVEY

EI is a world wide trade union organisation of educationalists, whose 24.5 million members represent all sectors of education from pre-school to university. It covers 304 national trade unions and associations in 155 countries and territories. EI has regional offices located in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean. It holds consultative NGO status with UNESCO, the ILO, the World Bank, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Bureau of Education (IBE), and the United Nations' Economic and Social Council. Prior to administering the questionnaire survey in Thailand, draft copies were provided to EI and it's Australian affiliates, the

Australian Education Union (AEU) and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). A number of officials provided feedback on the questionnaire contents. There were 1181 participants at the Congress classified as follows: 647 delegates, 393 non-delegate union members, 25 accompanying persons, 22 Executive Board Members and 34 invited guests. The survey was carried out only amongst the delegates, of whom 244 completed useable questionnaires, a response rate of 38 per cent.

The IMF represents the interests of around 24.8 million metalworkers in 207 unions in 101 countries. It covers all sectors of the metals and manufacturing industries including automotive and mechanical engineering, iron and steel, electrical and electronics, shipbuilding and airframe manufacturers. The IMF has regional and project offices in East and Southern Africa, East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, Central and East Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and Mexico. As with EI, draft copies of the questionnaire were provided to the IMF and its main Australian affiliate, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU). Both organisations provided feedback on the contents. Overall, the contents of both the EI and IMF questionnaires were virtually the same, with variations to take into account different nomenclature and structures. There were 457 participants at the IMF Congress classified as follows: 392 delegates, 18 speakers/guests, 18 observers, 20 Secretariat and 9 regional office representatives. The survey was carried out only amongst the delegates, Secretariat and regional office representatives, 421 in all of whom 252 completed useable questionnaires, a response rate of 60 per cent.

Table 1 provides some data on both EI and IMF questionnaire respondents. In terms of the key variable, North-South representation, 112 EI respondents were from the North and 132 from the South while the equivalent data for IMF were 191 and 61 respondents. The South categorisation was based largely upon country membership of the G-77, the group of countries classified as developing economies, but, based on economic criteria, three non-G-77 countries (Croatia, Bulgaria and Latvia) were also grouped in the South. Remaining respondents were classified as Northern countries. Overall, 24 countries from the North and 61 countries from the South were represented among respondents.

The survey instrument consisted of 24 questions. Part 1 sought to ascertain a range of personal information regarding respondents' gender, educational level, length of employment with their union, what position they held in the union and size of the union. In the more detailed Part 2, questions were designed to ascertain the respondents' views on a range of issues related to core labor standards and international trade agreements.

The ICFTU is the main global confederation of national trade unions centres, each of which links together the trade unions of the various countries. Established in 1949, in 2002 it has 225 affiliated organisations in 148 countries and territories on all five continents, with a total membership of 157 million. Two thirds of ICFTU affiliates consist of worker representative organisations from Southern countries. The ICFTU has three major regional organisations covering the Asia-Pacific region, the African region and the Americas. It cooperates closely with the ILO, has consultative status with a range of United Nations bodies, and maintains contact with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. The ICFTU survey was conducted at a meeting of affiliates held during the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2002. As only a minority of affiliates were represented at that meeting, questionnaires were sent to non-attendees. In total, 77 useable questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 34 per cent. However, presumably for reasons of confidentiality, nine respondents did not indicate their country of location. Of those who did identify their country, 44 respondents were from Southern countries while 24 were from Northern countries.

DATA

This section provides data on the views and attitudes of survey questionnaire respondents on three key, inter-related issues:

- the meaning of core labor standards and the perceived need for and effectiveness of such standards;
- the levels, mechanisms and enforcement measures for the future implementation of core labor standards, including the use of both positive and negative measures to ensure implementation; and
- the contention that core labor standards are a form of protectionism pursued by developed economies.

Throughout, data are discussed first from the two GUF surveys and are presented to allow identification of inter-regional and inter-union differences.

Meaning and need

There has been a long-term debate on what exactly constitutes core labor standards. For this research, we utilized the now widely accepted International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition covering four areas that have been deemed as fundamental human rights. These areas, and the relevant ILO Conventions, are:

- Freedom of association and the right to organise (Conventions 87 and 98)
- Freedom from forced labor and abolition of forced labor (Conventions 29 and 105)
- Freedom from discrimination (Conventions 100 and 111)
- Minimum age for employment/elimination of child labor (Conventions 138 and 182)

An overwhelming majority of GUF respondents, 94 percent, accepted this definition. The lowest level of support, at 90 per cent, was found among EI Northern respondents. An equally overwhelming majority of 95 per cent of respondents held the view that provisions are needed in international trade agreements to protect core labor standards. Turning to the future, 80 per cent of respondents held the view that trade standards could be an effective mechanism for ensuring that core labor standards were not undermined. Statistically significant differences (chi-square $p < .01$) existed between the 74 per cent of EI respondents and the 87 per cent of IMF respondents who held this view, but not between Southern and Northern respondents. ICFTU respondents were even more supportive of a trade-labor standards link. Some 97 per cent of these national-level respondents accepted the definition of core labour standards, 97 per cent believed that a social clause was needed in international trade agreements while 92 per cent perceived that such a clause could be an effective mechanism for ensuring that core labour standards were not undermined.

We sought GUF respondents' perceptions of the levels of support for incorporating these core labor standards into international trade agreements among both members and other officials of their national unions, and among employers and their national governments. Table 2 presents the means (1= very weak support, 5= very strong support) and standard deviations for these measures; for comparison purposes, respondents own views are also reported in this format. Respondents perceived very strong levels of support for such incorporation among both their fellow union officials and also, crucially, among their union members. This level of support was found across both EI and IMF groupings and Northern and Southern respondents. Conversely, respondents' views were that employers would not support a trade - labor standards link: all sub-groupings of respondents rated employer levels of support below the scale mid-point of three. Perceptions of

national government support was somewhat higher and, overall, averaged exactly the scale mid-point; inter-union perceptions varied with EI respondents being significantly more likely ($p < .01$) to perceive government support for this linkage.

Table 3 details the mean levels of support for a trade-labour standards link perceived by ICFTU respondents. A clear dichotomy exists: respondents overwhelmingly perceived strong support among their national federation, their federations' officials and their federations' affiliates while, similar to GUF respondents, employers were perceived as being strongly opposed. National governments were again perceived as, overall, being somewhat neutral; however, a key, statistically significant ($p < .01$) difference existed between the views of Northern and Southern respondents, with the latter group perceiving significantly less support among Southern governments.

Levels, mechanisms and enforcement measures

Core labor standards can be negotiated and applied at different levels of interaction, ranging up to multilateral agreements. Table 4 reports GUF respondents' views on possible implementation at four such levels. All four possible levels drew significant majority support, highlighting the strong underlying support for the application of core labor standards. Most support was evident for the application of standards at the institutional level, for example, agreements negotiated between trade unions and companies; at the multilateral level, for example, through an organisation such as the World Trade Organisation; and at the regional level, for example, within the European Union or ASEAN. The bilateral level, agreements between two countries, was the least supported but still attracted significant majority support. ICFTU respondents similarly strongly supported regulation of trade labour standards at all levels (see table 5), with multilateral regulation (Northern respondents) and institutional regulation (Southern respondents) receiving the highest level of support.

Overall, action at the multilateral level drew the strongest support from both ICFTU and GUF respondents. Given current political debates about possible roles for the ILO and/or the WTO, we explored this issue of multilateral interaction in more depth. Specifically, we asked which bodies would respondents consider to be the most effective for enforcement of core labor standards. Table 6 highlights the perceived attractiveness of the ILO or a combined/linked ILO/WTO body. Little support existed for options that did not involve the ILO.

The issue of enforcement is at the very heart of the debate about labour standards. Given the traditional role of the ILO in this regard, the questionnaire sought respondents' views on how that body, if it were to be given formal responsibility for enforcement, should operationalise this enforcement. The first three sections of Tables 7 and 8 details these views while the remainder of the table reports respondents' views on the possible usage of a broader range of powers.

Standards as a form of protectionism

Finally, tables 9 and 10 report the perceptions of survey respondents on the contention that labour standards are a form of developed country protectionism. Little support was evident for this proposition with all sub-groupings scoring well below the scale mid-point. Respondents from the South were, however, more likely to hold such views ($p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The data show very clearly that there is now little disagreement among unionists as to what constitutes core labor standards. Virtually all GUF and ICFTU respondents agreed with the ILO

definition; and of that small percentage that disagreed, most wished to add one or two extra ILO Conventions. A much more contentious issue, indeed a key issue as discussed earlier, in the debate on the incorporation of labor standards into international trade agreements is the level of support among unionists, particularly Southern unionists, for such incorporation. Our data are unequivocal: an overwhelming majority of respondents, 95 per cent of GUF respondents and 97 per cent of ICFTU respondents, held the view that provisions are needed in trade agreements to protect core labor standards. Further, of the remaining respondents, most were unsure rather than opposed. This level of support was evident across all sub-groups including the two industries and regions. The "lowest" level came from IMF Southern respondents; even among this sub-group, however, 92 per cent of respondents favoured incorporation of labor standards into trade agreements. Overall, there can be no doubt that, in both Northern and Southern countries, officials and activists at the federation level and within education and metal unions strongly perceive the need for core labor standards to be included in international trade agreements.

Further, respondents indicated not only their own personal support but also their perceptions that their fellow union officials, their union members and, for ICFTU respondents, their cross-industry affiliate unions also strongly supported such a development. In contrast, all groups were less sanguine about government or, particularly, employer support for such a development (see tables 2 and 3). Further analysis of the GUF data, based on a series of 2 X 2 between-subjects ANOVAs, with independent variables being union type (EI, IMF) and region of origin (South, North), did indicate some statistically significant differences between sub-groups. Small but differences existed between the views of EI and IMF Southern respondents with regard to their own beliefs, and their perceptions of other union officials and of member attitudes ($p < .01$), with the former more likely to hold and to perceive positive attitudes. Nevertheless, the views and perceptions of the relatively lower-scoring IMF Southern respondents offered very strong support for linking trade with labor standards, with mean scores well in excess of four on the five-point scale. Inter-union differences emerged with regards to perceptions of both employer and government support for incorporation: EI respondents were more likely ($p < .01$) to perceive employer and government support; no significant differences emerged in a North-South comparison. Overall, a clear difference existed between the views of GUF respondents and their perceptions of the attitudes of their fellow union officials and their members on the one hand, and respondents' perceptions of the views of government and employers on the other hand. ICFTU respondents held similar perceptual differences. Neither governments nor, particularly, employers are perceived as supporters of linking trade and labour standards, a linkage strongly supported by respondents. Clearly, for all survey respondents, governments and employers are not perceived as representing union movement views and opinions on the issue of core labour standards being linked to international trade.

Respondents indicated significant levels of support for attempts to enforce labour standards at four different levels of interaction (see tables 4 and 5). Analysis of GUF respondents' views showed that, at the regional level, there was a statistically significant divergence ($p < .01$) between the views of the more supportive Northern respondents and their Southern counterparts. Also, EI respondents supported bilateral approaches more than did IMF respondents ($p < .05$). Among ICFTU respondents, one major difference ($p < .01$) emerged between Southern and Northern respondents: unions from the South held much stronger views that action to enforce labour standards should occur at the institutional level. Once again, however, these differences were a matter of degree and, overall, regulation of labour standards at each of the four levels were supported by significant majorities of each sub-group of respondents.

The ILO, either on its own or linked with the WTO, was clearly the enforcement mechanism preferred by all respondents. Again, some differences emerged between sub-groups – a stand alone ILO enforcement role was preferred more by EI and Southern respondents ($p < .01$) – but the overall

preference for ILO involvement was very clear. Equally clear was the very low levels of support for the WTO to be the sole enforcement institution for core labor standards, or indeed for any mechanism that excluded the ILO.

A perennial issue of discussion and contention with regards to labour standards is that of enforcement. Should this be via "positive" measures - the carrot, or "negative" measures – the stick, or indeed both? Should the traditional moral suasion role of the ILO be replaced with more coercive powers, *a-la* the WTO with its intellectual property rights? Respondents were presented with the scenario of the ILO being given responsibility for the enforcement of core labour standards. Data in tables 7 and 8 show that a number of possible ILO measures - strengthening the complaints system, increasing on-the-ground monitoring of core standards and making aid conditional upon compliance with core conventions - received strong support from respondents. Importantly, there were no differences in levels of support between Southern and Northern respondents.

Turning to the issue of compliance in more general terms, the remainder of the data in table 7 and 8 details respondents' views on the possible use of a range of both positive and negative measures. GUF respondents were less enthusiastic about these possible negative measures than they were about measures applied by the ILO. Equally, some significant differences emerged as between measures. A higher level of support was evident for the possibility of denying countries without core labour standards access to markets; inter-regional differences were statistically significant ($p < .01$) with Northern respondents more supportive of this strategy. Much less support was evident for either an increase in general tariffs or a removal or reduction of development aid to such countries; IMF Southern respondents were opposed to this last strategy but the difference marginally fell outside our significance level ($p = .056$). Broadly, there was little opposition to the potential use of positive measures. Southern respondents were more supportive of both a reduction in general tariffs and the granting of preferences ($p < .05$); however, approximately one-fifth of respondents did not, somewhat surprisingly, have an opinion on this issue. Nevertheless, overall majorities of respondents and of each sub-group supported the use of positive incentives as a method of encouraging the adoption of core labor standards. Clearly, GUF respondents differentiated between different levels of punishment for non-compliance with core standards, with more support emerging for the "carrot" approach. ICFTU respondents, while similarly and strongly favouring the carrot approach, were also prepared to wield the stick by supporting a removal of preferential tariffs and denying market access to countries which did not respect core labour standards. Importantly, few differences exist between Northern and Southern ICFTU respondents. Indeed, only on one measure - reduction in general tariffs, more favoured by Southern respondents - was there a statistically significant ($p < .01$) difference.

Is the demand for core labour standards a form of western protectionism? When governments of the South or intellectuals or NGOs make the claim that trade unions in developed economies support labour standards because they are a more subtle form of job protection than other devices such as tariffs, are they supported by Southern unionists? Only 14 per cent of GUF respondents support this contention; however, an additional 24 per cent of respondents were unsure as to its validity. Statistically significant inter-regional differences existed with Southern respondents more likely to support this view ($p < .01$). Similarly, more Southern ICFTU respondents held this view ($p < .05$). Obviously, as discussed earlier in the literature review, there is some degree of apprehension, some degree of suspicion among some Southern unionists that labour standards could be utilised as a form of job protectionism in developed economies. Equally obviously, this is very much a minority view.

Intra-south differences

Much of the thrust of our analysis so far has concentrated on exploring potential differences between Northern and Southern respondents. As the analysis progressed, what became clear was that relatively few differences exist between these two groups. Indeed, within some sub-groups, particularly EI respondents, where differences do exist, Southerners in fact tend to hold views more supportive of a trade-labour rights link. Obviously the G-77 countries comprise a wide range of economies. Accordingly, to tease out any differences that might exist within such a large bloc of countries, and particularly to test for any "intra-South" differences, we analysed the GUF data from three sub-groups of geographically-linked countries: Africa (19 countries, 84 respondents), Asia (12, 48) and Central and South America (14, 25). Combined, these respondents accounted for 81 per cent of all Southern respondents. We then re-ran our analysis among the sub-headings outlined above to assess the extent of intra-south differences. For reasons of space we do not report such data in full here. Briefly, however, no statistically significant differences were found between the views of respondents in these three intra-south groups with regard to perceptions that:

- The four ILO Conventions comprise core labor standards,
- provisions are needed in international trade agreements to protect core labor standards,
- trade agreements could be an effective mechanism to ensure that core labor standards are not undermined,
- members and officials of their unions support the incorporation of standards into trade agreements,
- labour standards should be applied at multilateral, regional, bilateral and institutional level,
- the full range of possible ILO enforcement mechanisms be utilised,
- both positive and negative enforcement measures be used,
- employers would not support core labour standards, and
- core labour standards were not a form of protectionism by developed economies.

Small but significant differences – at the .05 level - did exist with regard to:

- making development aid conditional upon respect for core labour standards (American respondents strongly supported such a linkage),
- the perceived level of government support for incorporating standards into trade agreements (Asian respondents were more likely to perceive their governments as being less supportive), and
- their own and their perceived level of union official and union membership support for incorporating standards into trade agreements (Asian respondents were less supportive and more likely to perceive their fellow union officials and their members as being less supportive).

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, and particularly following the establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1995, there has been a significant and growing debate about the role of labour issues in international trade. A specific focus has been the demand by sections of civil society for the recognition and incorporation of core labour standards into international trade agreements. In this debate, governments, intellectuals and various Non-Government Organisations, have taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of workers and various assertions have been made about the attitudes and policies of unions. The only empirical research on this issue concluded that Southern unions, along with NGOs and a number of research centres, supported linking trade with labour standards. This paper has built on this research and drawn on the views of a wide range of union officials and activists to inject an empirically-grounded perspective into the debate on this contentious issue of labour standards and trade. In particular, our research set out to test the contention that unions from

the G-77 countries, the developing economies, hold attitudes and policies different to those of their Northern counterparts and are opposed to linking standards and trade. Our findings are unequivocal: there exists overwhelming support among union officials and delegates to the EI and IMF world congresses and among affiliates of the ICFTU, whether from the developing world of the South or the developed world of the North, to actively link standards and trade. Some inter-union and inter-region differences do exist but most are relatively small in magnitude; frequently, all that differed was the intensity and level of support for this linkage. Our findings show that governments, NGOs or groupings who claim to speak for Southern workers and unionists, and who oppose linking labour standards and trade, speak neither for teacher nor metal unionists, nor for union federations. We acknowledge that our findings are restricted to the views of these groups of unionists. We note, however, that the two Global Union Federations have traditionally played leadership roles in their various national industrial relations systems and that, combined, these union organisations represent 50 million workers. Further, the ICFTU survey presents the views of 44 Southern countries union federations, the representative bodies for unions covering all industries. A strong *a priori* case can be made that similar views are held by all Southern unions. At the very least, the findings raise the obvious question: if the views of two groups of key unionists and of a number of union federations are being misrepresented, as is so clearly shown by our research, is it not likely to also be true that the attitudes and opinions of other groups of unionists are similarly misrepresented?

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TABLE 1
Data on GUF questionnaire respondents

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>EI</i>		<i>IMF</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	
No. of Respondents	112	132	191	61	496
Gender (% female)	45%	24%	12%	15%	23%
Status (% full-time)	68%	51%	73%	59%	65%
Mean Age (years)	52	47	49	48	49
Median Union tenure	11-15 years	11-15	11-15 years	11-15	11-15 years

TABLE 2
GUF respondents' views and perceptions of the attitudes of union official and members, employers and government towards incorporating core labor standards into international trade agreements
(mean and standard deviation: 1=low support, 5=high support)

<i>Group</i>	<i>EI</i>		<i>IMF</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	
Respondents	4.7 (0.6)	4.7 (0.5)	4.7 (0.6)	4.4 (1.0)	4.7 (0.7) (N=469)
Other union officials	4.5 (0.6)	4.6 (0.5)	4.5 (0.6)	4.2 (1.1)	4.5 (0.7) (N=457)
Union members	4.3 (0.7)	4.6 (0.7)	4.4 (0.7)	4.3 (1.0)	4.4 (0.7) (N=464)
Employers	2.8 (1.1)	2.7 (1.3)	2.7 (1.2)	2.4 (1.1)	2.8 (1.2) (N=459)
National governments	3.3 (1.1)	3.3 (1.2)	2.8 (1.3)	2.8 (1.3)	3.0 (1.3) (N=453)

TABLE 3
ICFTU respondents' views and perceptions of the attitudes of their national federation, its official and affiliates, employers and government towards incorporating core labor standards into international trade agreements
(mean and standard deviation: 1=low support, 5=high support)

<i>Group</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Total</i>
My Federation	4.9 (0.4)	4.8 (0.5)	4.8 (0.4) (N=65)
Affiliates	4.8 (0.4)	4.6 (0.6)	4.7 (0.6) (N=65)
Union officials	4.8 (0.4)	4.7 (0.6)	4.8 (0.5) (N=64)
Employers	2.0 (1.0)	2.0 (1.2)	2.0 (1.1) (N=63)
National governments	3.6 (1.1)	2.6 (1.1)	3.0 (1.2) (N=65)

TABLE 4

GUF respondents' views on the levels at which trade labor standards should be regulated (%)

<i>Level</i>	<i>EI</i>		<i>IMF</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	
Multilateral	96	92	93	88	93 (N=461)
Regional	97	85	92	81	90 (N= 409)
Bilateral	76	80	69	60	72 (N= 387)
Institutional	97	92	92	92	93 (N= 417)

TABLE 5

ICFTU respondents' views on the levels at which trade labor standards should be regulated (%)

<i>Level</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Total</i>
Multilateral	100	95	97 (N=64)
Regional	95	91	93 (N= 54)
Bilateral	85	84	85 (N= 52)
Institutional	78	100	92 (N= 62)

TABLE 6

Total respondents' views on the most effective multilateral mechanism to enforce trade labour links (%)

<i>Level</i>	<i>EI</i>		<i>IMF</i>		<i>ICFTU</i>	
	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	34	45	22	31	52	46
World Trade Organisation (WTO)	4	3	14	5	0	2
Create a link between the ILO and WTO	41	43	43	45	36	45
Create a new organisation or institution	7	2	11	5	0	2
Other (including a combination of the above)	14	7	10	14	13	5

TABLE 7

GUF respondents' levels of support for possible enforcement and compliance mechanisms (mean and standard deviation: 1=low support, 5=high support)

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>EI</i>		<i>IMF</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	
The ILO complaints system should be strengthened	4.6 (0.6)	4.6 (0.7)	4.5 (0.7)	4.5 (0.7)	4.5 (0.7) (N=458)
"On-the-ground" monitoring should increase	4.5 (0.8)	4.6 (0.6)	4.6 (0.6)	4.6 (0.6)	4.6 (0.6) (N= 436)
ILO aid, such as technical assistance, should be made conditional upon compliance with the core ILO Conventions	4.3 (0.8)	4.2 (1.1)	4.3(0.9)	4.5 (0.8)	4.3 (0.9) (N=432)
Removal of preferential tariffs	3.9(1.0)	3.9 (1.2)	3.9 (1.1)	3.4 (1.3)	3.8 (1.1) (N= 396)
Denial of access to the market for the incriminating product	4.2 (0.9)	4.0 (1.2)	4.2 (1.0)	3.6 (1.3)	4.1 (1.1) (N= 383)
Increase in general tariffs	3.5 (1.0)	3.4 (1.3)	3.5(1.1)	3.5 (1.3)	3.4 (1.2) (N= 350)
Removal or reduction of development aid	3.2 (1.2)	3.4 (1.5)	3.4 (1.2)	2.9 (1.4)	3.3 (1.3) (N= 383)
Grant of preferences	3.7(1.0)	4.2 (0.9)	4.0 (0.9)	4.1 (1.0)	4.0 (0.9) (N=418)
Reduction in general tariffs	3.5 (1.1)	4.0 (1.0)	3.6 (1.2)	3.7 (1.2)	3.7 (1.1) (N= 379)

TABLE 8

ICFTU respondents' levels of support for possible enforcement and compliance mechanisms (mean and standard deviation: 1=low support, 5=high support)

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Total</i>
The ILO complaints system should be strengthened	4.8 (0.4)	4.8 (0.4)	4.8 (0.4) (N=58)
"On-the-ground" monitoring should increase	4.7 (0.5)	4.7 (0.5)	4.7 (0.5) (N=61)
ILO aid, such as technical assistance, should be made conditional upon compliance with the core ILO Conventions	4.2 (1.0)	4.4 (1.1)	4.3 (1.0) (N=60)
Removal of preferential tariffs	4.7 (0.7)	4.4 (0.9)	4.5 (0.8) (N= 49)
Denial of access to the market for the incriminating product	4.5 (0.9)	4.2 (1.2)	4.3 (1.1) (N= 52)
Increase in general tariffs	3.8 (1.1)	3.6 (1.4)	3.7 (1.3) (N= 44)
Removal or reduction of development aid	3.7 (1.2)	3.3 (1.5)	3.5 (1.4) (N= 50)
Grant of preferences	4.5 (0.7)	4.5 (0.6)	4.5 (0.6) (N=59)
Reduction in general tariffs	3.9 (0.9)	4.6 (0.6)	4.3 (0.8) (N= 49)

TABLE 9

GUF respondents' perceptions on the use of labor standards as a form of protectionism (mean and standard deviation: 1=low support, 5=high support)

<i>Contention</i>	<i>EI</i>		<i>IMF</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	
Incorporating core labor standards into international trade agreements is really only a form of protectionism by "western" countries	2.2 (0.9)	2.6 (1.2)	2.2(1.0)	2.6(1.1)	2.3 (1.1) (N=446)

TABLE 10

ICFTU respondents' perceptions on the use of labor standards as a form of protectionism (mean and standard deviation: 1=low support, 5=high support)

<i>Contention</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Total</i>
Incorporating core labor standards into international trade agreements is really only a form of protectionism by "western" countries	1.5 (0.5)	2.9 (1.1)	2.4 (1.1) (N=61)