the space to enlarge the multisectoral coalitions to more radical groups and this made it impossible to continue a combined use of different tactics. Launching the Struggle Campaign on the FTAA, TUs practically stopped participating in any negotiation and the focus was only on mobilizations. All these mobilizations against the FTAA, considered as an instrument of the neoliberal policies in the region, contributed to a political change of perception about these policies. This clearly was a contribution that favored the political changes that occurred. In this sense we can see a direct link between these mobilizations and the political change that later was decisive to block the FTAA negotiations”.

3.7 Developing a vision for a new trade system: fair trade and regional integration

We already mentioned how trade unions in the Americas never considered the instrument of FTAs as a good vehicle to implement the trade policies they wanted. They promote, with varying accents and voices, the need to reshape trade rules in a completely different way. Some trade unions explicitly use the term fair trade to address the need to reshape trade rules in a way that could prevent a race to the bottom for workers. As explained by Thea Lee, AFL-CIO representative, “We have never said that trade is in itself a bad thing. We live in a global economy and we all understand that we are going to continue to live in a global economy for the foreseeable future. So goods, services, capital and people are going to continue to cross national borders. The question is not how do we stop all the goods from coming across the border, and we don’t necessarily want to keep the tariffs high. But we don’t want to take our tariffs down, giving better access to the US markets, only to have our companies moving jobs to a place where workers can not exercise their basic rights, where toxic wastes are offloaded in the rivers or in the ocean, in a way that companies make money at the expense of ordinary people, workers and communities. What we always tried is to make a distinction between corporate dominated trade rules and socially oriented trade rules. Fair trade is kind of a short term to say that we need a framework of rules for the global economy that is fair to people”65. In other words these trade unions do not accept the idea that the final goal of trade liberalization should be to take every tariff down to zero. “There may be some social reason why you want a tariff, you may want to protect strategic industries. Every country should have the ability to do that and the goal in trade is that it should be done in a way which is fair to everybody. All countries should be able to use

65 Thea Lee, Interview on March 16th, 2009, by Bruno Ciccgllione
safeguard protections, be able to protect consumers and labor rights. So obviously we start it with labor rights, we start it with ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at work, the core labor rights that the international community has reached consensus on: freedom of association, right to organize, prohibition against the worst forms of child labor and discrimination in employment. We say that every worker in the world deserves those rights and any trade agreement, trade liberalization or trade law should respect those rights. So every time, for example, that a government tries to gain a competitive advantage by violating workers fundamental human rights, we would argue that our country needs to be able to say 'we are not going to import the products with child slave labor', because we don’t want to encourage it, and we don’t want to make money of your choice to violate rights. So I guess what we mean by fair trade is to take certain principles”. One of the problems of this approach is on the one hand the criticism we already mentioned about focusing on “core labor standards”66, and on the other hand the difficulty to extend this approach to other areas, such as environmental issues: “In the environmental front it’s a little bit harder to identify than in labor, because there is not a single set of core standards (...). As international community we have to be able to identify first of all the fundamental international consensus principles that should be more important than trade flow or profit, or multinational corporate rights, and being able to incorporate them in our trade rules. The price for trade should not be having to give up our own democracy. We have democratic scope and rule making and national regulations, but we don’t have an international government that makes those rules. We don’t have an international minimum wage, international environmental protection etc. So we need to figure out the interface where individual countries have the right to set higher standards and not be penalized in the global economy for setting high standards with respect to legitimate goals on environment, consumer and labor protections”67.

As the coalition building processes created to confront the FTAs developed, a wider vision started to emerge, although with contradictions and problems. The political shifts in Latin American started to produce attempts to build forms of regional integration which included


67 Thea Lee, Interview on March 16th, 2009, by Bruno Ciccaglione
trade rules but appeared not to follow the corporate trade agenda. The ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas)\(^68\) is one example, but it clearly comes from a deeper and longer analysis which is already part of the debates within the Hemispheric Social Alliance. To give an example of these first attempts to build trade rules with a different approach we can briefly enlist the main contents of the People's Trade Agreement (Tratado Comercial de los Pueblos, TCP, in Spanish)\(^69\) signed between Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela, and its main differences from a FTA: the People's Trade Agreement offers trade benefits for Bolivian products in Venezuela (mostly soy) but does not ask to Bolivia to do the same, allowing to maintain its tariffs in order to protect its local economy; the States become key actors of trade, since Venezuela commits to buy fixed amounts of a range of Bolivian products; the agreement excludes rules on intellectual property, health services, financial services, common goods as water, in order to grant each country the ability to protect this sectors. In other words the agreement appears to move far beyond the logic of the temporary WTO provisions based on allowing weaker economies to maintain some "privilege, as tools to prevent a dramatic impact on the local economy of the weaker countries."\(^70\)

The idea of developing an alternative vision that goes beyond free trade and towards a wider integration as a possible model is clearly evident in the official documents of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas\(^71\) (TUCA-CSA). As included in the Action Program on Integration and Globalization approved in the Founding Congress and later by the Executive Council of the TUCA-CSA: “The Congress commits trade unions of the Americas to defend a

\(^68\) “The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) is based, fundamentally, upon a model of politic, economic and social integration of countries, as the Caribbean and Latin American, which share geographic spaces, historical and cultural bonds, necessities and common potentialities. The ALBA is then, a new scheme of integration based on principles of cooperation, solidarity and complementariness and it arises as an alternative to the neo liberal model, which has not done but that to deepen the structural asymmetries and to favor the accumulation of wealth in privileged minorities in detriment of the well-being of countries” http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/pdf/alba_mice_en.pdf

\(^69\) In April 2006 the member governments of ALBA at that time (Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela) signed a People Trade Agreement - http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=516

\(^70\) See "Las diferencias entre los TLCs y el Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos -TCP" - Interview with the economist Pablo Solón of the Fundacion Solón in Bolivia - http://www.bilaterals.org/article-print.php3?id_article=4617

\(^71\) The ITUC Regional organization for the Americas (TUCA-CSA) was formed in March 2008 to succeed the ICFTU Inter American Regional organization of Workers (CIOSL/ORIT) as the regional organization of the ITUC. The organization has 65 affiliated, in 29 countries, representing more than 50 million workers. http://www.csa-csi.org/content/category/18/138/177/ . To see the affiliated organizations see http://www.csa-csi.org/content/view/4995/185/.
stronger economic, political, social and cultural integration that is in favor of people, respectful of diversities, and that favors environmental sustainability, as a strategy to face neoliberal globalization. It is fundamental to strengthen the processes of subregional and regional integration, with a full participation of the workers, in order to react to FTAs that only increase the distance between and within the impoverished and the rich countries.”72 “It is impossible to move in this direction” - the TUCA-CSA argues – “without going beyond the exhausted neoliberal model still present in the continent. Building alternative processes to the neoliberal model the TUCA-CSA will drive the strategy of Sustainable Development, consistently with a generalized common sense that consider three axes, each one having the same relevance: the economic, social and environmental. The starting point for economic, social and environmental policies, in order to help meet the target of a sustainable development, is an active role of the State, sustained by a new democratic assent based on popular sovereignty, and an enlargement of the forms of participation of the civil society in the decision making process, both at the national and the regional level.”73

This more general approach might become stronger now as the global economic crisis changes the framework. Sheila Katz, Canadian Labour Congress representative, argues that “Hopefully the opportunities that come out of this worldwide economic and multiple crises will allow for some talk and discussion on re-regulating the economies, re-regulating the financial systems, and might lead to the development of a new kind of trade agreements, to a new kind of globalization if you will, one that is more to the benefit of the workers in the world”74. Nevertheless the tendency to push for new FTAs will be strongly present as well, especially for countries and regions willing to boost their economies through increased exports.

4. Conclusions and recommendations for Europe

The story of how most of the trade unions of the Americas dealt with Free Trade Agreements is long and complex. Nevertheless our research supports the idea that a convergence process has occurred in the hemisphere. Considering the difficulties of the first attempts by the Canadian Labor Congress to speak a common voice with the AFL-CIO in approaching the US-Canada FTA negotiations in the mid 1980s, it is noteworthy that the analysis which is

72 http://www.csa-csi.org/content/section/26/189/
73 Ibid.
74 Sheila Katz, Interview on February 9th, 2009, by Bruno Ciccaglione