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**How do trade unions respond to and act in regional integration processes?  
A comparison between CUT in MERCOSUR and COSATU in SADC**

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**Abstract**

The post-Fordist era characterized by the neoliberal model created huge challenges to the labour movement. Apart from the neoliberal policies such as deregulation, privatisation and casualisation, there was also an increase in regional integration processes. These processes emerged after the Second World War and a “second wave of regionalism” occurred in the Southern Africa and in the South Cone of the Americas, in the 80s and 90s respectively.

The main objective of this paper is to find out the responses and actions of CUT Brazil in MERCOSUR and COSATU in SADC. Trade unions have been interacting with regional integration processes and it is clear that there is a lack of academic research in this field, especially for the cases of countries in the South. On the one hand, it is a current topic and part of the debate of globalisation. On the other hand, it is necessary to analyze the actions and expectations of social actors in integration processes, especially trade unions which are usually important actors in national contexts.

The main aim is to analyze how trade unions have been interacting with regional integration processes and it is based on the idea that labour must participate actively in order to promote an effective “developmental state” and/or region.

**Key-words:** COSATU, CUT, SADC, MERCOSUR, regional integration processes, globalisation and trade unions.

## Introduction

In a globalised world, labour movements are facing new challenges and must operate in other scopes, no longer only on the local or national spheres. On the other hand, there is an emerging movement especially after the 1950s of regional integration processes. The search for integration focusing economic privileges was predominant after the end of the Second World War, as the main actors of the national and global politics abandoned the integration through the conquest of new territories to ensure their control and dominance of resources and power (Bustamante 1997, page 6).

After the end of the Second World War, Fordism represented, in the neo-Gramscian perspective, an “*historic bloc*”<sup>1</sup>, though mostly materialized in developed capitalist countries. “*It was based on a particular combination of certain technologies, industrial mass production and mass consumption supported by strong trade unions and expansive welfare states*” (Bieling 2000, page 35). The developed countries played the leading role not only in terms of production but also of consumption. Meanwhile most of the developing countries were integrated into the international economy as suppliers of natural resources. Brazil and South Africa, on the other hand, played a different role compared to most of the countries of their respective regions (with some exceptions). This happened, because they participated, although peripherally, in the world industrial production with the supply of basic manufacturing goods. For instance, Brazil was characterized by Lipietz (1997, page 11), as part of the “*peripheral fordism*”.

However, according to Bieling, the socio-economic exhaustion of the Fordist model and the erosion of the stabilising international settlement caused a fundamental crisis of the old configuration (considered a Keynesian one). On the other hand, because of the socio-economic and political restructuring during the last two decades, this Keynesian model was replaced by a new one, which Bieling named as neo-liberal. The neo-liberal model is based on new technologies, new forms of production and a transnationalised mode of accumulation.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bieling, a historic bloc is “a social order as a relative coherent ensemble of coercive and consensual institutions, inclusive of particular mode of social development, which lasts for a longer period of time” (Bieling 2000, page 35).

It was during this neo-liberal phase that Mercado Comum do Sul - MERCOSUR (in 1991) and Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference - SADCC (in 1980 – later named Southern Africa Development Community - SADC) were created. Before this, most of the countries in Africa were involved in liberation struggles and anti-colonial wars to achieve independence while several countries in Latin America faced military dictatorships. Both regions faced economic challenges and especially during the neoliberal phase, huge economic crisis, as the debt crisis in the 80s.

There are clear differences among the history of the regions, but also many similarities. The majority of the countries undertook structural adjustment programs following the principles of the Washington Consensus. Undoubtedly this strategy supported mostly by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank failed and actually the inequalities in these countries were even enlarged. *“One of the most salient features of the 1990s is an unprecedented increase in social inequality and an intensification of exploitation of both people and nature in an increasingly naked pursuit of profit”* (Gill 2000, page 28). The neo-liberal model subjected majority of the population to the power of market forces. Consequently, workers and societies suffered the consequences, especially in developing countries, such as Brazil and South Africa. Such countries had to innovate and search for new forms to be integrated into the emerging global economy and one way was to follow a regional integration strategy.

It is crucial to understand how labour movements are facing these new challenges and moreover, it is important to understand how they engage in the regional level while integration processes are being created. The main objective of this paper is to compare the actions and perspectives of Central Única dos Trabalhadores – CUT Brazil in MERCOSUR and Congress of South Africa Trade Unions - COSATU in SADC. In this way, CUT and COSATU are considered independent organizations with international and regional insertion, in other words, two social actors who formulate their own strategies of insertion in the international and regional plan.

Their actions in the region since the creation of the national confederations (CUT in 1983 and COSATU in 1985) until 2004 were analyzed. In this way, to treat adequately the objects of this research and considering the period chosen, documents of resolution of

their congresses or spaces where policies were defined were considered<sup>2</sup>. It is important to highlight that there is a lack of institutional memory in both confederations when considering the international work in the respective regions. To re-build the history, understand their strategies, participation in institutional and non-institutional spaces is not an easy task. In most of the cases, the international work of unions is done by actors that do not use formal mechanisms, because most of the international relations are done by oral meetings and/or conversations. In this way, this research was also complemented by some interviews with key informants<sup>3</sup>.

This paper will focus on the results of a master thesis<sup>4</sup> which described and compared the actions of both labour movements. The first part will give a brief analysis of the relation between globalisation and regional integration processes. The second part will concentrate on the comparison, which will be based mainly on five issues: types of trade unions and their alliances and also due to CUT's and COSATU's similarities this should be reflected as it explains also the reason why both trade unions were chosen for the comparison. Participation in regional trade union organizations, as CUT and COSATU participate in the Coordenadora de Centrais Sindicais do Cone Sul – CCSCS and in the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council - SATUCC, respectively, institutional participation in the regional integration bodies (MERCOSUR and SADC), conquests of the labour movement and revitalization and education strategies.

## **1. Neo-liberal globalization and regional integration processes:**

According to Susan Strange (1999, page 2), “*the whole point of neo-liberalism is that the market mechanism should be allowed to direct the fate of human beings. The economy should dictate its rules to society, not the other way around*”. So according to Strange (1999, page 8), “*neoliberalism is not the natural human condition, it is not supernatural, it can be challenged and replaced because its own failures will require*

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of the policies of CUT occurs in the National Congresses, in the National Plenaries and in meetings of the National Board. COSATU's policies are defined in their National Congresses, Central Committees meetings or at policy conferences.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, in the South African case, it was not possible to interview key informants of COSATU regarding their regional actions, but other relevant actors were interviewed.

<sup>4</sup> RUPPERT, C. S., 2006. How do trade unions respond and act in regional integration processes? A comparison between CUT in MERCOSUR and COSATU in SADC. Master Thesis (Global Labour University). University of Kassel and Berlin School of Economics (FHW).

*this*". Considering Strange`s statements, CUT and COSATU have been struggling against neo-liberalism policies and not only nationally and regionally but also in the international plan. Both organizations are partners in global social forums such as the World Social Forum and apart from this; they have also a close relation, joining common activities and initiatives such as the Southern Initiative in Globalization and Trade Union Rights - SIGTUR.

CUT and COSATU are considered examples of the so-called social movement unionism, consequently as stated by Bezuidenhout (2000, page 2), "*social movement unionism, based only on national campaigns, cannot advance globalization with a "human face"*". In addition, for "*those who accept the argument that globalization undermines the importance of the national site in favour of the global (or transnational) level are led, logically, to the conclusion that, as capital is global so must be resistance to it*" (Akça 2001, page 1). Also in this perspective, it is necessary to understand that both trade unions, if in favour of the regional blocs created, they should also interact with it and struggle for a model, which does not undermine the interests of the working class.

In the debate of globalization, despite reactions of sympathy, identification or resistance to it, the processes of regionalism has been relevant. The common debate was to classify regional integration as a "stepping stone" or as a "stumbling block" to globalization. According to Stallings (In: Serbin 2001, page 14), the emphasis on global issues usually tends not to properly consider the regional arrangements or the regional dynamics. As a consequence there is a misinterpretation, as globalization can be understood in different manners, not only because of the inequalities and social exclusion that it creates, but also the reactions which it generates in local, national, regional and global spheres.

Mittelman (In: Serbin 2001, page 15) shows that regionalism appears as a vital strength in the process of globalization. So regionalism, in his view, can be understood as an important component of this process. In this perspective, regionalism can be seen as a chapter of globalization (or as a phase, according to other authors such as Polanyi). On the other hand, it can be seen also as an answer or as a challenge to globalization. Another interpretation is that regionalism and globalization are parallel processes and not necessarily convergent nor divergent.

According to Robinson (2002, page 8), “*economic integration processes and neo-liberal structural adjustment programs are driven by transnational capital’s campaign to open up every country to its activities, to tear down all barriers to the movement of goods and capital, and to create a single unified field in which global capital can operate unhindered across all national borders*”. In the same way, he defends that the Nation State used to be the mediator of class relations and that what is happening now is a formation of a transnational class, because the mediator role of the State has been modified. This transnational capitalist class (TCC) is, according to him, a new ruling class worldwide. He (2002, page 10) mentioned three competing blocs, “*the EU, the US-centered NAFTA, and East-Asia ASEAN blocs (which) are non-global regional forms, each core grouping is integrating its periphery into a regional formation in competition with rival regional blocs*”.

However, Robinson did not mention that other integration processes such as MERCOSUR and SADC. Alternatively, it must be clarified that the Nation State still remains the actor who leads the decision-making processes in such regional organizations. In the globalization epoch, states lost some of its mediating power due to neoliberal policies, but they are still the most important actors in the global system. Thus different social classes can influence them, but they still play an important role in the national, regional and in the international plan. Additionally, Murphy (2001, page 2) argues that the “*challenge of globalisation within regional trade unionism is depicted as a process driven by powerful northern regional blocs - one response by southern countries has been to form competing blocs, such as MERCOSUR and SADC*”. Furthermore, the labour movements of both cases support the existence of the respective integration processes, they may not agree with the way the integration process is being developed and the priorities chosen, but they do understand the necessity of regional integration creation as a survival strategy in a globalised world, not to mention the flags that both movements carry of continental unity (Africa and Latin America).

As Mittelman (1999, page 35) defended “*international institutions are double-edged swords. In some instances – for example, decolonization and the anti-apartheid movement – they may promote counter-hegemony. They are agents of change and do have potential for innovation, especially in the realms of ideas, although the present*

*tendency is to institutionalize neoliberal concepts and practices*". Robinson explores also the emerging challenges to the hegemony of the globalist bloc. One of them is the *"progressive elites and nationalist groups in Third World countries, such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela"* (2002, page 22). In this context, it must be considered that the current realities and political directions of the integration processes of SADC and MERCOSUR can be understood as challenges to the TCC and/or as counter-hegemonic processes.

Robinson pointed out that *"free trade policies, integration processes and neo-liberal reform opened up the world in new ways to transnational capital"* (2004, page 20). This could be the case of the first phases of MERCOSUR, but after the elections of progressive governments in the region, the scenario changed. The new governments (such as Lula in Brazil, Tabaré in Uruguay and Kirchner in Argentina) demonstrated the political will of constructing another type of integration, considering the labour and social issues. However critically analyzing it, there is still little progress in the labour and social dimensions of the South Cone bloc. In SADC, since its beginning it was mentioned that it was a developmental model. However, *"regions lack political commitment to deeper integration"* (Mittelman 1999, page 31). Furthermore, *"binding instruments are not characteristic of the SADCC (later SADC)"* (Mittelman 1999, page 30). The absence of political commitment and binding instruments in both regions, are impediments for the conquest of an active integration process, which considers the interest of the populations involved.

Meanwhile, in the International Labour Organisation - ILO's report elaborated by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization: *"A Fair Globalization: creating opportunities for all"* it is mentioned that regional integration and cooperation can promote a more equitable pattern of globalization in at least three dimensions. The first would be to *"empower people and countries to better manage global economic forces"*, for instance, to increase the size of domestic markets, to reduce and distribute the spillover effects of external shocks among the region, etc. The second would be to *"enhance the negotiating power of smaller countries"* and the third one would be to *"improve the conditions under which people connect to the global economy"* (2004, page 71). *"When social goals are built into regional integration and regional institutions this*

*provides a starting point for building them into the wider global economy*” (ILO 2004, page 72).

According to the ILO (2004, page 72), MERCOSUR *‘has gone beyond the trade liberalization to include finance, macroeconomics, and social and political integration’*. In Africa, it is stated that *“regional economic integration is seen as an important route to peace and stability, and to more effective participation in the global economy”*. However, *“efforts to open up and interconnect African economies require considerable investment, which has been hard to mobilize”* (ILO 2004, page 73). Nevertheless it is important to mention that a regional integration process is only developed, if there is a political interest to develop it. Member states must be active to build the regional structure. Trade unions can struggle for it, but the States are the actors who have the power to construct them and to develop them, even in scenarios where there is a lack of investments.

As defended by Munck (2001, page 11), *“regionalism is not simply a response to globalization but rather a social construct”*. It goes beyond the common debate of a “stepping stone” or “stumbling block” for globalization. As Bulmer-Thomas puts it: *“it is surely no accident that almost every country in the world has chosen to meet the challenges of globalization in part through a regional response”* (In Munck, Bulmer-Thomas 2001, page 363). Moreover, the realities of the diverse regional processes have different features in developed and in developing countries. According to Bustamante (1997, page 7), the different forms of integration are related to the developmental level of means of production and also to the capacity of the societies to create responses to it.

It is also crucial to emphasize the different models of regional integration worldwide. As argued by Rafael Freire, the differences among the regional arrangements between the South and the North of the Americas, is that *“here (in the South) we dispute a process of integration and in the North the governmental perspective is only a free trade zone with neoliberal fundamentalism”* (Freire 2006, interview).

## **2. Comparison of the actions of CUT in MERCOSUR and of COSATU in SADC**

Countries are facing many challenges especially because of the neoliberal character of globalization since it has transformed itself mainly in an unfair process,



where inequalities grew and poverty reached high levels. The spaces of discussion and decision making are not anymore between states as these processes also take place in many different forms, such as international organizations, regimes, bilateral, multilateral agreements and regional integration processes. Labour has been negatively affected because of deregulation, flexibilization and casualization of labor markets. Trade unions, therefore, have to answer to the challenges imposed by globalization in a different way.

On the one hand, Brazil and Argentina were the leading countries to develop the regional integration in the Southern Cone. On the other hand, South Africa joined the integration process after its creation, due to the fact of the anti-sympathy of the countries in the region to its Apartheid System. In fact in the Southern African case, the Apartheid system was one of the reasons, which stimulated the regional integration process.

Brazil and South Africa have a similar position in their respective regions, as both countries are more economically developed than the others, however, South Africa's case must be analyzed in a different way, as Apartheid influenced negatively and strongly in Southern Africa. This also affected the labour movement and their regional actions and relations. In COSATU's submission on the SADC Protocol on Trade, when comparing the approach used in the EU Agreement Submission, it is stated that "*in the Southern African case, it is South Africa which is the regional hegemon, particularly at the economic level*" (1999, page 3). Due to Brazil's huge territory and economic power, it may also give an impression of "hegemon" in the region, but not so strongly as in the South African case.

## **2.1. Types of trade unionism and alliances**

Some authors classify the Social Movement Unionism -SMU as a different kind of unionism that is probably creating new tools to deal with globalization and neo-liberal policies' effects. Most of them exemplify this new movement based on the experiences of trade unions such as COSATU and CUT. The struggles of the SMU embrace topics such as democracy, social justice and human rights, in this way the rights of the workers are also connected to the concept of human rights. This new social unionism is described as a movement that surpasses "*existing models of "economic", "political" or "political-*

*economic” unionism, by addressing itself to all forms of work, by taking on socio-cultural forms, and addressing itself to civil society”* (Waterman 2004, page 249).

COSATU and CUT had similar creations; both trade unions were created in hostile atmospheres and struggling for democracy. COSATU was struggling against the Apartheid system and CUT against the Military Dictatorship. Both organizations were also discussing a new labour system in their respective countries. The trade unions which founded COSATU had been discussing the Wiehahn Report before COSATU’s launch. CUT had been struggling for changes in the Brazilian labour and trade union authoritative structure which hindered the organization of workers and strikes. Both confederations emerged in the 80s, CUT was created in 1983 and COSATU in 1985. It is important to observe how the creation of these two organizations had a similar background, as they both had the necessity to achieve a democratic society.

Another similarity between COSATU and CUT is that both are committed to the struggle for socialism. COSATU is part of a formal alliance with the African National Congress - ANC and the South Africa Communist Party - SACP, while CUT has informal relations with the Worker`s Party of Brazil (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) and also with other parties. In the presidential election of 2002 (and also on the elections of 2006), CUT decided to support Lula`s election (candidate of the PT). Though, both consider themselves as independent organizations.

CUT and COSATU have concretized the conception of social movement unionism by national alliances with other organizations of the civil society. However, it should be noted that in the regional sphere, in each case such alliances are not well developed as there are no signs of alliances with other social actors regarding the regional integration processes. Until 2004 CUT and COSATU did not develop broader alliances with other social actors regarding MERCOSUR and SADC. In the regional integrations processes, their main allies are other labour movements of the region.

## **2.2. Participation in regional trade union organizations**

The integration processes in both regions imposed new challenges on both labour movements. The question is how these actors take action in these processes and which

their main responses are. Both labour movements reacted to the regional integration processes and constructed their strategies. Both organizations, apart from their own initiatives and policies, also participate in regional trade union organizations, CCSCS and SATUCC.

CUT has been part of CCSCS since its creation and formed a position about the MERCOSUR since the beginning. COSATU was launched after the creation of SATUCC, but since COSATU formation, it has been participating in the SATUCC. However, it is necessary to highlight, that COSATU only considered international topics in its agenda in the 90s.

As stated by Keet (1994, page 75) referring to SATUCC, “*the lack of independent dynamism and active leadership is also largely a reflection of the weaknesses in the national trade union organizations of which it is composed*”. Trade unions of the Southern Africa region, according to Keet, are seldom firmly work-place based, lack active membership participation and do little to service their members.

There is vast unevenness in organizational power and effectiveness among the various trade unions in Southern Africa. COSATU had to decide if it would give priority to the regional sphere. In the majority of COSATU’s resolutions it is stated how much they valorize the solidarity received during the apartheid system. In addition, the clearness of the negative effects it has caused in neighbouring countries was cited. During the Apartheid system, “*the majority of the victims of the South African government’s attempts to maintain itself in power were outside of South Africa*” (Daniel, Naidoo, Naidu 2003, page 372).

At the same time, in COSATU’s resolutions, there are constantly citations about strengthening the labour movement of the region. However, it is clear that there is not much progress in this area. It is comprehensible that the actions of SATUCC, for example, can be harmed if their members are not nationally strong or if they do not pay the affiliations fees properly. However, the strengthening of the labour movements in the region does not rely only on COSATU or South Africa. Thus it is evident that COSATU can contribute and organize solidarity actions when necessary, as it has been doing in relation to Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

COSATU is also negatively affected, because, as Keet (1994, page 79) notes “*union leaders in neighbouring countries are sensitive about encroachments on “their” spheres by South African unions*”. The challenge is that COSATU, defending the interest of its members cannot ignore the region. Consequently, for a stronger action in the region, it must have the national trade union confederations of the region as allies.

CCSCS has been an active actor in the shape of the regional integration of the South Cone. CUT has been participating since CCSCS’s creation and its actions are concretized not only by its own initiatives, but also through CCSCS. It means that CUT had to interact with the other national confederations of the region in order to implement some strategies. In fact such alliances are necessary, because the bargaining power of the unions is superior when acting together. So there is a common ground of actions and strategies which were built collectively. The idea was to create one unique voice for labour in the integration process. Yet, CUT participates representing its members in the institutional bodies of the bloc, but in actions such as the International First of May, in the Union Summits or even in the State’s Summits, it is through the CCSCS that CUT acts (also representing its members).

The role of regional trade union organizations, such as CCSCS and SATUCC, is very important to create an unique voice in the regional integration processes. Of course, there are divergences among the trade unions of different countries of a region, not only due to interests of their members but also in many other issues, such as different ideologies, expectations and ways to struggle<sup>5</sup>. However, with the weakened position of labour in a globalised world, it is crucial to strengthen it in order to achieve better results. Clearly one way to achieve improvements for the working class is to act united in order to improve the conditions of the working class as a whole.

### **2.3. Institutional participation**

Comparing their institutional participation in the integration blocs, it is evident that they are quite different. Apparently COSATU does not participate directly in any

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<sup>5</sup> There are differences not only among trade unions of different countries, but also among trade unions of the same country. In CCSCS, for example, there are three Brazilian national confederations which participate on it (CUT, FS and CGT). They have different ideologies, but in the regional and international scope they usually work together, sometimes more productively than in the national sphere.

institutional body of SADC, at least in the resolutions of its Congresses actions are not discussed in any institutional space. CUT participates in some institutional bodies, such as the Economic and Social Consultative Forum - ESCF, some working groups, the Labour Market Observatory - LMO and in the Labour Social Commission – LSC. It is important to underline that spaces of participation in institutional bodies were one of its main demands and positive achievements.

However, it must be highlighted that CUT's participation in the structure of the MERCOSUR is not passive, actually it is transformative. The labour movement of the Southern Cone decided that they should make efforts to participate in the institutional bodies in order to influence the process in favor of the working class and also to bring social and labour issues into the MERCOSUR's agenda. If the institutional space is not useful to achieve these goals (which almost happened once in the working group number 10), CUT could probably give up its participation.

In contrast to CUT, COSATU's case can be interpreted in different ways. One perspective could be that COSATU is represented in the institutional bodies of SADC through SATUCC. Another possibility is that they prefer to observe the process and not interact with it. Another option is that it is not of their interest to influence the process and/or it is not a core topic in their agenda.

However, to influence the decision making structures in favour of the workers should be part of the agenda of an active and progressive trade union. In this case, COSATU should make efforts to have a greater participation in the SADC structure. It is evident that there are ideologies and principles involved which denote that COSATU was always on the side of their brothers and sisters in the continent and region. But it is clear also that if they are in favour of the integration of the region, in other words, for SADC, they should make efforts to shape it according to the interests of the South African and Southern Africa workers.

It is necessary to analyze concrete actions built by COSATU's efforts in the region to shape the regional integration process in favour of the workers' interest and to effectively contribute to strengthen the labour movement of the region. Unfortunately, according to its resolutions, there is a lack of initiatives and a lack of involvement in deeper and wider actions in relation to the integration process. It must be clarified,

however, that COSATU has been active expressing its solidarity to some countries, such as Zimbabwe and Swaziland. However, both COSATU and SATUCC did not organize mobilizing actions regarding the regional integration process, such as CUT and CCSCS have organized, as the Union Summits and the International First of May.

In SADC's principles it is clear that its goal is to improve the living standards of the people of the region and it is stated in SADC's constitution in the article 5 that SADC should "*encourage the people of the region and their institutions to take initiative to develop economic, social and cultural ties across the region and to participate fully in the implementation of the programmes and projects of SADC*". It is based on these statements, that the labour movement of the region should focus their actions, in order to make them reality.

In contrast to SADC, in the Asuncion Treaty (which originated MERCOSUR), there was only one citation about social issues in its introduction, mentioning that "*the enlargement of the national markets, through the integration constitutes a fundamental condition to accelerate the processes of economic development with social justice*" and it was no establishment of institutional bodies to treat labour issues was forecasted.

Trade unions have to dialogue with the blocs if they are in favour of the regional integration process. The option to struggle to conquest institutional spaces and to struggle in these bodies should be complemented also by other non institutional activities as well. But in order to influence the direction of the process in favour of the workers, institutional participation is required. If there is no space where the unions can use their representative power in favour of their members, few improvements are possible or their bargaining power and representativeness will not be considered in the process. If the position of the trade union is against the regionalism process, then, of course, other measures should be applied in order to stop the process.

#### **2.4. Conquests of the labour movement**

The labour movements in both regions have conquered some goals, as the adoption of codes and institutional bodies where labour has a voice. One victory was the adoption of charters on labour and social rights, however in the MERCOSUR case as in

the SADC case, the main challenge is how trade unions can truly implement these social chapters. The adoption of ILO core labour standards does not mean that they will be implemented and respected. It is necessary to find concrete ways and strategies to make these rules effective.

As argued by Rafael Freire, *“the labour laws in MERCOSUR are just recommendations and not obligations, due to the relatively “low” model of MERCOSUR. So what we have in the MERCOSUR is a pattern which is not assumed by the governments of the bloc. This does not mean that this pattern is not important, however, if macroeconomic policies, a common Parliament and common courts do not exist in MERCOSUR, there will not be effective labour laws as well”* (Freire 2006, interview).

## **2.5. Revitalization and education**

Southern Africa’s experience of launching Southern Africa Trade Union Leadership Academy - SATULA is an important and inspiring initiative which aims to revitalize the trade unions of Southern Africa. And COSATU has been contributing to its activities. On the other hand, such initiative does not exist among the labour movement of MERCOSUR. Mainly its activities of education and training regarding MERCOSUR are organized through the national confederations and through CCSCS, but they did not install any special program aimed to strengthen the labour movement of the region through education. Meanwhile activities organized by CCSCS such as the Union Summits and the International First of May in the South Cone region are also crucial for the revitalization of the workers.

In order to have a representative role in the integration processes, it is vital for the labour movement to organize such initiatives in order to educate their members and to demonstrate the importance of their actions in the respective regions. An adequate model of regional integration in favor of the working class will only be achieved, when the workers can understand the impacts of regional integration processes in their daily life and when they can contribute to its transformation.

## Conclusion

CUT and COSATU are examples of strong national labour movements and “*it is self-evident that, to be capable of struggle at all, the working class must organize itself at home as a class and that its own country must be the immediate arena for struggle. To that extent, the class struggle is national, not in content, but, as The Communist Manifesto says, “in form”*”. (Marx 1996 [1875], page 217 in Akça 2001 page 1). So in other words, each country’s working class must be its immediate arena for struggle, however, with the deepening of the globalization process, labour movement must innovate their strategies in order to struggle for their rights and to achieve more democratic and socialist societies, which are COSATU and CUT desires. This innovation should rely on the national content of the class struggle, but it should also take different forms to face capital regionally and/or internationally.

If the integration processes in the South are adequate developmental processes regarding the labour movement aspirations, it is the function of the latter to struggle to transform them into fair processes where social and labour issues are considered and proper regulations are truly implemented. The regional process should not be transformed into a process that benefits the interests of the already rich and few people of the regions. Labour should struggle for models of integration which positively develop the conditions of the workers and of the whole society. With globalisation, regional integration processes were transformed in developmental and even “survival” strategies for countries in the South.

Yet we have a quite active regional labour movement, but that does depend on the actions of the MERCOSUR’s Member States to achieve a fair social development. In reality, each national labour movement must put pressure on their respective State to reach the proper social development of the bloc.

On the other hand, we have a regional labour movement, which is not so well developed even nationally. In addition, some are considered bureaucratic rather than progressive. In this case, how can trade unionists develop an active regional labour movement, if they do not have national movements to base themselves on?



This is the opportunity where a south-south dialogue is possible, where experiences can be exchanged and both regional movements can learn from their own experiences and struggles. It is more difficult to compare such experiences with NAFTA and/or European Union, as both of these examples involve developed countries and also different models of integration and different regional realities. In NAFTA's case, for example, labour ties were created from NAFTA's establishment (See Kay, 2005), and the labour ties in the South Cone region and in the Southern Africa region already existed before the regional blocs were created. This does not mean that the relations among the unions (of MERCOSUR and SADC) were not strengthened with the creation of the regional blocs.

The instruments for the implementation and promotion of fundamental labour rights created in MERCOSUR and SADC are still not sufficient. However, these instruments should and can propose protective measures and changes in the economic, commercial and productive policies in order to offer the society wider opportunities of employment and better salaries. The patrimony that has been already conquered enlarges possibilities of improvements.

Another indispensable feature in integration processes is the necessity of transparency. In the MERCOSUR case, many actions of the labour movement were negatively affected because trade unions faced difficulties to obey the decisions taken in the institutional sphere. This happened due to the fact that in the majority of the cases, they were not consulted before decisions were taken. A clear example in the MERCOSUR case is the ESCF which has a consultative function. However, it has rarely been consulted before governmental decisions were made. Without the participation of the societies in integration processes, the historical rivalries and economic variations are not going to be overcome. Moreover, the social and cultural integration is lost on the way and consequently the integration processes become a reality only for a minority.

As Javier Silva mentioned the difference between employers, governments and labour movement is that the latter is the one which has the capacity to mobilize workers with an aim, because as argued by Silva *"we can have the reason of the world, but if we do not have people behind it, few or nothing can be achieved, without an ideal, the*

*struggle is not conducive, however, without the people, the ideal is barren”* (Silva 2004, page 13).

It is clear that COSATU and CUT have still a long walk to achieve a model of integration that is in favor of the workers` needs. Additionally, both confederations can learn from the experiences of each other. CUT`s achievements in the institutional body of MERCOSUR show the importance of these spaces as new places for struggle. If the labour movement does not manifest their interests and does not participate in the construction of the integration process, workers` voice will not be heard. The unity of the labour movements in the region (through regional trade union organizations) is crucial. Initiatives such as the Union Summits, International First of May and SATULA are extremely necessary to diffuse the process among the workers and societies. If other models of integration are possible, they should be achieved through the efforts of trade unions so, COSATU and CUT, which are the most representative and strongest movements in their respective regions, must play a leading and an active role.

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### **Interviews:**

FREIRE, Rafael. Secretary of Economic and Social Policies of ORIT. Interviewed via e-mail on the 04.09.2006.