

THE SEQUENCING OF SUCCESS: ORGANIZING TEMPLATES AND NEOLIBERAL POLICY OUTCOMES*

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In the 1990s and early 2000s, government privatization and austerity programs served as the cornerstone of free market reforms implemented throughout the developing world. The selling off of government utilities, resources, and services laid the groundwork for a highly contested battleground in the global South over social and economic distribution. This study examines the sequencing of campaigns against neoliberal reforms in Central America. Two successful movement campaigns against privatization in El Salvador and Costa Rica followed failed collective attempts to impede similar economic reforms. The policy outcomes against neoliberal measures are explained by the path-dependent nature of the organizing templates activists chose to employ and the breadth of social movement unionism achieved. The article offers insights into similar battles currently waged in the third world over the pace of economic globalization and the conditions in which oppositional movements are likely to succeed or fail.

Economic liberalization in the developing world is driving campaigns of mass defiance against unwanted policies. The social and economic consequences of neoliberal reforms over the past twenty five years are well documented (Walton and Seddon 1994; Robinson 2003). Beginning with the foreign debt crisis of the early 1980s, dozens of states in the global South began to enact austerity policies. The first generation economic reforms of the 1980s included state subsidy reductions in basic food products and transportation, currency devaluations, wage freezes, removal of import tariffs, and privatization of government-run factories and enterprises (Green 2003). The economic liberalization measures derived from conditionality loans mandated by international financial institutions to renegotiate the foreign debt and curb inflation. By the mid-1980s, the austerity policies had generated a wave of economic-based protests throughout the developing world (Walton and Ragin 1990; Walton and Seddon 1994).

The 1990s witnessed a renewed effort to implement a second generation of economic reforms as the debt crisis remained unresolved. These second-phase reforms centered on the privatization of basic government services and utilities such as ports, power and water distribution, energy resources, health care, pensions, and telecommunications. As in the mid-1980s, the second generation neoliberal measures sparked a wave of protest throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Yet nowhere in the world have the protests reached such intensity as in Latin America (Almeida and Johnston 2006; Roberts 2008). Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, every Latin American and Caribbean country (with the possible exception of Cuba) experienced massive outpourings of popular dissent against privatization. In addition, privatization-related conflicts account for nearly 40 percent of all anti-neoliberal protests in Latin America (Almeida 2007).

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Though scholars and journalists recognize these two waves of anti-neoliberal protest as a global trend, much less is known about the outcomes of *specific* campaigns. While the current trajectory of global capitalist integration and neoliberal policy implementation continues on the same path, there are important cases whereby the measures are not implemented (and even reversed as with the re-nationalization of natural gas in Bolivia in 2006 and telecommunications and energy distribution in Venezuela in 2007). Below, I draw from studies of popular movements and labor conflicts to explain the varying capacity of civil society groups to resist neoliberal reforms, and more specifically, austerity and privatization programs in Central America.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM AND POLICY OUTCOMES

Labor unions are often involved in the struggle against the privatization of public services or austerity in a particular state institution. Unlike neoliberal measures such as hikes in sales taxes or free trade agreements—where the core social group to be affected is not transparent at the outset of a conflict—privatization and austerity usually first threaten a labor union in the sector undergoing the government sell-out or cut-back (Rhodes 2006). Such scenarios provide analysts with a *focal organization* to examine in terms of coordinating a larger campaign against the privatization or austerity process. The most common occurrence is that the public sector labor union facing privatization/austerity enters an agreement of compensation and indemnification with the government and no larger conflict ensues. However, at times, unions directly confront neoliberal measures and plans for outsourcing public services to the private sector, transnational corporations, and international investors. I analyze here the likelihood for such a campaign to be successful in terms of inhibiting the economic liberalization process.

Combative Tactics

Studies of labor struggles highlight a particular form of union organizing that has been found to be more successful than alternative strategies. Labor studies scholars refer to this stratagem as social movement unionism and have identified two defining properties. One primary attribute involves the use of direct action as a central campaign tactic (Fantasia and Voss 2004). That is, instead of the more traditional collective bargaining strategies—closed-door meetings between company managers, government bureaucrats and labor leaders—unions actively use their rank-and-file members to engage in institutionally disruptive tactics that characterize social movements in general (Flacks 2004). For example, Martin (2008) found in a study of 70 labor unions that noninstitutional organizing strategies were more successful than using official channels. Such tactics range from boycotts and the interruption of government proceedings to sit-ins, mass marches, wildcat strikes, and roadblocks. These mass action strategies are by no means the norm, as Fantasia and Stepan-Norris (2004: 557) note:

The organizations that constitute a labor movement are not simply (or even frequently) organizations mobilized to engage in direct action or social combat. Unions also bargain and negotiate with employers, they help to regulate economic activity, and they serve a brokerage function as employment agents, stabilizing labor markets on behalf of their members. In these ways unions restrain social combat and collective action, and thus a significant part of the labor movement can be seen as not only institutionalized, but institutionalizing.

Indeed, in the early 1990s, Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari lulled the state telecommunications union (STRM) into an agreement whereby the labor union would retain its legal status (and its members' job security) in exchange for a conflict-free privatization process of TELMEX—one of the most profitable state assets after petroleum reserves (Clifton

2000). Hence, union-based strategies vary from routine activities (the most common) to disruptive protests.

External Allies

The second property defining social movement unionism centers on the ability of a labor union to mobilize groups beyond its organizational boundaries (Seidman 1994; Moody 1997; Fantasia and Stepan-Norris 2004; Lopez 2004; Schock 2005).¹ The first natural ally would be other labor associations, especially public sector labor unions in the case of anti-privatization and austerity campaigns. As important as this ally may be, the focal labor organization would likely need more than just other public sector labor unions to sustain a long-term struggle. In the epoch of globalization, labor unions stand in a much weaker bargaining position vis-à-vis the state and employers than in the previous period of state-led development and mixed economies (Tilly 1995; Moody 1997; Silver 2003). Indeed, neoliberal globalization in the developing world includes “flexibilization” of national labor laws and enormous downsizing of employment in the public sector (Rodrik 1999; Cook 2006). Hence, public sector unions find themselves in an unfavorable bargaining situation even when they make alliances with one another given the enormous power asymmetry between labor and the state. In addition, the public in general may harbor skeptical attitudes about state sector unions in terms of only struggling to save their own benefits (Sandoval 2001), which are relatively better than the *average* worker in the private, rural, and informal sectors of the economy in the global South.

In order to strengthen its political muscle, a labor union may reach out beyond the labor sector and organize other civil society groups such as students, community and non-governmental organizations, churches, and others (Van Dyke, Dixon, and Carlon 2007), including oppositional political parties. The broader the coalition, the more strength the campaign maintains to marshal resources and employ direct action tactics across an immense geographic space (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). For example, in the third world, public sector labor unions are concentrated in the largest cities, and primarily in the nation’s capital. This spatial concentration is hardly conducive to launching a nation-wide campaign against an unwanted economic policy such as privatization. Mobilizing other groups assists in coordinating actions outside the capital and manifesting to the government that discontent is widespread beyond a few labor unions and their urban allies.

Public Opinion

When public opinion stands against the impending measure it allows more groups to join in the campaign and signals to policy makers that political consequences might stem from the current neoliberal trajectory. Large-scale societal opposition to a government initiated economic liberalization program, as observed in national public opinion polls, provides potential sympathy pools in which a labor union can mobilize other sectors. In such situations, the public would generally be more willing to tolerate inconveniences caused by disruptive protests. Especially noteworthy may be the population’s experience with past economic reforms. If past reforms have been implemented successfully, and the private sector delivers social services in a more efficient and less costly fashion, the public would likely not join in opposition. However, if liberalization policies are perceived by the populace as largely negative (i.e., increased consumer costs and/or decreased efficiency), future neoliberal measures will be met with more suspicion and caution. Even if a labor union facing privatization enjoys the support of public opinion, the union will not automatically form a wide and diverse coalition representing civil society. The organizing strategy will also be conditioned by the relative achievements of past organizing arrangements.

ORGANIZING TEMPLATES AND GETTING IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME

Challengers not only vary by the repertoires of contention they employ (Tilly 1978), but also vary by the *forms* of organizing (Clemens 1993 and 1997). Forms of organizing may play a pivotal role in movement outcomes (Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Martin 2008). Social movement unionism serves as one particular organizing strategy or template. However, a narrower coalition may work in some times and places. Adaptive learning theory from organizational sociology hypothesizes that particular organizational strategies will be discarded over time if they are unsuccessful in meeting organizational goals (Aldrich and Ruef 2006). Likewise, innovative strategies are likely to be tested and incorporated in the aftermath of organizing campaigns that end in defeat (McCammon 2003; Ganz 2004). Hence, it is crucial that analysts of collective action historically situate the movement under consideration. Past successful organizing strategies will be reimplemented in new campaigns while innovation is more likely on the heels of a less triumphant mobilizing drive by similar actors. The above proposition assumes the social movement sector (the population of social movements and supporting associations) is akin to an organizational field and that mutual awareness occurs among social movement organizations and movement leaders (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Minkoff and McCarthy 2005). It also predicts that flexibility exists in the social movement sector and that social movement organizations (SMOs) have the capacity to strategically adapt in the case of failed responses to changes in the political and economic environment—a process that Stinchcombe (2001: 36-38) calls a “trajectory of improvement.”

In summary, the more a focal state sector labor union employs assertive protests and mobilizes other groups in a broad coalition that encompasses large tracts of the national territory, the more likely it will be that state managers repeal their plans for austerity measures or privatization in the service, utility, or administrative unit in question. Nonetheless, past coalitional strategies by similar collective actors embedded in an organizational field shape the type of organizing template employed in the present, including the form of social movement unionism. Strong public opinion against a particular neoliberal policy also enhances the capacity of activists to piece together an efficacious social movement unionism campaign. Below, I examine the sequencing of struggles against neoliberal reforms in Central America to highlight the conditions associated with broad social movement unionism campaigns and favorable policy outcomes.

DATA AND METHODS

I reconstruct the campaigns of four struggles against economic reforms in El Salvador and Costa Rica. A paired comparison design is employed (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) that matches two developing countries in the same world region (Goodwin 2001). Data were collected from archival and field research in Costa Rica and El Salvador between 2000 and 2007. These data include interviews with activists involved in the mobilizations, national newspaper coverage of the four campaigns, and documents and bulletins produced by the movements and sympathetic institutions. Particular empirical attention is given to a key dimension of social movement unionism: coding when the individual protest actions of a particular campaign include organizations and groups outside of the focal labor union organizing the mobilizations. Recent scholarship on social movement impacts addresses many of the problems inherent in measuring movement success (Andrews 2004; Amenta 2006). Movement outcomes in this study are specified as if the movement achieves its primary stated goal (Burststein et al. 1995). Campaigns in El Salvador and Costa Rica centered on the goal of preventing the legislative passage and implementation of the economic reform in question. Defining movement outcomes in such cases is more transparent (i.e., a policy is either implemented or it is not) than in social movements that span longer periods of time and encompass a multiplicity of goals.

Two cases have a movement-negative outcome (telecommunication privatization is implemented in El Salvador and pension reform passes in Costa Rica), while the other two cases have a movement-positive result (health care privatization is blocked in El Salvador and telecommunications/electrical power privatization is impeded in Costa Rica). The successful cases are anomalous in the sense that governments in the developing world usually implement neoliberal policies with limited public opposition. These two countries witnessed at least moderate opposition to the government's liberalization policies in all four campaigns examined. Hence, these case studies contribute to theory building in collective action and policy outcomes research by highlighting key dimensions (and their sequencing) linked to movement-favorable policy impacts under unlikely circumstances (Snow and Trom 2002)—the kind of theory that may be of use to scholars and civil society organizations attempting to understand the conditions associated with extensive challenger alliances and positive movement outcomes (Flacks 2004).

THE SEQUENCING OF NEOLIBERAL POLICY CONFLICTS

El Salvador Campaign 1: *Telecommunications Privatization in El Salvador, 1994-1998*

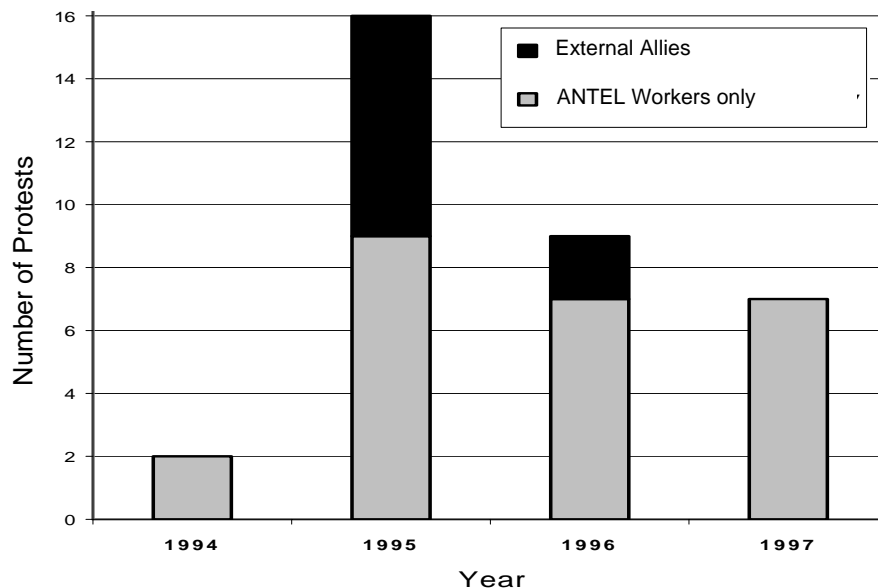
In the mid-1990s, as part of a larger state “modernization” program in El Salvador, the government of Armando Calderón Sol placed privatization of the state-run telecommunications company, the *Administración Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* (ANTEL), at the core of his neoliberal program. The republic of El Salvador established ANTEL in 1963 at the height of state-led development in the third world (Iraheta and Soriano López 1999). Calderón Sol served as the president of El Salvador from 1994 to 1999 representing the neoliberal Republican Nationalist Alliance (ARENA) party. The ARENA party first came to executive power in 1989 and immediately began to privatize state-run enterprises and infrastructure such as the banking system, urban housing institute, agro-export institutes, and sugar refining. These early privatizations were small in scope and less controversial as civil society focused on making the transition to a post-civil war society.² So central was the privatization of telecommunications to its economic program that Calderón Sol appointed ARENA party president Juan José Domenech as the head of ANTEL to direct its selling-off to transnational communications firms.

In 1995, under President Calderón Sol's tenure, the ARENA government moved to deepen neoliberal reforms through a new sales tax, massive layoffs in the public sector (Anner 1996), privatization of telecommunications, electricity distribution, and pensions. These reforms were developed under the auspices of a special commission established in the executive office (*Comisión Presidencial para la Modernización del Sector Público*) (Romano 1996). President Calderón Sol publicly announced the measures of his modernization program on February 2, 1995. Immediately after, on February 3, the opposition convened a mass march rejecting the modernization measures (*Diario Latino* 1995b). Even with a diversity of actors present at the march, the temporary coalition failed to sustain a multisectoral struggle against privatization. At the time, the ARENA party also dominated the legislative assembly with 39 deputies out of 84, thus facilitating the passage of neoliberal reforms emanating from the executive's state modernization program in 1996 and 1997. Resistance efforts began immediately as NGOs and consumer defense groups organized campaigns of resistance against a new sales tax in 1995. The state pension system employees (organized in SITINPEP) focused on pension privatization. The public works labor association (ATMOP) largely protested the mass layoff policy. The state-run telecommunications workers (organized in four labor associations—ASTA, ASTTEL, ATES, and SINTEL) focused their struggle on the privation of ANTEL.³

By introducing several neoliberal measures close together in time, the executive effectively divided civil society and the labor sector in the short and medium term as each group battled a particular piece of the overall neoliberal policy package. This resulted in few sustained solidarity actions across sectors. Astute observers at the time pleaded for the movement to form a single oppositional block and desist attempting to fight each measure in isolation (Montoya 1995). During the conflict labor analysts noted that the four ANTEL labor associations failed to frame the issue around larger consumer protection issues that would have brought more external groups into the campaign (e.g., under the threat of rising costs and declining access). Such perceived threats assist organizers in forming wider coalitions (Van Dyke 2003; Reese, Geidraitis, and Vega 2005). Instead, the ANTEL workers focused on labor stability as a central plank in their anti-privatization struggle (Aguilar Guillén 1995).

Public opinion was moderately opposed to ANTEL's privatization. National surveys conducted by the Jesuit University (*Universidad Centroamericana*) and the *Universidad Tecnológica* showed 55 percent of public opinion against the privation in mid-1996 and 57.5 percent in September 1996, respectively.⁴ The ANTEL workers held several mass marches and labor strikes in 1995 and 1996. Figure 1 displays the total number of reported protests against telecommunications privatization coded from a national daily Salvadoran newspaper between 1994 and 1997.

Figure 1. Protests against Telecommunications Privatization in El Salvador, 1994-1997



Source: *Co Latino* 1994-1997

Protests were coded for both the presence of ANTEL workers alone as well as the participation of external groups (i.e., other labor unions and civil society groups). The protest actions could be considered a nominal attempt at social movement unionism. Even at the height of the anti-telecommunications privatization campaign in 1995 and 1996, the majority of protests, though at times disruptive via roadblocks in the capital, street marches, building occupations (*Diario Latino* 1995c),⁵ and wildcat strikes, were conducted only by the ANTEL workers' associations alone (see figure 1). Only 26.5 percent of all reported protest actions involved the participation of groups outside of the ANTEL labor organizations. Even when support surfaced from other groups, it derived largely from other public sector unions (e.g., social security and public works unions). This limited the demonstrations to only the largest cities and kept their size to a minimum in most cases. Even with these limitations, the ANTEL labor

associations displayed an air of confidence in their organizing strategies. In one of the largest marches organized by the ANTEL unions, on January 17, 1995, workers marched with a coffin shrouded with a banner that read “we will bury the privatization” (*Diario Latino* 1995a).

At a decisive moment in the campaign, on November 28, 1996—the day the legislative assembly voted on the final privatization of ANTEL—the ANTEL workers’ associations organized a strike and a modest demonstration on the same day that peasants and rural cooperative associations held a multitudinous street march against agrarian debt (*Colatino* 1996b; 1996c). The two groups failed to coordinate their actions, giving the impression of a civil society balkanized into group-wise mobilization—fitting the metaphorical cliché of two ships passing in the night without recognition of one another’s presence. At this same time, the telecommunication workers presented their own modernization plan to the legislative assembly that involved the system’s technical upgrading without privatization. The telecommunication workers numbered about 6,500 state employees and clearly needed outside assistance to sustain a campaign against a major government privatization program.

The historical context in which the ANTEL unions were situated in the mid-1990s was one of a declining labor movement that had recently coordinated solidarity actions among labor groups to resolve labor and economic disputes as well as fight against human rights abuses (Anner 1996). After the genocidal repression of the early 1980s by the Salvadoran security forces, the labor movement re-emerged by forming alliances within the labor sector (Bollinger 1987). The Christian Democratic government of José Napoleón Duarte allowed the re-emergence of public sector labor associations after his election victory in mid-1984 with aspirations of consolidating a support base with urban workers. Militant union activists exploited this modest political opening by forming a coalition of over twenty public sector labor associations, including ANTEL workers, called the State and Municipal Workers Coordinating Council (CCTEM). The CCTEM coordinated several labor-based campaigns in the mid to late 1980s by holding simultaneous solidarity strikes in support of a particular public sector union’s conflict such as the arrest of leaders, militarization of work sites, or an end to wage freezes. This form of organizing within the state sector endured into the early 1990s with the formation of analogous labor coordinating associations such as the *Intergremial* and UNASTEMA. Though alliances were made with other groups that included constituencies outside the labor movement, such as some of the nonlabor organizations affiliated with the UNTS (e.g., agricultural cooperatives, students, shantytown dwellers, etc.), the organizing template centered on solidarity campaigns *within* the public sector labor movement.

During the anti-telecommunications privatization campaign in the mid-1990s, the telecommunication workers’ associations also enjoyed the symbolic support of the largest oppositional political party, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). The FMLN, since coming into legal existence in 1992, had consistently stood against neoliberal reforms. However, after internal factional disputes, the FMLN was reduced to only 14 legislative deputies out of 84 in 1995 and 1996; not powerful enough to prevent telecommunications privatization in the legislative assembly.⁶ In fact, this split left the FMLN as third strongest party in the legislative assembly after the neoliberal ARENA and center-right Christian Democratic parties. Telecommunications privatization eventually passed through the legislative assembly in two parliamentary sessions in September and November of 1996 with a simple majority of largely ARENA party votes. In the legislative elections of March 1997, the left-wing FMLN party made significant electoral gains winning almost the same number of legislative seats as ARENA (27 for the FMLN and 28 for ARENA). At this same time, a scandal erupted whereby it was leaked that the ANTEL privatization funds would be used to make International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan repayments instead of domestic social programs as ARENA promised. The newly elected legislative assembly temporarily suspended the privatization of ANTEL through a legislative session led by the FMLN, which resulted in a 56 to 0 vote in favor of halting privatization until a special commission established how the privatization proceeds would be invested.

In July 1997, the legislative assembly voted to authorize the final privatization of ANTEL. The FMLN, even with its 27 deputies, still remained too weak to prevent the passage of privatization in the telecommunications sector. Nonetheless, the opposition party successfully added a stipulation in which 25 percent of ANTEL would continue under state control. Already, by the end of 1997, the telecommunication workers that previously demanded no privatization of the state-run system, were reduced to chanting “we want a pro-worker privatization” and “we demand a fair privatization” during street demonstrations (*La Prensa* 1997). In 1998 the Salvadoran government divided the state-operated telephone company in two parts. The state sold the basic telephone infrastructure to France Telecom while wireless communications were licensed to Telefónica of Spain (Iraheta and Soriano López 1999). Thousands of telecommunications workers lost their jobs, the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare decertified their labor associations, and the remaining employees fought an uphill battle through the early 2000s to establish legal recognition for new labor unions in the privatized firms.⁷

El Salvador Campaign 2: *Public Health Care Privatization, 1999-2000 and 2002-2003*

After the failure of the ANTEL campaign, the Salvadoran labor movement initiated several new multisectoral organizing strategies such as the *Movimiento de Organizaciones Laborales Integradas* (MOLI), *Concertación Laboral y Social* (CLS), and the *Coordinadora Sindical de Trabajadores de El Salvador* (CSTS).⁸ These new strategies initiated in 1998-1999 included solidarity relations between state sector unions, students, a variety of NGOs, and agricultural cooperatives. Leaders of these new multisectoral groups explicitly acknowledged the lack of success of earlier campaigns against neoliberal reform and the need to construct new organizational arrangements that coordinated several social sectors (Martínez Peñate, Ochoa and Lara López 2004). These new organizing templates led to the largest and most successful mobilizations in post-war El Salvador between 1999 and 2003, aimed at preventing privatization of part of the public health care insurance system (Schuld 2003). In other words, organizing lessons learned from the defeats in the privatization of telecommunications were used to prevent subsequent rounds of privatization in El Salvador’s public health care system and water administration (interview with ASTTEL labor leader, San Salvador, September 26, 2007), especially the need for a greater variety and number of external allies.

El Salvador’s public medical system is divided into two main branches: the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MSPAS) and the Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS).⁹ The MSPAS provides basic medical care and services to the majority of the population. The ISSS is a health insurance program for workers and employees in the formal sector of the economy which is funded by employer and worker contributions. The ISSS provides health care coverage to between 15 and 20 percent of the population and maintains the highest quality services and equipment. The conflict over public health care outsourcing and privatization in El Salvador dates back to the mid-1990s with a World Bank-sponsored program to modernize and restructure El Salvador’s medical system that involved the Salvadoran government, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Health Organization, and representatives from MSPAS, ISSS, and NGOs.

By the late 1990s, doctors, health care workers, and NGOs working in the health sector became increasingly alienated from the health care reform program sponsored by the World Bank and the Salvadoran government (interview with leader of *Alianza Ciudadana contra la Privatización*, San Salvador, May 3, 2003). Physicians in the ISSS founded a labor union in October of 1997 to confront these problems (SIMETRISISS). Health care workers in the ISSS had formed a labor union in 1966, at the height of state-led development named the *Sindicato de Trabajadores del Instituto Salvadoreño del Seguro Social* (STISSS). In late 1999, STISSS and SIMETRISISS became aware of a government plan (as part of the larger health care

reform process) to begin outsourcing ISSS hospital units to the private sector as a pilot program for a larger project of extended privatization. In that same year, the ARENA party once again triumphed in presidential elections, and the new president, Francisco “Paco” Flores, moved to implement the partial outsourcing of ISSS medical services.

In November of 1999, STISSS and SIMETRISSS signed a historic accord to lead a joint struggle against the privatization of the ISSS. In mid-November they launched a national strike against the privatization of the Salvadoran Social Security Institute. In the months immediately before the strike as well as in the first weeks of the conflict, STISSS and SIMETRISSS held several mass meetings with the NGO community and other multisectoral organizations that were founded in the late 1990s such as CLS, CSTS, and MOLI. From the beginning, public opinion polls showed that between 70 and 85 percent of the population was against the privatization of the ISSS. The doctors and health care workers used public misgivings about health care privatization along with higher electricity and telephone rates from earlier privatizations to piece together a broad multisectoral coalition against the privatization of the ISSS (Interview with leader of *Alianza Ciudadana contra la Privatización*, San Salvador, May 3, 2003).

Workers in STISSS had participated with ASTTEL in several campaigns against neoliberal reforms since the mid-1980s, including the ANTEL privatization campaigns discussed above. Both STISSS and SIMETRISSS were acutely aware of the dangers of only mobilizing within the state sector unions. Each month between December 1999 and March 2000 STISSS and SIMETRISSS convened a massive street demonstration in the capital that integrated a diverse array of civil society actors, including students, teachers, NGOs, peasants, state sector unions, militants from left political parties, and doctors and health care workers from the MSPAS. In January of 2000, public sector labor organizations in MOLI held several solidarity work stoppages in support of STISSS and SIMETRISSS. Also, in January of 2000, the NGO community formed a coalition of civil society organizations to support the anti-health care privatization campaign. Nongovernmental organizations played a major role in expanding the social movement unionism organizing strategy, bringing representatives from well-beyond traditional labor. This representation included environmental groups, women’s organizations, agricultural cooperatives, and community development committees.

By February of 2000, several street demonstrations were taking place in cities and towns outside of San Salvador such as in San Vicente, Aguilares, Usulután, San Miguel, Santa Ana, and many others. These protests outside of the capital averaged between 5,000 and 15,000 participants with an impressive showing of schoolteachers, labor unions, students, peasants, and NGOs. By early March 2000, the movement was peaking, doctors and workers in the MSPAS, after several short term work stoppages, were threatening to shut down the entire public health system if the government refused to negotiate with STISSS and SIMETRISSS and cease the privatization process. In addition, after a violent police crackdown of a SIMETRISSS sit-in in the hospital district of San Salvador, the movement held its largest demonstration to date with 50,000 people attempting to march down Paseo General Escalón (the main thoroughfare in an exclusive neighborhood in San Salvador) to the president’s house on March 8 in repudiation of the repression and privatization. On March 11, the government signed an accord with the striking ISSS workers promising to halt the impending privatization plans and to include previously excluded stakeholders (i.e., ISSS staff and physicians) in future rounds of health care restructuring programs.

In September of 2002, the conflict resurfaced when the government failed to implement the recommendations of the committee organized after the 1999-2000 strike. Instead, the ARENA government began plans again to introduce legislation that would allow outsourcing and privatization of the ISSS medical infrastructure. Once again, STISSS and SIMETRISSS went on strike and launched a campaign to resist the renewed efforts to privatize the ISSS. In this round of contention, the degree of social movement unionism catapulted to even greater heights in terms of commitment as the NGO community played a critical role in supporting

the ISSS workers. Traditional labor had been greatly weakened since the last strike with the firing of thousands of unionized public sector workers in the ministries of agriculture, treasury, public works, and the ports (interview with elected SIMETRISSS leader, San Salvador, May 5, 2003). The ISSS health care workers immediately used the same successful strategy as the previous campaign, coordinating with several social sectors inside and outside of health care.

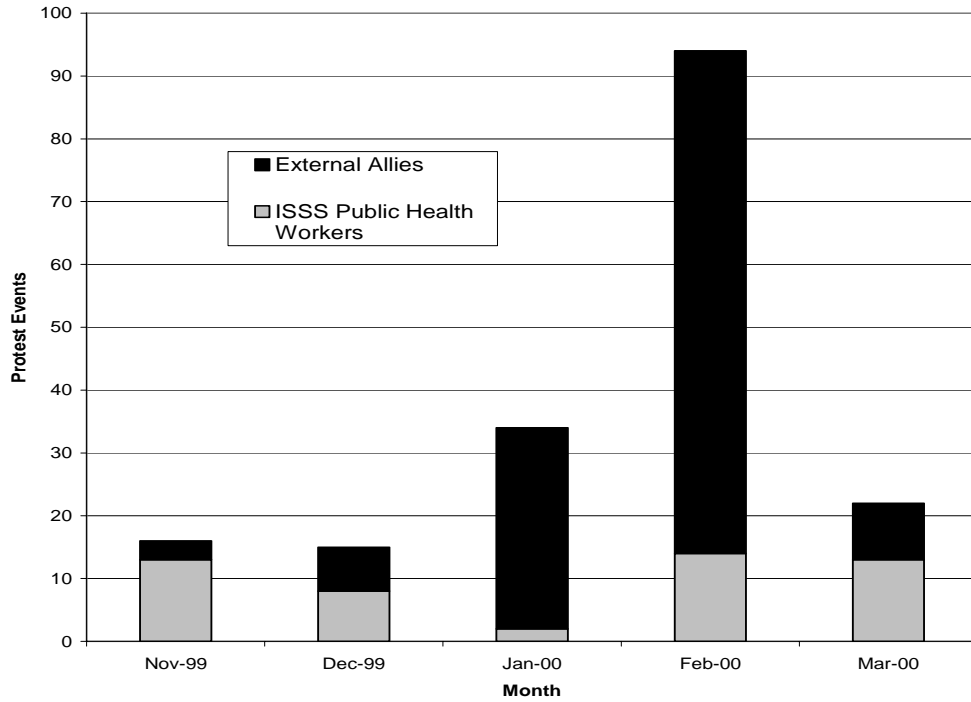
The CLS and CSTS (mentioned above) coordinated with the largest coalition of NGOs in the *Foro de la Sociedad Civil* to support the ISSS workers against privatization. Another closely related ad hoc organization of NGOs, students, and labor (the *Alianza Ciudadana contra la Privatización*) also formed in October of 2002, with the explicit goal of stopping privatization (“against privatization” being incorporated in its organizational title). Between October and December of 2002, these groups produced two decisive forms of collective action: (1) national days of action and (2) the *marchas blancas*. The national days of action included simultaneous roadblocks and street demonstrations on a national level, literally shutting down the country for hours at a time. There were at least five national days of action between October and December of 2002. The other major form of popular discontent included the *marchas blancas* (white marches) in which thousands of participants paraded in the capital and other major cities dressed in white to show their solidarity with the health care profession. The massive *marchas blancas* were held in October, November, December of 2002, and in February and March of 2003. Some of the *marchas blancas* involved up to 200,000 participants, the largest street demonstrations in El Salvador in decades. Both the national days of action and the *marchas blancas* would be inconceivable if they were only organized by the 10,000 workers and doctors that comprise STISSS and SIMETRISSS. The doctors repaid the population for its patience and support by setting up free medical consultations in tents in front of striking hospitals and sending medical brigades to the countryside.

In December 2002, after coming close to reversing the privatization process in the parliament, the ARENA government aligned with smaller right-wing parties to overturn movement-favorable legislation outlawing privatization of public health care. This protracted the health care conflict until June 2003. After sustaining protests in the first half of 2003, the ARENA-led government finally conceded in the middle of June and once again agreed to halt the privatization process and support the work of the health care commission set up after the 1999-2000 strike. Hence, on both occasions the movement succeeded in its primary goal of preventing the privatization of the ISSS. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the level of social movement unionism achieved in the two successful campaigns against health care privatization. In the 1999-2000 campaign, external allies were present in 72 percent of protests. In the 2002-2003 campaign, external allies participated in nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of protest events. Unlike the ANTEL telecommunications campaign, both health care campaigns included demonstrations and protests in dozens of towns and cities outside of the capital. The total number of protest events also shows the campaigns in defense of public health care were much more intensive than the ANTEL anti-telecommunications privatization campaign (i.e., the monthly totals are much higher than the yearly totals).

Costa Rica Campaign 1: *Teachers' Pension Reforms, 1995*

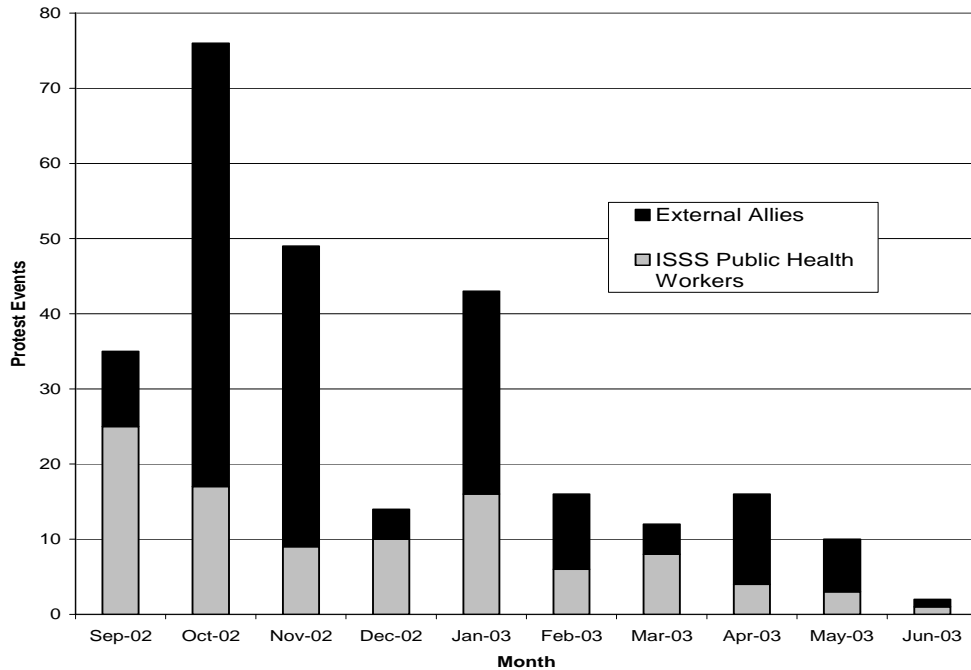
In Costa Rica, the state sector workers in the late 1990s learned from the 1995 teachers' strike against retirement and pension system cutbacks and other neoliberal reforms related to the nation's third major structural adjustment program. This 1995 mass movement was largely organized by the state sector teachers' unions and other public sector labor associations. The movement failed in August 1995 to prevent the implementation of the austerity policies. The 1995 campaign also lacked a wider coalition beyond the education sector and state labor associations.

Figure 2. Protests against Health Care Privatization—El Salvador, Nov 1999 to March 2000



Source: *Co Latino*

Figure 3. Protests against Health Care Privatization—El Salvador, Sept 2002 to June 2003



Source: *Co Latino*

Before the 1995 teachers' conflict, with the exception of the peasant sector, large sectors of the Costa Rican population failed to sustain campaigns against austerity measures.¹⁰ In some cases, the government would negotiate with labor leaders before the economic reforms were enacted. In other cases, civil society resistance was limited to the particular sector affected by the reforms. This was the case for small farmers in the 1980s contesting agricultural subsidy and tariff reductions (Edelman 1999), cuts in the university budget in 1991 that lead to a strike in higher education, austerity measures in public education that resulted in teachers' strikes in 1992 and 1993, as well as a campaign in May 1995 by state telecommunication workers against the takeover of cell phone administration by a transnational corporation. These smaller austerity conflicts resulted in some concessions won by the movement campaigns (Sandoval Coto 1995), including the teachers preventing a negative change in their pension program during the administration of President Rafael Angel Calderón Fournier. Scholarly observers in Costa Rica classify the 1995 austerity conflict and teachers' strike as the first major national campaign against economic globalization (Cedeño Castro 1995: 122), and the largest protest campaign of any type in the 1990s up to that date (Gutiérrez, Raventós and Sandoval 1996).

The 1995 conflict began in June when the leaders of Costa Rica's two major political parties (PLN and PUSC) signed a pact (*Pacto Figueres-Calderón*) agreeing to pass a series of neoliberal forms in the following six months. State policy makers were under enormous international pressure after the World Bank had refused to give the government a \$350 million loan earlier in the year and the International Monetary Fund had a standby loan ready to be issued once new economic reforms were implemented. International lenders expressed concern over Costa Rica's domestic budget deficit, which ran at about eight percent in 1995. One strategy to shrink the deficit involved restructuring the retirement system for public school teachers. The austerity plan would reduce pension payments from 100 percent of a teacher's final salary to 80 percent along with greater teacher contributions to the system as well as raise the age of retirement. The legislative assembly introduced and passed the restructuring plan on July 9, 1995, while teachers were on vacation. Policy makers scheduled the legislative debate and passage over the weekend, leaving little room for parliamentary discussion.

Knowing this legislation was in the pipeline, teachers began demonstrating outside the parliament building while educators from Heredia set up a tent city. The teachers called on fellow public educators to immediately return from vacation and organize to resist this economic threat. The teachers formed a coalition comprised of the four major teachers' associations in the country called the *Frente de Organizaciones Magisteriales* (FOM). The FOM represented between 35,000 to 50,000 teachers. By July 11, 1995, the teachers had entered into a coalition with a new ad hoc organization, the *Comité Cívico Nacional* (CCN). The CCN was comprised of 33 labor organizations, mostly from the state sector. The CCN was mainly concerned about other neoliberal reforms in the Figueres-Calderón Pact (e.g., cutting of 8,000 public sector jobs, increasing the value-added tax by 50 percent, increasing the prices of public utilities, and privatization of state institutions). In addition to supporting the teachers, the CCN demanded a 15 percent pay raise and price subsidies on 500 basic consumption products. The FOM also enjoyed the support of the four national universities, including faculty, staff, and students. Though these coalitions formed early in the strike, they were largely confined to the educational sector and public sector unions. In addition, the public sector unions mobilizing efforts did not materialize with the force that organizers anticipated.

The public educators decided to open the school year with a complete strike, which began on July 17, 1995. The following week, public sector unions from the CCN began to hold solidarity work stoppages with the teachers. The teachers held daily rallies in the capital, San José as well as intermittent demonstrations in provincial towns (Menjívar Ochoa 1999). On July 26, and again on August 7, the FOM held massive demonstrations in the capital. By August 11 leaders from FOM and CCN began to hold negotiations with the government,

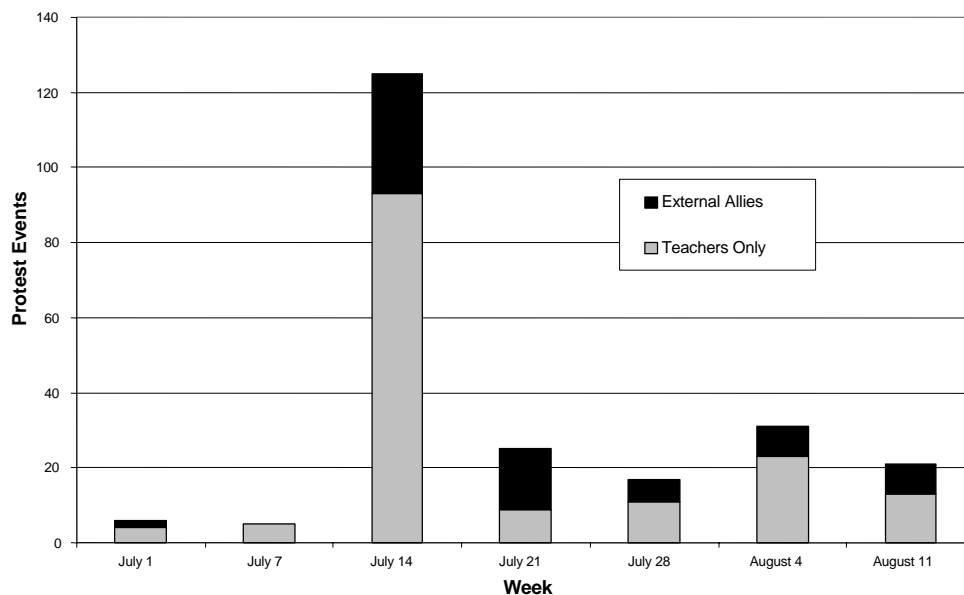
while more public sector unions began to join the strike and threatened to escalate the situation taking actions which would culminate in a general strike. On August 18, leaders from FOM agreed to end the strike and set up a special commission with representatives from the government, FOM, CCN, and the private sector to further discuss the pension law and other reforms without any guarantees of rescinding the pension law (Menjívar Ochoa 1999). The next week teachers returned to work. The reforms, however, remained in place years after the commission was set up. In sum, the teachers failed to overturn the pension law (an economic austerity measure), which was their explicit goal.

Similar to the telecommunications privatization in El Salvador, several other social sectors—such as peasants in Cartago and judicial workers—held simultaneous group-specific protest campaigns that neglected to link to the teachers’ movement during the first week of the strike.¹¹ Figure 4 provides information about the level of social movement unionism achieved in the 1995 teachers’ strike. Many more of the reported protests were held by teachers alone. External allies participated in only 31 percent of documented protest events during the strike.

Public opinion appeared divided in its support for the teachers’ demands. A national poll taken during the first week of the strike reported that 51 percent of Costa Ricans felt that the demands of the teachers were justified, but nearly 80 percent of respondents disagreed with the tactics of a labor strike and street protests. In this same survey, 46 percent of respondents did not think other labor leaders (i.e., CCN) should include additional grievances related to the Figueres-Calderón Pact, while only 28 percent thought the demands should be unified (*La Nación* 1995c).

In another public opinion poll, reported near the end of the strike in August, 48 percent supported the strike and 43 percent opposed it. In this same survey, 56 percent of respondents favored the new pension law, while only 26 percent felt that it should revert back to the original program favored by teachers (*La Nación* 1995e). Other public sector labor leaders in key organizations inside the CCN such as the water workers (AyA), Social Security/Health Care (UNDECA), and the federation of public employees (ANEP) disclosed to field reporters covering the strike that they were having a difficult time convincing rank-and-file union

Figure 4. Weekly Protests against Pension System Reform—Costa Rica, July-Aug 1995



Source: *La Nación* and *La Prensa Libre*

members outside of the educational sector to support the teachers' demands (Mora and Solís 1995; *La Nación* 1995d). In other words, some of the constituencies of key external allies (i.e., other public sector workers) did not clearly perceive (1) that the teachers' battle was tied to a larger process of neoliberal reforms in the legislative pipeline under the Figueres-Calderón Pact; and (2) the role that state sector union solidarity could play in impeding liberalization measures unfavorable to the working class as a whole. Even though the formation of the CCN and the solidarity strikes by public sector workers strengthened the teachers' bargaining power, the recent past of sector-specific forms of organizing against neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s constrained the overall degree of social movement unionism achieved.

Costa Rica Campaign 2: *Telecommunications and Electricity Privatization in, 1999-2000*

On March 20, 2000, the Costa Rican national assembly voted in favor (with 45 out of 57 votes) of a new law (*Ley para el Mejoramiento de los Servicios Públicos de Electricidad y Telecomunicaciones y de la Participación del Estado*) allowing for the partial privatization of the state-run telecommunications and power distribution enterprise—*El Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad* (ICE). Public opinion overwhelmingly opposed the privatization of ICE, viewing the state institution as a relatively efficient and affordable system that should not be left to the whims of international telecommunications and energy corporations (Alvarenga Venutolo 2005). Telecommunications and electricity cover over 95 percent of the national territory.¹² Civil society groups, realizing that the neoliberal legislation was in the works, began meeting in the spring of 1999. Earlier attempts to privatize the ICE had begun in 1995 under separate legislation for telecommunications and electricity generation and distribution. These earlier initiatives stalled for legal and bureaucratic reasons. In 1999, after a series of negotiations between the two dominant political parties (the PUSC and PLN), policy makers decided to combine the separate initiatives into one single piece of legislation that would allow for the partial outsourcing of ICE operations.

The ICE union leaders learned from the blunder of the 1995 teachers' strike and adopted a more inclusive organizing template to battle telecommunications privatization in 1999 and 2000 (interview with leader of *Asociación de Empleados Públicos* (ANEP), San José, Costa Rica, June 4, 2007), a strategy that proved successful in the short and medium term. Indeed, ICE workers were active participants in the 1995 strike, marching with the public educators on several occasions. Propaganda in the middle of the ICE campaign referred to the failures of the 1995 teachers' strike and calls to not allow the oppositional leadership to negotiate with the government without a prolonged consultation and approval from the movement base.

The ICE labor associations organized anti-privatization protest events and forums between April and July of 1999.¹³ The oppositional coalition was composed of some 15,000 ICE state workers (organized in eight associations) united in the *Frente Interno de Trabajadores* (FIT), university students, high school students, university workers' unions, environmentalists, the progressive Catholic Church, and a small oppositional political party (*Fuerza Democrática*). The newly formed coalition, led by the ICE unions, held a few anti-privatization actions in the second half of 1999. By the end of 1999 the ICE unions-led coalition termed itself the *Movimiento Cívico Nacional* or the *Liga Cívica* (Interview with university student leader, San José, Costa Rica, July 30, 2002).¹⁴ By early 2000, several oppositional factions emerged in civil society against the privatization. As the ICE privatization neared a vote in Costa Rica's unicameral legislature, the factions began to unify and coordinate as they feared a repeat of 1995 when the government proved less than transparent in implementing neoliberal reforms and defeated a divided social movement (*Proyecto Estado de la Nación* 2000).¹⁵

The coalition organized a mass street protest on March 17, 2000—just days before the vote—that ended at the legislative assembly. The ICE unions (organized in the *Frente Interno de Trabajadores*) effectively advertised the March 17 demonstration and other activities as a

multisectoral struggle of neighborhoods, students, church parishes, environmentalists, and NGOs fighting inevitable price increases if the ICE were privatized¹⁶ (see figure 5). On March 20, 2000, after almost a year of negotiating a diverse oppositional coalition, demonstrators surrounded the legislative building as lawmakers passed the privatization legislation. The anti-privatization movement referred to the ICE privatization program in a derogatory fashion as “El Combo” since it combined the dismemberment and privatization of electricity and telecommunications together. Oppositional propaganda employed the imagery of a fast food outlet’s “combo” meal to mock the government’s “great bargain” in selling off the national patrimony.

Days after the assembly passed the ICE privatization law (March 20, 2000), the opposition coalition had already assembled approximately 40 roadblocks and protests in all seven provinces of the country. University and high school students along with public sector workers joined barricades throughout San José and at strategic points on highways in the interior of the country. Unlike the 1995 campaign, organized peasants in the Cartago region united their demands against cheap agricultural imports with the ICE anti-privatization movement and erected barricades with students in the opening days of the conflict (Alvarenga Venutolo 2005).


For these disruptive protests, several dozen protesters were arrested while hundreds more faced tear gas dispensed by police. On March 23, 2000, in a defining moment for Costa Rica in the new century, the opposition coordinated a massive street demonstration with a reported 100,000 participants (*La República*. 2000b). Not only was a history-making demonstration held in the capital on March 23, several other cities held simultaneous street marches on the same day. In the cities of Heredia, Cartago, Alajuela, and Limón newspapers reported that the high schools were practically empty as students, teachers and parents joined the demonstrations against the privatization of the ICE. Several other cities and towns reported protest activities on March 22 (*La Nación* 2000).

Between March 20 and March 25 several state sector unions held full day or partial strikes including: the *Federación de Trabajadores Limoneses* (FETRAL) that encompasses city employees and dock workers in Limón; the ICE workers on a national scale; the public health care system employees (UNDECA), which held strike actions in 80 clinics and

Figure 5: “El Combo” Oppositional Propaganda, Costa Rica, March 2000

LA VERDAD SOBRE EL COMBO ICE

- Se aumentarían las tarifas, 4 veces más de lo que usted paga actualmente.
- Si usted paga ₡ 3,000.00, pronto pagará ₡ 12,000.00.
- Es un negocio de algunos políticos empresarios para robarse lo que es de los costarricenses, los recursos naturales.
- Estos políticos ya tienen empresas de **ENERGÍA y TELECOMUNICACIONES** por lo que están acelerando la aprobación de las **LAS LEYES DEL ICE**.



¿QUÉ DEBEMOS HACER?

Impedirle a los VENDEPATRIAS apoderarse de lo que es de todos. Las pastorales sociales, organizaciones comunales, federaciones universitarias, movimiento sindical, movimientos ecologistas y ambientales, Liga Cívica, Frente Patriótico Nacional, Consejo de Defensa de la Institucionalidad y otras organizaciones; estamos realizando movilizaciones conjuntas para exigir al GOBIERNO de la REPÚBLICA el RETIRO de la corriente legislativa del denominado COMBO ICE.

**UNAMOS ESFUERZOS
COMO PUEBLO**

**VIERNES 17 DE MARZO
JORNADA NACIONAL DE PROTESTA**

FRENTE INTERNO DE TRABAJADORES DEL ICE

TEL: 221-1792 - 257-2797
FAX: 256-5835 - 223-0123

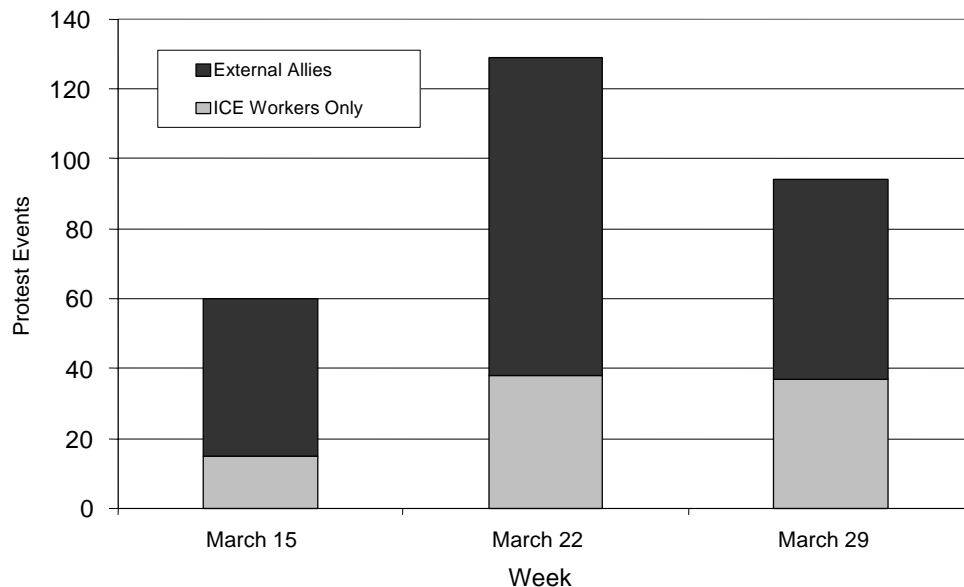
hospitals; the petroleum refining workers (Recope); and several other state sector unions, including teachers. Moreover, four university students initiated a 12-day hunger strike on March 20 in front of the ICE central administration building. Roadblocks, street marches, labor strikes, and rallies continued through the last week of March throughout the national territory. In the face of this massive outpouring of civil society resistance, the main oppositional political party, the PLN, publicly stated it would not vote in favor of the privatization in the next round of parliamentary voting (Solis 2002).¹⁷ According to the Costa Rican Constitution, pending legislation needs to pass two rounds of parliamentary approval before it can be enacted into law.¹⁸

Figure 6 provides information on the number of weekly protests at the height of the campaign. The data were gathered and coded from a main national newspaper, *La Nación*. The oppositional actions appear much more intense than telecommunications protest in El Salvador with *daily* protest averages surpassing the number of annual protests in El Salvador over the same issue (see figure 1). A progressive general strike began to take shape in the first week of April bringing in port and refinery workers from Limón on the Caribbean coast and dock workers on the Pacific coast, and several public sector unions organized by the National Association of Public Employees (ANEP).

Besides the ICE workers' strike, which began immediately following the passage of the privatization law on March 20, the majority of other protest actions included external groups. In total, external allies were present in over two-thirds of the reported protest events (68 percent). The large multisectoral and combative resistance in civil society and the PLN's reversal of support for the privatization, led the PUSC government of President Miguel Angel Rodríguez to enter a dialogue with the opposition by the first week of April. The mobilizations marked the largest mass outpouring in protest participation in decades. Indeed, in a 20-day period (March 16 to April 4) *La Nación* reported 274 protest events out of which 103 were roadblocks (37.6%), indicating a high level of disruption (*Proyecto de la Nación* 2000: 216).

A CID-Gallup polling team conducted a survey of 660 protest participants during the historic demonstration on March 23. The poll found that 44 percent of the protesters blamed the legislature for the ICE crisis and 27 percent faulted President Miguel Angel Rodríguez of the PUSC (*La República* 2000). In another telephone survey of the general population,

Figure 6. Weekly Protests Against Telecom and Power Privatization, Costa Rica, March 2000



Source: *La Nación*

conducted by the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) of 460 citizens on March 24 and 25, 2000, 53 percent of the population stated they were against the privatization legislation and only 20 percent responded in favor of the newly proposed law. Eighty-four percent of the respondents preferred a direct referendum on the privatization as opposed to delegating the issue to congressional authority. Seventy-one percent of respondents were in favor of the anti-privatization marches, while 42 percent stated they approved of the highly disruptive tactic of the roadblocks (Only 13.7 percent approved of such tactics during the teachers' strike in 1995; *La República* 2000c). Clearly, public opinion in early 2000 was against privatization of telecommunications and electricity, especially the form in which it was being implemented.

On April 4, 2000, the oppositional coalition (in the midst of an escalating general strike) signed an agreement with the government. The government agreed to shelve the privatization of the ICE and assigned a special commission to create an alternative plan for the future of the ICE. The special commission included key sectors of the oppositional coalition, including ICE labor associations, university students, environmentalists, and the progressive Catholic Church. In exchange for the halting of the privatization process, the civil society groups agreed to cease all disruptive protests and agitation in the final signed accord.¹⁹

DISCUSSION

The paired comparison of the sequencing of popular movement campaigns against neoliberal measures offers important insights into the pace of economic liberalization and the literature on social movement policy outcomes. A threatening economic policy such as privatization of government services and utilities or pension system reform, may push labor unions in the affected sector into a protest campaign with high levels of social disruption. The threat of privatization jeopardizes the public sector union's legal status as well as the rank-and-file members' job security in the institute or public utility in question (Rhodes 2006), while the austerity measure of pension system reform threatens economic well being. The ANTEL and ISSS workers in El Salvador and the teachers and ICE workers in Costa Rica shared this general perception. Such uncertainty reduces the restraints on unions to only use traditional and institutionalized bargaining procedures.

In each of the four cases the labor unions (or focal organizations) employed disruptive protest as a vital component of their respective campaigns. However, this study indicates that disruption alone is not sufficient for a movement favorable outcome. The employment of combative tactics forms only half of the equation of social movement unionism. The *breadth* of a coalition using disruptive protest proved crucial in this comparative analysis. When unruly tactics were used by the ANTEL labor associations in El Salvador, they rarely occurred outside of the confines of ANTEL worksites or beyond the capital. The teachers of Costa Rica largely used the strike at their schools and street marches as their central tactic. In contrast, in the Costa Rican ICE struggle, external allies (of largely students, church parishioners, ecologists, and other state sector unions) carried out assertive nonviolent tactics throughout the national territory (with high frequency) in order to protect the ICE from privatization. The health care workers in El Salvador carried out a broad social movement unionism campaign, paralleling the ICE workers in Costa Rica. In the two successful campaigns (health care in El Salvador and telecommunications/electricity in Costa Rica), external allies were, on average, present in two-thirds of all reported protest events. In the *unsuccessful* cases (ANTEL in El Salvador and teachers in Costa Rica), external allies participated in less than one-third of protest events.

El Salvador's state telecommunications' workers and Costa Rican educators brought groups outside of their organizations into the struggle only sporadically, and when they did, they were usually other public sector labor associations. In contrast, Costa Rica's ICE unions

and labor associations made pacts with outside groups nearly a year before the height of the protest campaign in the spring of 2000. The coalition of ICE unions, university and high school students, teachers, environmental NGOs, local church parishes, peasant federations as well as other state sector unions, made it possible to unleash a nation-wide campaign of mass disruption. The Costa Rican ICE protests escalated into the first phases of a general strike when the government finally backed down, entered negotiations, and rescinded the privatization legislation. The ISSS health workers and doctors coordinated a similar campaign in El Salvador between 1999 and 2003. Hence, these findings support research that contends the context in which the disruption is employed is crucial in having an impact (Almeida and Stearns 1998). In particular, when large numbers of external allies support assertive non-violent protest over a large geographical space it places more pressure on policy makers to reconsider implementing impending reforms.

In other major successful movement unionism campaigns against privatization in Latin America, a large multisectoral coalition joined with public sector unions, as in the cases of social security privatization in Ecuador in 1995, electricity privatization in Arequipa, Peru in 2002, water privatization in Cochabamba and El Alto in Bolivia in 2000 and 2004, and water privatization in Uruguay in 2004. In May-June of 2002 in Paraguay, a wide coalition of state sector workers, teachers, students, peasant associations, and neighborhood groups launched a direct action campaign (including dozens of highway roadblocks and an escalating general strike) which effectively halted a series of privatizations, including that of the telecommunications industry. Hence, even though this study examined four cases, similar situations in Latin America suggest that a wide and diverse coalition using institutional disruption is, at minimum, a critical condition for achieving movement-favorable policy outcomes. More comparative research would be needed to ascertain the degree that these are sufficient conditions as well if these successful campaigns emerged after lessons learned from previous failed mobilizations against similar neoliberal reforms. In addition, employing participant observation methods during meetings of civil society groups confronting unwanted policy changes would provide more detailed and microlevel information about the innovation process of how organizing strategies are discarded and new ones adopted.

The organizing templates that the focal labor unions chose to employ in this study were path dependent and historically embedded (Mahoney and Schensul 2006). The ANTEL privatization acted as the first major privatization of a public service/utility in the country. Past labor organizing—from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s—was largely based around organizing *within* the labor sector, and more specifically for civil servants, within the public sector. This mobilizing template had proven relatively successful in El Salvador for fighting milder austerity reforms or the release of jailed union leaders in the 1980s. However, with deepening global economic integration since the 1990s, the political muscle of labor unions in El Salvador and throughout the global South continues to wane as membership declines and bargaining power diminishes vis-à-vis capital and the state (Fitzsimmons and Anner 1999; Cook 2006). With both the failure of the ANTEL campaign and the continuing mass layoffs in the public sector, health care workers in the ISSS realized they needed to form broader alliances with NGOs, students, and other civil society groups in order to defend public health care. The public's skepticism about the effectiveness of the earlier privatizations also assisted in forming the extensive coalition that defeated public health care outsourcing on two occasions.

In Costa Rica prior to the 1995 teachers' strike, labor unions largely mobilized very short campaigns within their sector against neoliberal reforms. The Social-Democratic nature of the Costa Rican state usually resulted in a conciliatory posture on both sides of the conflict. This partially explains why the attempt at social movement unionism was relatively weak in the 1995 teachers' strike—a template for such organizing was not needed nor in existence in recent memory. By the mid-1990s, international financial institutions were pressing the Costa Rican state to reduce large budget deficits and implement deeper economic reforms. This placed policy makers in a more rigid stance vis-à-vis state sector labor unions, as witnessed

by the Figueres-Calderón pact of 1995, which committed the dominant political parties to implement several neoliberal reforms in a short time frame. Favorable public opinion of the dominant two parties was at an all-time low in the years immediately after the Figueres-Calderón Pact (Rojas-Bolaños 1997). After witnessing the unyielding posture of the hegemonic political parties in the aftermath of the 1995 teachers' strike, public sector labor unions realized they needed to redouble their efforts in future rounds of mobilization against neoliberal reform by reaching to broader sectors of civil society. Such organizational learning manifested itself in the monumental campaign in 2000 against the privatization of the ICE.

CONCLUSION

Social movement theorists have long contended that external and influential allies act as core features of the structure of political opportunity conditioning the relative success of popular movements (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1998). Empirical studies of movement outcomes give support to the pivotal role of external allies in the varying impacts of challengers on state policy making (Cress and Snow 2000; Stearns and Almeida 2004; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). This study not only reconfirms these findings on the importance of a focal challenger organization's ability to make broad alliances to sustain an efficacious campaign, but also establishes the types of historical contexts that are likely to be more conducive to forming coalitions with several external allies (i.e., potent social movement unionism). Thus, this study addresses the question: under what historical circumstances does a challenger successfully assemble a wide and forceful coalition of external allies? The comparative and sequential analysis of anti-neoliberal campaigns in Central America demonstrates that the wide and diverse coalition originates on the heels of less successful organizing templates and mobilizing drives. Mutual awareness in the larger social movement sector and favorable public opinion allow for organizational adaptation to take place in the next round of movement opposition to similar types of neoliberal policies. Successful organizing templates may also be used in subsequent rounds of collective action against neoliberalism as witnessed in the case of two rounds of health care privatization mobilizations in El Salvador and the more recent campaign against the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in Costa Rica.

NOTES

¹ Other properties of social movement unionism include democratic decision-making and high levels of internal solidarity within the labor union (Lopez 2004).

² El Salvador was embroiled in a protracted civil war from 1980 to 1992. United Nations brokered peace negotiations formally ended the civil war in January 1992. The war involved left-wing insurgents (FMLN) battling a repressive military regime that slowly liberalized into a rightwing civilian government. The armed conflict cost billions of dollars and the lives of an estimated 80,000 Salvadorans.

³ On top of these protests, ex-soldiers (organized in ADEFAES) and ex-paramilitary groups (*patrulleros*) launched a wave of violent and disruptive actions in January and February of 1995 over post-conflict reintegration issues and economic security. These rightist protests created more distractions and a climate of fear for the general population.

⁴ A CID-Gallup poll sponsored by the government taken in 1996, however, reported majority support for the privatization. The Universidad Centroamericana survey asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with phone and electricity privatization in the same question. See also, *Colatino* 1996.

⁵ On July 3, 1995 ANTEL workers occupied the central administrative offices of ANTEL.

⁶ The seven legislative deputies that left the FMLN went on to form the Partido Demócrata (PD) a centrist political party that supported ARENA's neoliberal modernization program until the party dissolved in subsequent electoral contests.

⁷ One report in 2003 estimates that less than 2,500 of the original 6,500 positions in the telecommunications sector remain (Velásquez 2003). An interview with an ASTTEL labor leader independently confirmed a similar figure (Interview with ASTTEL labor leader, San Salvador, September 26, 2007).

⁸ In late 1994 and early 1995, an organization entitled the “Coordinator of Social Organizations” played an important role in El Salvador by bringing labor-based associations together to confront government austerity measures. However, the coalition was largely made of state sector labor associations and only organized a few major actions. In brief, it enjoyed only an ephemeral existence compared to the organizations that would appear in 1998.

⁹ Smaller portions of the Salvadoran population receive medical attention from the teachers’ health care program (*Bienstar Magisterial*), the military’s program, or private hospitals and clinics.

¹⁰ In May-June 1983, a neighborhood-based movement with national reach fought the government against rising electricity rates, after price subsidies were repealed. This was another momentary movement that battled austerity in the 1980s besides the peasant sector (Alvarenga Venutolo 2005).

¹¹ See: *La Nación* 1995 and *La Nación* 1995b. Other major peasant organizations such as *Mesa Campesina* and UPANACIONAL also announced during the strike that they supported the government’s pension reform program and would not support the teachers (Menjívar Ochoa 1999).

¹² The government established El Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (ICE) in 1949 after several decades of struggle by the Liga Cívica and Asociación para la Defensa del Consumidor Eléctrico for the state to take over power distribution from foreign management. Telecommunications were added to the ICE in 1963. By 1988, 13 out of every 100 Costa Ricans had telephones in their home, about three times higher than the average for Latin America (Trejos 1988).

¹³ For example, on March 19, 1999 a mass street demonstration of thousands of workers took place in San José that condemned the notion of opening up the ICE to international investors. See: *La Nación* 1999.

¹⁴ See Merino (2000) for a discussion of organizing activities against ICE privatization in 1999.

¹⁵ The nascent coalition began leafletting its propaganda against the ICE privatization in bus stops, movie theatres, farmers’ markets and work-places between January and March of 2000 (Interview with leader of *Asociación de Empleados Públicos* (ANEP), San José, Costa Rica, June 4, 2007).

¹⁶ One leader inside the FIT reported to me the initial difficulty of negotiating a coalition with environmentalists, given that the ICE is a government development agency responsible for constructing dams, digging tunnels, and other industrial activities that often come into conflict with ecology NGOs. In the end, however, environmentalists concluded that these activities would best be regulated by the government with domestic political accountability than international energy and telecommunications firms, and thus joined the oppositional coalition (Interview with leader of *Asociación de Empleados del Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad* (ASDEICE), San José, Costa Rica, June 4, 2007).

¹⁷ The PLN held 22 of 57 legislative seats at the time, and its support was decisive if the privatization measure passed in a second round of voting.

¹⁸ In addition, on April 24, 2000, the Chamber of the Supreme Court that oversees legislative procedures (Sala IV) ruled the passage of the privatization law in the first debate as unconstitutional by the manner in which the dominant parties introduced the impending law into legislative debate (thus annulling it) (Solis 2002).

¹⁹ Mimeograph of final accord in possession of the author.

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