US Politics and the Social Regulation of Trade

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Social Regulation?

• The social regulation of economic agreements is part of the broader political economy
  – This is evident by the variability of approaches across the world

• Economic agreement strategies are part of and integrated into broader worldviews

• These worldviews are not universal
Social Regulation?

• Autonomous
  – Economic agreements grounded within social regulation

• Heteronomous
  – Social regulation conditional on economic agreements
What is to be Regulated?

• Flows (people, products, ideas) between countries?
• Economic flows (people, products, ideas) across countries?
• Production for trade?
• Production for local markets?
• The jurisdictional re-articulations of global production networks
Politics and the Social Regulation of Economic Agreements

• Since economic agreements are part of political economy
• Our study of them has to be based in political economy
• The challenge is to identify and map the political economies implicated
• In what follows I explore possible scenarios affecting the US regulation of economic agreements – but first..
The Many Countries of North America

- Canada(s)?
- USAs
  - High unionization states
  - Declining unionization states
  - Right to work states (South East and expanding)
- Mexico
  - Industrial Central and Northern Mexico
  - Less industrial parts of Mexico
The Many Countries of North America

• The right to work states and northern Mexico offer low or ‘disciplined’ unionization and cheaper labor

• Opposition to the social regulation of trade is integral to the social organization of these ‘countries’

• In this they are supported by European and Japanese companies
Negative Futures

- Nativism in Society at Large
- Further thinning of social welfare state
- Authoritarian Federal State
  - Trump as a decoy for authoritarian neoliberalism
- Sub federal states competing for investment
  - Right to work
  - Attack against public sector unions
  - Systemic anti-unionism
- Further decline of unions
- Further fragmentation of unions
  - The further consolidation of business and authoritarian unionism
- More predatory neoliberal business in USA
  - USA capital
  - European, Japanese, Indian, Chinese etc. business in the USA
- Predatory neoliberal business abroad
Positive Futures

• More democratic socialist society
• More democratic socialist federal state
  – Thicker social welfare state
• Revamping labour policies to minimize predatory competition amongst subfederal states
  – Breaking Republican hold on states
  – Preventing reassertion of neoliberal Democratic policies
  – Protecting/rewarding high union-density states
• A more comprehensive agenda adopted by unions
• Organic collaborations with other movements to be followed by the willing
  – How to make labor-environmentalist alliances more impactful?
Likely futures?

• Reassertion of centrist Democratic neoliberalism with some social welfare gains
  – The social regulation of trade as a transactional concession

• Reassertion of Republican neoliberalism with significant authoritarian elements
  – The further thinning of the social welfare state