

# **STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WORKERS AND THEIR TRADE UNIONS – CANADA AND USA**

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**Keywords:** workers, labor relations, North America, collective bargaining, standards, legislation, NAFTA

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## **Summary**

The labor relations systems in Canada and in the United States seem to have similar origins in that they both evolved from the passage of the 1935 Wagner Act in the United States. Thus the disparity in union membership between the two countries that has arisen since the early 1970s and has widened in the 1990s, particularly at a time when economic relations have never been closer because of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has been much analyzed. In fact, historically, from the time when a legislative framework was established, there have really been two different labor “regimes” in North America; their dissimilarities have increased and they have diverged further with the passage of time.

## **1. Objective**

The objective of this report is to outline the differences in the origins of the legal framework of the industrial relations systems which resulted from distinct political/economic environments during the Depression and World War Two years; to analyze the immediate post-war period when the systems were entrenched in law; traced the evolution of the two systems and their adaptation to the growing service sector; analyze the modern period and others’ critiques of it in order to draw some conclusion about the current state of labor relations in North America. The report then addresses how the situation might be improved to strengthen the role of workers and their trade unions, and the implications the status quo has for other workers in developing nations.

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