

counterbalance the enormous power of the United States and to avoid being excluded from a favorable trading relationship with Mexico.

The NAFTA negotiations lasted approximately three years (1990–93). During much of this time a serious global recession increased unemployment and undercut most people's incomes. Large and small firms throughout the world began a process of "restructuring," usually implementing new management practices such as "just in time" inventory systems and "total quality management," and eliminating jobs ("downsizing") at all levels. Suddenly, the long-standing concerns of workers, foremen, and managers, who saw their jobs evaporating, roiled the waters of the NAFTA debates in all three countries. In general there were four sources of criticism:

- Labor and community groups, mainly in Canada and the United States, decried the loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector, the deteriorating living standards that they predicted would result from freer trade and from MNCs moving jobs to lower cost locations, and the resulting disruptions to communities that would follow. However, most labor groups in Mexico, long loyal to the official government party, saw job and perhaps wage gains resulting from the NAFTA and, therefore, for the most part sided with the government's pro-NAFTA position.
- Environmentalists in all countries, citing the poor environmental enforcement record in Mexico, feared a massive exodus of firms out of Canada and the United States to escape those countries' stricter enforcement policies, aggravating both regional and global pollution as well as driving the job displacements noted above. Additionally, a growing group of environmentalists, who oppose expanding international trade generally, sided with the anti-NAFTA forces. They maintained that increasing "global interdependence" could have enormous negative effects on both the environment (e.g., through oil spills) and "institutions of community" within national borders.
- Human rights groups in the three countries pointed to the absence of truly democratic processes and the large number of human rights violations in Mexico. They argued that increasing trade links would implicitly condone such behavior. It is widely recognized that, while Mexico had dramatically reformed its economy, political reform had consciously been relegated to the back burner.