

## SHOP-FLOOR LABOR ORGANIZATION IN ARGENTINA FROM EARLY PERONISM TO THE “PROCESO” MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

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*This article focuses on a crucial aspect of the Argentine labor movement that, in spite of its importance, has not been adequately examined by the existing historiography: the high degree of union structure penetration at the shop-floor level through means of shop-stewards and comisiones internas (CI). First, it provides a basic definition of shop-stewards and CI for the Argentine case. Second, it briefly analyzes the history of these bodies from the early 1940s to the early 1980s, taking into account the most important structural transformations during this period, in particular the transition from an economic model driven by import-substituting industrialization from the 1930s to the mid-1970s to a process of deindustrialization from that moment onward. Third, it contends that these shop-stewards and CI experienced tensions and contradictions, some of which were related to those present within the Argentine industrial working class. Finally, it underlines the importance of taking into account this rich history of shop-floor organization to understand the strength of the Argentine labor movement in this period.*

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The Argentine labor movement has been considered as one of the strongest and most powerful in Latin America during the twentieth century. Traditional scholarly approaches have emphasized political factors to explain this, underlining particularly the importance of the relationship established between important sectors of the working class and Peronism. They have emphasized that the existence of a highly centralized union structure dominated by a single labor confederation, the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT) was the major source of that labor power. This article will focus particularly on a key aspect of the Argentine labor movement that, in spite of its importance, has not been adequately examined by the existing historiography: the high degree of union structure penetration at the shop-floor level through means of shop-stewards and *comisiones internas* (CI).<sup>1</sup> I will argue that the extension and strength of shop-floor organization in the workplace and particularly in large-scale industrial factories was another central factor to explain the power of the working class in Argentina from Peronism to the “Proceso” military dictatorship.

The text is divided into three main sections. First, it will provide a basic definition of shop-stewards and CI for the Argentine case. Second, it will briefly analyze the history of these bodies, from the early 1940s to the early 1980s,

taking into account the most important structural transformations during this period, in particular the transition from an economic model driven by import-substituting industrialization from the 1930s to the mid-1970s to a process of deindustrialization from that moment onward.<sup>2</sup> Third, it will argue that these shop-stewards and CI not only underwent historical transformations but also showed tensions and contradictions, some of which were related to those present within the Argentine industrial working class. Finally, it will underline the importance of taking into account this history of shop-floor organization in order to understand the strength of the Argentine labor movement during this period.

### *Defining Shop-Stewards and CI*

Shop-stewards and CI, while frequently mentioned in preceding historical studies, have been generally taken for granted and regarded as institutions that needed no explanation.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this was due to the fact that it is not easy to define them both because there are different regulations for the various economic sectors and activities and also because their functions and roles have experienced important transformations over time in terms of their legal framework as well as in their actual day-to-day functioning.

It is possible, however, to summarize some of the main features that define these institutions of workers' direct representation at the shop-floor. Workers of any company with ten or more employees are entitled to elect a representative; for example, a shop-steward. The number of shop-stewards for each firm is directly related to the number of wage workers employed in the company, and is regulated by legislation. Workers who want to be elected shop-stewards need to be members of the trade-union organization legally recognized by the state (with *personería gremial*). Any worker aiming at being elected as a shop-steward would have to certify that he/she worked at the workplace in question for a certain period of time (generally two seniority years are required), and would have to put forward his/her candidacy in an election organized and held by the local branch of the national union. Generally, shop-stewards are voted for by all of the workers of a certain section or department, although at certain historical periods they were sometimes directly appointed by the union.

The shop-stewards' body is a collective institution that comprises all shop-stewards in a particular factory. The *comisión interna de reclamos* (CI) is a smaller collective body composed of some shop-stewards. CI members can either be elected by direct vote by all of the workers of the factory (in an assembly or by secret ballot depending on the cases) or, else, be appointed only by the shop-stewards by direct vote. The CI is in charge of representing all workers in a certain factory and of collecting and conveying their demands regarding work conditions, health issues, wages, and any other specific complaints workers may have. At the same time, the CI is an essential part of the union structure and plays a key role in articulating workers from specific factories and workplaces with the national union structure.

*A Brief History of Shop-Stewards and CI from 1943 to 1983*

*The Expansion and Consolidation of Shop-Floor Representation (1943–1955).* From 1943—when a nationalist sector of the army seized power—onwards, a new political movement headed by Juan Domingo Perón emerged, eventually leading him to the Presidency in 1946. This study of shop-floor labor organization starts in this period of intense working-class mobilization when a series of changes in labor relations prompted key transformations in shop-floor labor organization, although there is fragmentary evidence indicating that this was not the beginning of workplace representation in Argentina. The early history of these bodies has not been studied in depth, but the available contributions suggest that there were different attempts at achieving labor representation on the shop-floor in the early times of the labor movement before 1943. Robert Alexander argued that the CI and shop-stewards that expanded and consolidated in the 1940s were in fact an extension of claims committees (*comisiones de reclamos*) that “almost every union had managed to introduce” at the level of the shop-floor before 1943. However, according to Louise Doyon, who made pioneer contributions on the subject, there was a radical difference between those bodies mentioned by Alexander and the ones introduced after 1945. Most of the pre-Peronist committees were not integrated into the union structure, and in fact, many of them had been created by businessmen to encourage “a conscience of community of interest” between bosses and workers. These “claims committees” were out of the sphere of influence of the most powerful unions and performed a different task given that they were subject to potential manipulation by management.<sup>4</sup> Instead, she argues that employers’ resistance against CI and shop-stewards extended during the Peronist period, and support and encouragement of unions are yet additional elements that support the thesis which states that these labor institutions had not reached a significant level of institutionalization before 1945.

A recent contribution on this matter suggests, however, that in the pre-1943 period, workers and militants carried out significant developments in terms of shop-floor organization in the industrial sector. Diego Ceruso showed that in some metallurgical and textile factories, as well as in construction between 1935 and 1943, militants of the Communist Party were successful in promoting the election of shop-floor representatives who were in charge of representing workers and fostering their demands.<sup>5</sup>

Although further research is needed in order to properly assess these institutions’ early history, there is scholarly consensus that the first two Peronist administrations (1946–1955) were a crucial moment with regard to the consolidation of the modern union structure and shop-floor organization in Argentina. Both sympathetic and critical assessments of Juan Domingo Perón’s governments agree in emphasizing that it was in this period that the predominance of the industrial union model (displaced craft guilds) was consolidated, which promoted the centralization of union power, as well as a close relationship with the State, which had been established by the 1945 Decree-Law 23.852. It was

also during this decade that a unified confederation of labor was formed for the first time in Argentine history. By mid-1948, most of the unions were brought together in a single national confederation, the General Confederation of Labor, or CGT, while the model of industrial union representation (as opposed to craft unions) extended to textile, metallurgical, shoemaking, clothing, tobacco, rubber, chemical, oil, electronic, and construction activities, among others.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the number of unionized workers increased dramatically. While in 1941, 441,412 workers were union members, in 1946 there were 877,330, and 2,256,580 in 1955. This means that in fourteen years, the number of unionized workers grew over 400 percent.<sup>7</sup> The consolidation of this powerful labor movement was accompanied by significant economic gains for the working class. Wage workers share of total GDP rose from 40.1 points in 1946 to 50.5 points in 1952 and 49.9 in 1954. This constituted an unprecedented redistribution of income in favor of wage workers and a clear reflection of their position of power in the economy and society.<sup>8</sup>

Louise Doyon first suggested that there was another key legacy of the Peronist years: the consolidation of the forms of representation and organization on the shop-floor by means of shop-stewards and CI.<sup>9</sup> Doyon notes that the implantation of these commissions was a direct result from the pressures exerted by workers and their organizations. In fact, because of employers' fierce resistance, the instances of representation on the shop-floor were not initially backed by the legal framework. The legal norms regulating unions made no explicit reference to CI, although unions argued in favor of labor representatives on the shop-floor based on a vague clause in article 49 that granted workers the right to elect their representatives without any specification as to the level or kind of functions. The weakness of this legal support suggests that the creation of these collective bodies was a result of the direct imposition of workers and their union leaders. In spite of the resistance against them, these instances of representation started to be acknowledged directly in the collective agreements by 1947.<sup>10</sup> According to Doyon, by 1950, CI extended to most of the unions, although their functions varied somewhat according to the balance of power present in each industry and factory.<sup>11</sup>

A number of 1946 sources were helpful to examine the role these collective shop-floor bodies had in this initial stage. In a series of documents written by textile leaders meant for distribution among workers, they argued that CI were fundamental in order "to demonstrate the potential and the firmness of our organization," for they "are the safeguard for the enforcement at the workplaces of the agreements reached on labor conditions."<sup>12</sup> Shop-stewards and CI were, in their view, the "pillars" of working-class organization that had to be "strengthened."<sup>13</sup> The existence of "capable CI, firmly supported by workers" was considered key to fight against "employers' capricious interpretation of the law . . . especially concerning vacations and illnesses."<sup>14</sup> In order to "unequivocally impose its strict enforcement in the whole territory of the Republic," they considered that "our best weapon" is to build "a serious and responsible organization [for] all industrial workers."<sup>15</sup> In September 1946, leaders of the textile

union called for an assembly of workers of the silk industry, arguing that "employers, in spite of the millions they made during the last years, want to limit and stop our aspirations."<sup>16</sup> They thought that in order to confront them, they "must be willing to fight in all arenas in defense of our rights."<sup>17</sup> The above statements seem to confirm, therefore, that CI were of great importance in strengthening labor.

Interesting and yet preliminary evidence shows that the establishment of these instances of shop-floor organization favored new forms of participation of women in union movement throughout the 1940s and the early 1950s. In the early twentieth century, unions mostly represented male workers because of the occupational segregation. This also favored the ephemeral development of some unions organized by women.<sup>18</sup> However, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, these separate organizations tended to fuse, although the leadership positions as well as the roles of delegates to congresses tended to be men, even in the cases where female workers predominated. The available contributions suggest that although women participated since the early twentieth century in strikes and working-class protests, during the 1930s and 1940s women workers' position was subordinated and weak in most of the unions.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, the establishment of shop-floor representatives introduced changes regarding women's involvement in labor representation. At that time, female industrial workers concentrated mainly on the textile, meatpacking, and food industries, especially in large-scale enterprises.<sup>20</sup> While the debates about the suitable place for women on the shop-floor and in unions continued to take place, union leaders expressed a renewed interest in their participation. Given that many departments, especially in food processing (meatpacking among others) and textile factories, consisted solely of women, their participation was necessary so as to ensure widespread representation of workers on the shop-floor. In this context, there was a renewed campaign, visible in union newspapers and publications, in order to promote their participation, especially in those activities where women's employment was high.<sup>21</sup>

Although the historiography generally acknowledged the transformations that occurred during this period, these are seldom explained as a result of working class actions. Instead, Perón and his administration are considered the most relevant factor, together with the national union movement, frequently depicted as an instrument of the government.<sup>22</sup> According to historian Daniel James, the union movement emerged from this period with a deeply imbedded reformism that rested on the conviction of the need to achieve conciliation with employers and to satisfy its members' needs by establishing an intimate relationship with the state.<sup>23</sup> In his view, therefore, "Peronism could be considered to have played a prophylactic role in preempting the emergence of autonomous activity and organization."<sup>24</sup> Although writing from a different analytical perspective, historian Walter Little also emphasized that "in spite of the strict control that Perón exerted over the unions, he never lost his deeply rooted fear of the spontaneous acts of the working class," and that "participation in the

Peronist system was never accompanied by a real responsibility but by an imposition of a monolithic control.”<sup>25</sup>

These interpretations that make reference to a reform from above in a context of working class demobilization and control are difficult to reconcile with the available information about labor conflicts during the period. Between 1946 and 1948, over 300 strikes were carried out by nearly one million workers who “lost” around 10 million work days in the city of Buenos Aires alone.<sup>26</sup> When looking at statistical series of strikes for the city of Buenos Aires from 1925 to 1954, the Peronist years stand out clearly as a time of unprecedented working class protest, not only in terms of the number of strikes but also in terms of striking workers and “lost” workdays where 1946 and 1947 are clearly peak years. These figures are not consistent with the image of rank-and-file passivity or with a working class aiming for “class harmony.”

These labor struggles during the first two Peronist governments—many of which became national in scope—focused on industrial activities, and their most frequent goal was to demand higher wages and better work conditions. Most of them took place in the course of the process of collective bargaining.<sup>27</sup> Doyon argues that these strikes reflected workers’ intention to bring their political victory from past elections to the economic sphere, and that between 1946 and 1948 strikes fostered a redistribution of power of great magnitude at the workplace. As a result of these struggles, workers reaffirmed their newly acquired position on the shop-floor consolidating the challenge to the authority and power of employers.<sup>28</sup>

By the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, economic difficulties caused changes in government’s attitudes toward labor conflict. After years of sustained expansion, the Peronist administration faced economic problems, deriving from an increasing gap between exports and imports.<sup>29</sup> If during the initial years there had been tolerance and support of workers’ struggles, many conflicts during the early 1950s ended up in repression, in particular against the sectors linked to the political opposition. Within the labor movement, these opponents to Peronism comprised groups that were in the two extremes of the Cold War confrontation: on the one hand left-wing militants (particularly Communists, but also Socialists, Anarchists, and Trotskyists who in many cases had an active participation in shop-floor organization and militancy), and on the other “free” trade-unionists, linked with Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers [ORIT]) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), some of whom were in exile.<sup>30</sup> However, even in this increasingly difficult context and enduring the opposition of part of the national union leadership and the government, shop-stewards and CI led other series of strikes and protests against the deterioration of the situation of workers during 1949 and 1950.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, in 1954, labor conflicts experienced yet another upsurge. Recent studies about the metallurgical strike of that year are especially useful to approach the still unexplored topic of the role of shop-stewards and CI in labor conflicts, which challenges the views alluding to total subordination and control



of the working class by the state.<sup>32</sup> The 1954 struggles focused on achieving a wage increase and the rejection of policies that linked wages to productivity. The importance of shop-floor organization and militancy becomes evident when considering the fact that conflicts started in January 1954 at the Pirelli factory, with workers going on strike to protest the layoff of shop-stewards and CI members who had led previous conflicts in demand of higher wages with no requirements regarding productivity.<sup>33</sup>

Shop-stewards and CI led this conflict, which soon extended to most of the major metallurgical factories throughout the country. The national labor confederation (CGT) initially backed up the demands, but when the labor conflict escalated, they tried to abruptly stop it by several means. This strike ended up with the signing of a collective agreement on June 1, 1954. This agreement which changed the working conditions of 165,000 metal workers did not include productivity and wage-related clauses or any clauses restricting CI prerogatives, all of which clearly reflected workers' victory.<sup>34</sup> In spite of this favorable outcome and the fact that the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (Metal Workers Union) [UOM]) considered the strike to have finished, in many factories shop-stewards and CI decided to continue carrying on the strike, demanding even higher wage increases and protesting against the lack of adequate responses on the part of the leadership. This wave of protest ended in repression, although the metallurgical activity was one of the least affected by the economic cuts that the industry suffered.<sup>35</sup>

Another relevant indicator to discern CI's role and power was the increasingly aggressive protest the industrial business elite carried out against shop-floor representatives. During Perón's second administration, the economic program expressed in the 1952 five-year plan sought to foster the transition from the production of consumption goods to intermediate and capital goods. The increase of productivity by means of limiting labor power at the shop-floor became a top priority. Contemporary sources from the period show businessmen's growing concerns regarding CI influence and power toward the end of the Peronist government. The employers' organization *Confederación General Económica* (General Economic Confederation, CGE), argued in a 1954 document that "CI have repeatedly proven not to understand the requirements entailed in an efficient firm management, and their attitude constitutes one of the main obstacles for rational organization of production." They denounced these representatives power and argued that "in an arrogant fashion, they have arbitrarily claimed the right to accept or reject management proposals concerning the change of methods, the pace of machines, or the elimination of unnecessary tasks."<sup>36</sup>

In this document, the CGE clearly argues that the so-called rationalization of production—which aimed at increasing efficiency, productivity, and profits—demanded a drastic change in working class representatives' power as they were the main obstacles in this process. In this context, businessmen appealed to the State, arguing that it was its task to educate workers and teach them to behave in a more adequate fashion and to accept the implementation of a wage system linked

to individual productivity, which would contribute to “increase the nation’s wealth.”<sup>37</sup>

The 1955 Productivity Congress shows the importance that this issue had, not only for industrial businessmen but also for the government.<sup>38</sup> In a speech delivered for that occasion, José Ber Gelbard, chair of the CGE, linked once again labor representatives’ power on the shop-floor with the obstacles to increase labor productivity, complaining about the position “the CI assumed in many factories, where they alter the concept that says that the mission of the worker is to perform a fair job in exchange for a fair pay . . . Neither is it acceptable that any shop-steward can, for no reason at all, blow the whistle at any given factory and paralyze it completely.”<sup>39</sup> Also, the Chamber of Metallurgical Industries presented a complaint before the Congress in which he denounced the “CI’s extreme liberty in the factories.”<sup>40</sup> These and other pieces of evidence suggest that the forms of shop-floor labor representation managed to retain their power until the end of the Peronist governments despite business opposition and the changes in the economy from the early to the mid-1950s.

*Challenging Times for the Working Class and the CI: From Setbacks to Mobilization (1955–1976).* The 1955 military coup that overthrew the second constitutional administration of Juan Domingo Perón (President from 1946 to 1955) signaled the beginning of a new period, both in political and economic terms. In political terms, it is necessary to underline the central role played by the armed forces, either through means of direct military dictatorships or “tutelage” over the civil governments, and the proscription of the Peronist Party, which until 1973 was banned from participating in elections or in any other political activity. As to the economic transformations, since the mid-1950s, the industrial sector became increasingly integrated: textile and food industries which had fostered industrial growth during the first two decades of import substitution industrialization (ISI) tended to stagnate, while the metallurgical, chemical, and automobile industries became the most dynamic activities. These changes marked the beginning of the second stage of the ISI model, which extended from 1955 to 1976.

During this period, there was a confluence between the important sectors of the business elite and the dominant fractions of the armed forces that played a central role in national politics based on their common goal to discipline labor. While for businessmen disciplining the working class was necessary in order to apply policies of reorganization of production and increase productivity, some sectors of the armed forces sought to alter the position of power that the working class had achieved during the past decade, paying special attention to workplaces. The military directly or indirectly in power during this period oscillated between two main strategies to deal with Peronism and the working class: repression and drastic restructuring of the labor movement and its power versus cooptation and integration of the leadership in order to control the rank-and-file.

During the first years after the 1955 coup, there was a strong offensive to limit shop-stewards and CI’s power and prerogatives, which was, however,



unsuccessful due to the intensity of workers struggles. According to the available data, in the city of Buenos Aires alone there were over 15 million work days lost due to strikes between 1956 and 1958. In 1959, labor protest peaked, reaching over 10 million work days lost due to strikes. This high level of working class struggle had a clear correlation in labor relations at the workplace. The Undersecretary of Labor Galileo Puente explained in 1960 that when he first assessed the problem of labor relations, he found “anarchy, abuses, and outrages of all kinds from the workers. The employers had lost control over their factories; CI ran everything; those who were meant to obey were in fact imparting the orders.” Puente considered this to be a major problem which had to be dealt with. He plainly explained that “employers must therefore retake control over their factories.”<sup>41</sup>

Shop-stewards and CI managed to survive that first general offensive, and the working class managed to preserve its power and influence on the shop-floor until the late 1950s. But if this first offensive was unsuccessful, the policies developed under Arturo Frondizi’s administration (1958–1962) on the contrary, obtained more significant results in challenging labor’s power at the shop-floor. While in 1959, there had been over 10 million lost workdays, in 1960 and 1961 they declined to slightly above 1.5 million, which means that while labor conflict continued, its intensity exhibited a noticeable decrease.

Repression against rank-and-file workers deepened at the turn of the decade. This had to do not only with rising working class struggles but also with the change of the international context and particularly the impact of the Cuban Revolution. The success of a revolutionary drive in a Latin American country, together with the process of decolonization and the configuration of the “Third World” camp that defended an anti-imperialist stance in the face of the Cold War, had a decisive influence on political and labor organizations.<sup>42</sup> Not only left-wing organizations (that is, Communists, Socialists, and Trotskyists, among others) but also important sectors of the Peronist movement underwent a process of radicalization. At the same time, the international context deepened the fears already present among the business and military elite. This led to the formulation of the doctrine of the “internal enemy” by the armed forces in the CONINTES plan (State’s Internal Commotion) in 1960, which sanctioned the detention of hundreds of militants and activists. This plan was later replaced by the National Security Doctrine (*Doctrina de la Seguridad Nacional*) that considered the “anti-subversive struggle” as a top priority for the armed forces.<sup>43</sup>

Daniel James—one of the few historians who took into account the transformations of shop-floor organization during this period—proved that in this context of rising repression, employers granted concessions to the union leadership in exchange for their control of the rank-and-file. James argued, moreover, that the fair degree of control inside the factory that had been achieved during the Peronist government began to be eroded in the 1955–1959 period, experiencing an even more serious deterioration from 1959 onward.<sup>44</sup> According to him, “the frontier was firmly fixed at the factory gate and all territory beyond

was strictly under management dominance,” and therefore for most of the 1960s CI were “in a general state of crisis.”<sup>45</sup>

New documentation, together with recent analytical contributions, contained in a number of recent studies on economic, social, political, and cultural aspects support an alternative interpretation of the evolution of the forms of militancy and organization at the level of the shop-floor in large industrial enterprises during this period.<sup>46</sup> This evidence shows that working class organization and militancy at the level of the shop-floor was, contrary to James’ assessment, quite active and important after 1959–1960. In particular, the *Plan de Lucha*, a large-scale protest plan carried out by the CGT, consisting of the occupation of factories in 1964, was an example of the importance and extension of working-class organization at the shop-floor. In the course of few weeks, almost 4 million workers seized 11,000 factories in an orderly fashion.<sup>47</sup> This plan showed both the power of the centralized leadership and the importance and vitality of the shop-floor representatives and forms of organization, which actually made the campaign of factory seizures possible.

The development of the *Plan de Lucha* was impressive, not only because of the number of workers and industries involved, but also because of the detailed and careful planning it entailed, under conditions of secrecy which made coordination and synchronization especially complex.<sup>48</sup> The outstanding role played by workers and their shop-floor representatives stands out when trying to understand how the CGT was able to mobilize these masses in just a few days and in such an orderly fashion. The instructions distributed by the textile union—the *Asociación Obrera Textil* (AOT)—made reference to a “chain of command” that had to be respected in order to execute the plan, as well as to a network woven between national labor leaders, regional and local branches, CI and shop-stewards, and rank-and-file workers.<sup>49</sup>

The success of the *Plan de Lucha* depended, therefore, on leaders and workers ability to communicate and on the already mentioned chain of command involving all union levels of organization.<sup>50</sup> Several trade unions, including the AOT, held numerous assemblies and informative meetings in different factories where labor leaders explained the plan to workers and shop-stewards.<sup>51</sup> AOT documents explain that “only in few occasions had a labor protest received such spontaneous support from the rank-and-file as the CGT *Plan de Lucha* did.” The textile union leaders held assemblies, meetings in factories, public events, and gatherings in union halls. Andrés Framini, AOT General Secretary went to factories in Buenos Aires, suburban area, and several other provinces, while the members of the national leadership, as well as branches, sectionals, and delegations’ leaders engaged in similar activities aimed at securing the *Plan de Lucha*.<sup>52</sup>

However, while shop-stewards and CI remained active and participated in conflicts, the early 1960s were certainly critical for industrial workers and shop-stewards, taking into account the intensification of the rhythm of production and increases in productivity in a context of growing unemployment and a general deterioration of working conditions in the majority of factories.<sup>53</sup>

Economic studies also stress the fact that there were important increases in productivity in the industrial sector. While in 1951, the industrial sector employed 1,445,300 workers, which was a 27.3 percent of the entire workforce, in 1970 they were 1,669,000, which was a 25.55 percent. Also between those years the growth of industrial production was 5 percent, while employment's was only 0.5 percent.<sup>54</sup> The increase in labor productivity was not mainly the result of the implantation of new technology. Instead, reorganization of production and an increase of the intensity of work, namely an increase in the exploitation of labor were the main forces driving it. These changes were coupled with a decline in confrontation and mass mobilization in factories and the strengthening of a conciliatory leadership with greater control over the rank-and-file. These two processes were closely linked: the increasingly bureaucratized leadership received important compensations in exchange for contributing to this process of demobilization.

The growing distance between the leadership and the rank-and-file was to become a main feature throughout the period. According to many authors, the process of union leadership "bureaucratization," that is, the constitution of a separate caste with its own interests, different from those of the masses, seemed to have started in the final years of the Peronist government but extended from the early 1960s onward.<sup>55</sup> Labor leaders not only benefited from the financial resources unions acquired but were also able to offer certain benefits to union members so as to secure their support. They were also in a considerably stronger position to exert internal repression against those who disagreed with or confronted the predominant orientation.<sup>56</sup>

This leadership's dominant position was also strengthened by the 1958 Law 14.445 of Professional Associations, which reenacted the single-union system and its hierarchical and centralized structure. It also reinstated State's recognition of industrial unions, establishing that only they would have full collective-bargaining rights at every level: local, regional, and national. Even though the law permitted both a federative and a more centralized union structure, the latter prevailed among the most important industries, such as the cases of the metal-working, railroad, textile, and construction. In these unions, the control exerted by the leadership over the branches and factories was, in formal terms, extremely tight. In the textile union, for example, central leadership was authorized by article 53 of the union codes to change the authorities of any section that performed acts of indiscipline or any irregularities. As CI was considered as directly linked to the central leadership, their functions and attributions were increasingly controlled.<sup>57</sup>

The transformations of the economic and social structure are important to explain the transition from these early critical years to a period with more favorable conditions for workers. The second stage of the import substitution industrialization period can be divided into two different subperiods. The first, from 1955/1958 to 1963 was characterized by a cycle known as "stop & go," composed of periods of industrial growth followed by an abrupt fall of industrial activity in absolute terms due to the imbalance between the necessary imports to

keep up the industrial development and the insufficient exports to finance it. In this initial period, the government passed new legislation to promote foreign investment and accepted the participation of Argentina in the IMF and the World Bank. In later years, from 1964 to 1974, although there were periods of acceleration and relative deceleration, the industrial sector underwent sustained and continuous growth in absolute terms at an annual average rate of 5 percent, thanks to the maturity of previous foreign investment, promotion of industrial exports to compensate for the insufficiency of primary exports, and the recourse to external debt.<sup>58</sup> This meant that the new wave of labor activism from the mid-1960s onward took place under structural conditions that were substantially more positive than those of the previous subperiod.

In this context, anti-bureaucratic groups, most of which were born at the level of the shop-floor, increasingly challenged the existing leadership, demanded democratic organization, and became strongly linked to an upsurge of social and political mobilization. This was fueled by the increasing repression implemented by the dictatorship of General Onganía, from 1966 onward, which targeted students, intellectuals, as well as the most radical sectors of the working class. During this period, there was an increasing confluence of these anti-bureaucratic groups with the sectors of the left (that also included a sector of Peronism that had experienced a profound radicalization). The CGT *de los Argentinos*, an alternative national union confederation, founded in 1968 brought together many of these anti-bureaucratic groups, which built connections with the student movement, the Third World Priests movement, and other social sectors that were experiencing a process of militancy and radicalization. The social rebellion known as the *Cordobazo*, a working class and student upsurge that took place in the industrial city of Cordoba in May 1969, was the first of many massive popular mobilizations that had key political consequences (General Onganía had to resign from the Presidency in 1970, while his successor, Levingston, also did so in 1971). Contrary to what many historical studies argue, many left-wing political organizations and guerrilla movements were, especially from 1970 onward, connected to the process of radicalization experienced by sectors of the working class. In fact, the increasing connection between them was one of the main factors of concern for both the military forces and the economic elite that supported their political intervention.<sup>59</sup>

While one of the main issues under discussion within the labor movement was the process of bureaucratization and the demands for democracy, there was another source of confrontation of a different nature. Besides the discussions about internal organization, there were different views within the working class about the relationship between workers and employers, which translated into distinct ways of understanding labor action and different strategies.<sup>60</sup> The metallurgical leader Augusto Timoteo Vandor, the CGT General Secretary, believed that class conciliation was possible and desirable; hence the labor movement had to put pressure and negotiate with the employers and governments in order to increase its share within the existing system and without aiming at introducing significant fundamental structural changes. In contrast,

the combative groups, besides defending union democracy and attacking the bureaucratic leadership, believed that there was an intrinsic contradiction of interests between capital and labor, and that therefore the working class could not expect any compromises, as it was subject to a permanent struggle against the employers. Therefore, the controversy within the working class was not only related to the degree of bureaucratization or democracy within the labor movement but also to a different understanding of the relationship between labor and capital and different strategies.

The period between 1969 and 1973, from the *Cordobazo* till the March 1973 elections—which put an end to the 18-year-long proscription of Peronism—was a moment of rise of rank-and-file militancy and organization on the shop-floor. The cycle of working-class struggle that began in 1969 was followed by other uprisings, such as the 1971 so-called *Viborazo* that also took place in Córdoba and fostered rank-and-file mobilization in factories.<sup>61</sup> During this period, combative groups grew in number and power, simultaneously coexisting with the expansion of guerrilla organizations that attempted to support working-class action, taking part in some of the most prominent upheavals.<sup>62</sup> From 1969 to 1973, one of the most outstanding political phenomena was the consolidation of a left-wing camp.<sup>63</sup> The *Cordobazo* fueled the previously mentioned convergence of sectors of the Peronist left and other groups of the new left (including Marxists, Anarchists, Trotskysts, Maoists among others), showing the existence of an active working class and student movement that protested against the dictatorship and demanded change.<sup>64</sup>

The *Cordobazo* also triggered important transformations regarding the relationship between capital and labor on the shop-floor. Shop-stewards and CI in many industrial plants led protests and activities, acting independently from union leadership.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, there were changes in the forms of protest and confrontation. From 1969 onward, a growing number of protests took place directly in the workplace. Factory takeovers became increasingly more common, including in many cases taking hostages. With these types of measures, the company's authority was subverted and traditional labor relations were challenged, while the headmost union leadership's role began to be regarded as increasingly secondary.<sup>66</sup> Another important change, linked to the above mentioned, was the appropriation of new spaces other than the workplace, like the working-class community. Protests from 1969 onward involved a variety of new spaces and institutions: neighborhood organizations, parishes, political halls, and sports and social clubs played a role in supporting working-class struggles. There was also a tighter relationship with intellectual circles, and labor conflicts were publicized by a network of social and political publications, some of which were clandestine.<sup>67</sup>

An additional important feature of the 1969–1973 period is that while the more orthodox and the combative groups had radical differences in their understanding of the capital–labor relationship, as well as different strategies, they coexisted to a certain extent. Although they engaged in constant confrontations at workplaces and in the political sphere, they nonetheless coexisted as different



perspectives of lines within the labor movement until the elections in 1973. The reasons for this coexistence were in the first place that the dictatorship was a common enemy (which each of the groups confronted with its own strategy, according to their different goals and perspectives). While repression was predominantly aimed at the combative group, it also affected the bureaucratic leadership and the conciliatory sectors of the labor movement. At the same time, the orthodox leadership and the Peronist left shared the membership of the same party, Peronism, which was proscribed and persecuted. Both perspectives were in a defensive position against the alliance between the military and employers.

The series of working class and student mobilizations achieved important transformations, and in 1973, the military dictatorship finally called for elections. In that year, in which Perón returned to the country and was elected President, a new period started, characterized by an increasingly acute confrontation within the Peronist movement between the right and left political currents that had radically different projects for the organization of the country. In 1974, when Perón died, the struggle within Peronism unleashed and triggered an even more violent confrontation between the sectors of the left and the right, within Peronism and beyond it, which was invoked as a cause for a new military intervention that took place on March 24, 1976. This regime, which proclaimed to aim at ending violence, developed instead a plan of systematic repression of the opposition that has been characterized as a case of state-terrorism.

*The Offensive against Labor: The Military Dictatorship (1976–1983).* The character of the coup d'état and the ensuing military dictatorship is still an object of controversy in both academic and political circles. Statistical evidence indicating that in the period previous to the coup the industrial sector experienced a decade of sustained and continuous growth suggests that it is not justifiable to argue, as some analysts still do, that the industrialization model experienced an endogenous implosion that caused its termination. Instead, in the context of the growth of the industrial sector, the economic policies applied during this period fundamentally altered the economic and social foundations of the country. During the second stage of the ISI industrial workers (and especially those employed in new dynamic industries) had occupied a central place, not only as producers in the industrial activities that were driving the country's development and generating the highest profits for businessmen, but also as consumers, as the industrial production had been mostly destined for the internal market. The structural change of the mid-1970s, which fostered a process of acute deindustrialization, greatly eroded the power of labor.<sup>68</sup>

In terms of economic policies, the 1977 Financial Reform established domestic interest rates considerably higher than the international ones, therefore altering dramatically the structure of internal prices in the domestic economy and favoring financial speculation over industrial production.<sup>69</sup> This cycle of financial speculation was based on an abrupt increase of the external debt. This provided funds initially for the internal financial market to profit from high interest rates, and after that, to send both the original funds and



derived profits abroad. From 1979 onward, the authorities fostered economic openness, profoundly affecting the industrial sector which had to confront, not only the change in internal prices but also the competition of imports without protective tariffs. As a result, the industrial sector not only ceased to be the key economic activity driving growth but in fact presented an evolution characteristic of war or natural disaster: the industrial production in 1983 was 10 percent smaller, in absolute terms, than that of 1973.<sup>70</sup> That is, the military dictatorship not only constituted a period of strong repression but also a time of profound structural change.

Changes in the industrial sector had significant impact on the power of labor and its organization. Not only did the industrial sector lose importance in relative terms regarding percentage of the GDP and also in absolute terms, but it also experienced a process of restructuring which benefited the largest companies, most of them securing oligopolic positions in their markets by absorbing smaller firms, therefore strengthening significantly their position over labor. Moreover, the military dictatorship developed a program of subsidies, supposedly aimed at "industrial promotion" that benefited these oligopolies, which received important tax exemptions in return for establishing part of their productive activities in new areas.<sup>71</sup> These policies also affected labor organization, as many large-scale factories located in areas with previous tradition of union organization were closed down or reduced in size. This left a portion of the workers unemployed in the original areas, which damaged the power of those still employed, at the same time that new factories were established in areas with no previous history of industrialization and union organization.

Repression against the working class was another prominent feature of the period. The armed forces considered industrial workers, and especially shop-stewards and members of CI in large industrial factories, as a main target. Repressive policies against industrial workers and union leaders included kidnapping and/or disappearance, murder, persecution (that drove many of them to exile, in other countries or to other Argentine provinces), or imprisonment of activists, shop-stewards, and CI members. Testimonies and documents demonstrate the extreme concern of the armed forces and the economic elite for the increase of militancy on the shop-floor that had taken place during the late 1960s and reached a very high point by the mid 1970s as well as for the links between workers and their immediate representatives and left-wing organizations. They also reveal the involvement on the part of management personnel of some of the most prominent industrial enterprises in terms of repression against their own workers, whom in some cases were kidnapped in the firms' vehicles or taken to concentration camps located within the boundaries of the industrial plants.<sup>72</sup> An example illustrating the confluence between the economic elite and the armed forces is provided by one of the most prominent figures of the period, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, who was until 1976 President of Acindar, a steel mill in Villa Constitución which became an emblematic case of workers mobilization and repression, and was then appointed as the Minister of the Economy from 1976 to 1981.

At the same time, trade union activity was severely affected by the suspension of civil liberties and the military's direct control and management of the national labor confederation—CGT—as well as several of the most important trade unions.<sup>73</sup> During the initial three years, dozens of organizations were placed under military supervision while many others were deprived of their legal status.<sup>74</sup> The most numerous and important unions, such as UOM and UOCRA (metallurgical and construction unions, featuring nearly 300,000 active members each), were among the federations affected.<sup>75</sup> The appointment of military officials to one third of the national labor organizations severely undermined the centralized national union structure's power. Labor rights, beginning with the right to strike, were suspended, along with any form of collective organization and bargaining.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the military dictatorship introduced changes in legislation intended to legalize repressive activities and the military presence at labor institutions. A series of legal norms froze all union activity,<sup>77</sup> while others, especially the Law of Professional Associations 22.105 of November 1979, established new regulations in labor activity (by replacing the Law of professional associations 20.615 of the previous government) to undermine the institutional and financial foundations of union power.<sup>78</sup> This law passed in 1979 suppressed the existence of any third-degree union organization, thereby abolishing the CGT.<sup>79</sup>

The three policies were closely related. Repressive and labor policies had a strong economic impact, causing an increase in productivity and a decrease in real wages so dramatic that can only be understood in a context of persecution of the activists and strict prohibition of bargaining activities.<sup>80</sup> In their turn, economic policies strengthened the impact of the other two, as the structural change they caused altered the place of workers in the economy and society. If during the import substitution industrialization model there was a limit in terms of the decrease in wage levels that could not be surpassed without affecting the evolution of the dynamic sector of the economy. This is because profits depended on the ability of workers to consume the products, while in the new economic model, profits started to be increasingly independent of these factors. Therefore, the economic and social structural changes reinforced the attack on industrial workers that repression and the prohibition of union activities had started.

In spite of the damaging effects of this offensive against labor, different sectors of the working class presented a number of responses to face these various threatening policies. Both workers and their organizations responded in changing ways during the period, and it is necessary to take into account the initiatives of both the leadership and the rank and file, the actions that took place in the country and those developed abroad, and the open, most visible forms of protest, as well as the underground movements. In terms of the first point, it is necessary to stress that if a significant part of the rank-and-file as well as sectors of the leadership found ways to express resistance and discontent against the dictatorship, there was also part of the union leadership that simply accommodated to the terms of the regime and played an important role in the legitimization of the regime, both internally and externally.

As for the situation at the factories, the previously analyzed history of organization at the level of the shop-floor played a decisive role in the first years of the regime when the impact of the prohibition of union activity and repression reached its highest point. From 1976 to 1979, although there were a relatively significant number of “traditional” strikes and protests, the workers involved in them were severely punished, many of them with prison, disappearance, or death. The high level of repression forced the development of underground strategies to express labor unrest. Although shop-stewards and CI members were among the most looked-for targets of repression and a great number of them had to leave the factories to save their lives, the previous tradition of organization and militancy at the shop-floor was important for the workers to organize different strategies that included sabotage, different methods for lowering the rhythm of production (*trabajo a desgano*, *trabajo a tristeza*), repeated individual claims, and written petitions, among many others.<sup>81</sup> In this period, there was another form of struggle that became important: the international campaign of combative workers and union leaders in exile against the dictatorship that received the support of local workers and leaders and of many international labor organizations.<sup>82</sup>

In April 1979, a sector of the union leadership represented by the so-called “Commission of the 25,” called for a national day of protest that marked the transition to a period of relatively more open mobilization and a slow return to the traditional forms of struggle, such as massive mobilization, strikes, and protests. However, repression, if not so severe as in the previous period, continued nevertheless, and many of the labor leaders involved in these protests were imprisoned for periods that ranged for days to months. From 1980 onward, the effects of the international campaign against the dictatorship led by human rights and labor activists, together with the sustained militancy of human rights and labor groups in Argentina showed important progress. In 1981 and 1982, other massive protests followed, and after the defeat in the Malvinas War, the transition to democracy was consolidated and opened the path for a slow recovery of labor rights from 1983 onward. In spite of the strategies developed by workers and unions to repeal the attack on these various fronts, it is clear that the dictatorship and the structural change developed from the 1970s onward had a profoundly negative impact for industrial workers and their ability to organize and foster demands.

### *Tensions and Contradictions within Shop-Stewards and CI throughout the Period*

The existence of these commissions under labor control at the workplace ensured important benefits not only to workers but also to unions. They increased the labor organizations’ efficiency to protect economic and social rights within the production system and created a permanent connection between the union organization and the base. Moreover, they offered an effective assurance for the actual implementation of labor legislation and the collective agreements reached by the union, creating directly on the shop-floor a

collective body that could negotiate the workers' demands with the bosses without any fear of retaliation. In the case that their demands did not receive a satisfactory solution, they could resort to the local or national union. These commissions also ensured a direct and continuous channel of communication between the union and the workers that made it possible for the militants to be aware of the concerns of the union members.

Taking into consideration the multiplicity of functions that the shop-floor representatives performed and their impact on union structure, it can be argued that the ability to elect shop stewards and the establishment of CI constitutes one of the most important achievements of the Argentine working class after 1945.<sup>83</sup> The combination of a centralized union leadership in the CGT and the presence of labor representatives at the level of the shop-floor was a powerful legacy that strongly influenced the history of the Argentine working class from then on.

At the same time, when considering the entire interpretation of the history of shop-floor organization in Argentina from the mid-1940s to the early 1980s, it is possible to identify certain tensions and contradictions present in them throughout history. The first source of tension within these shop-floor bodies was related to the intrinsic challenge of the dynamics of representation. The legal recognition of these representatives' rights and prerogatives, while it was a remarkable achievement for workers and the product of a process of militancy and struggle, implied the separation of the representatives—who were granted special benefits—from the rank-and-file. Therefore, when representing their fellows, shop-stewards became more than just plain workers and acquired their own interests and perspectives.

A second tension is linked to the relationship between these shop-floor representatives and the union structure. The integration of these instances of representation with the national union movement was essential to strengthen the position of labor against capital on the shop-floor. This allowed these representatives, if necessary, to mobilize workers and their organizations beyond the factory to which they belonged and to exert political pressure at the national level. At the same time, this implied that these shop-floor representatives became part of the union structure. This meant that shop-stewards and CI not only represented workers and conveyed demands and concerns to the leadership of the union but that they functioned in the opposite direction as well. They were also in charge of transmitting orders from the leadership and of channeling every protest or demand of the rank and file, and therefore they could become instruments of control over these same workers. This was promoted not only by the leaders of the national unions but also by the state, which also had interests in organizing masses whose actions could have been "anarchic" and potentially dangerous otherwise.

Finally, there were other fundamental tensions within these institutions of shop-floor representations associated with the existence of different views among workers about their class identity and their relationship with the employers. That is, contrary to what many authors imply when they refer to shop-

stewards and CI, they did not always play the same role but assumed different tasks and roles depending on the views and strategies with which they were associated. When analyzing the history of shop-floor organization and workers' experiences in the light of influential structural factors, there were different traditions and strategies within the working class, which can be grouped into two main lines: the orthodox or conciliatory and the combative.

The first group, which we called conciliatory not because of its tactics but due to its view of class relations and its strategy, conceived of the process of production as a joint venture developed by capital and labor, each of which made specific contributions to make it possible. From this perspective, the greater the commitment of both parts with the enterprise of production, the better for all. In this view, class harmony appears as desirable and as possible. The second group, which we called combative due to its view of class relations, on the contrary, stressed that given that labor is the source of wealth, businessmen can only make profits by exploiting workers. From this perspective, it is not possible to reconcile the interests of capital and labor, as their interests are by definition opposed. Workers can only achieve gains at the expense of the employers, and vice versa. The debate and confrontation between these two views (generally linked to these two main lines in the Argentine labor movement with two different strategies) appeared constantly not only between one shop-steward and another but also in the form of debates and strong confrontations within groups of workers. The controversy and tension was present even within individuals themselves, who often shifted during his/her lifetime from one view to the other, or even eclectically combined partial elements of each of them.

### *Final Remarks*

This brief analysis of the history of shop-floor representation and organization in Argentina from the Peronist decade to the last military dictatorship suggests that the existence of CI and shop-stewards, which provided the rank-and-file with a useful institution to express and organize, was an important factor in explaining the strength of the Argentine labor movement. Their significance of shop-stewards and CI for the Argentine working class becomes visible, not only when analyzing the role they played key labor conflicts and processes of organization throughout the period, but also when realizing that they became central targets for the military forces during the "Proceso" dictatorship, which aimed at drastically alter the balance of power between capital and labor.

Moreover, the analysis of this important dimension of labor organization allows for a better understanding of the different components of the Argentine union structure which was characterized not only by strong nationally based industrial unions and a centralized leadership but also by dynamic institutions of labor representation on the shop-floor. At the same time, the analysis also suggests that the process of labor militancy and organization at the workplaces, far from being simple and unidirectional, put forward difficult challenges. In this

process, workers not only had to face the opposition of the business elite but also had to deal with their own contradictions and tensions.

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## Notes

1. This article summarizes some of the most important contributions presented in my PhD dissertation, "Labor and structural change: Shop-floor organization and militancy in Argentine industrial factories (1943–1983)" defended in December 2009 at Columbia University. I would like to thank my advisor, Prof Pablo Piccato, Profs Eduardo Basualdo and Daniel Azpiazu, for their valuable comments on previous manuscripts of this article, Florencia Rodríguez and Paul Cooney for their helpful suggestions, and the funding granted by Columbia University and the Whiting Foundation which made this research possible. The dissertation studies the transformation of the forms of militancy and organization of industrial workers from industrialization to deindustrialization, and specifically focuses on three case-studies: the Acindar steel mill in Villa Constitución, in Santa Fe, and the Alpargatas textile mills in Barracas and Florencio Varela in Buenos Aires.
2. The import-substituting industrialization model (also known as ISI) is a strategy for economic development based on the promotion of industrial activities aimed at replacing imports with domestic production, which was widely applied in Latin America during the twentieth century. While traditional studies placed its origins in the 1930s, many important contributions demonstrated that there had been previous stages of industrial development that had provided the necessary infrastructure for the expansion experienced from the 1930s onward in Argentina and in several other Latin-American countries.
3. See for example Louise Doyon, *Perón y los trabajadores. Los orígenes del sindicalismo peronista, 1943–1955*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2006; Daniel James, *Resistance and integration. Peronism and the Argentine working class, 1946–1976*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; and Alejandro Schneider, *Los compañeros. Trabajadores, izquierda y peronismo, 1955–1973*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2006, among others.
4. Louise Doyon, "La organización del movimiento sindical peronista," *Desarrollo Económico* N°94 (July–September 1984), 211 and Robert Alexander, *Labor relations in Argentina, Brazil and Chile*. New York, 1962, 196.
5. Diego Ceruso, *Comisiones internas de fábrica. Desde la huelga de la construcción de 1935 hasta el golpe de estado de 1943*, Buenos Aires: PIMS-Dialektik, 2010.
6. Doyon, "La organización del movimiento," 209–11.
7. See Louise Doyon, "La formación del sindicalismo peronista" in *Nueva historia Argentina. Los años peronistas, 1943–1955*, edited by Juan Carlos Torre. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2002, 369. These figures are in fact conservative, as Walter Little alludes to 2,334,000 unionized workers in 1951. See Walter Little,



- "La organización obrera y el Estado peronista, 1943–1955" *Desarrollo Económico* 19, no. 75 (October–December, 1979), 370.
8. See Eduardo Basualdo, *Estudios de historia económica Argentina. Desde mediados del siglo XX a la actualidad*, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2006, 35–7.
  9. See Doyon, "La organización del movimiento" and "Conflictos obreros durante el régimen peronista (1946–1955)," *Desarrollo Económico* no. 67, vol. 17 (October–December 1977).
  10. Doyon, "La organización del movimiento," 210.
  11. It is possible to appreciate the attributions of these bodies by looking at the 1949 metallurgical collective agreement. Among the enumerated functions of the CI, the agreement mentions the presentation of the workers' claims to the employers, supervision of correct implementation of current labor legislation, safety norms, collective agreements, and correct treatment of workers by overseers, collaboration in the internal discipline of the firm and improvement of the plant, discussion with the employers before any discipline measure is taken against workers, contribution to the decrease of labor conflicts, and finally the attribution of total mobility inside the workplace. Doyon, "La organización del movimiento," 210 and *Estatutos de la Unión Obrera Metalúrgica*, 1949.
  12. Document "Las comisiones internas: garantía del cumplimiento de las condiciones de trabajo en los establecimientos," September 1946 in CEDINCI Archives. The document is signed by the leaders of the silk commission: Eduardo A. Lavalle (Secretary General), Valentín García Romero (Adjunct Secretary), Delso Potenza (Secretary of organization), José M. Lema (Secretary of Propaganda), Ricardo Sampayo (Secretary of acts), Roque Baviello (Treasurer), Francisco Pérez, and E. Ochoa (Vocals). For more information about the CEDINCI archive (Centro de Documentación e Información sobre la Cultura de Izquierdas en la Argentina) and its documental collections, which contain a wide range of publications, documents, leaflets and secondary bibliography on the history of the labor movement and left-wing organizations, see: <http://www.cedinci.org/>.
  13. Document "Las comisiones internas," CEDINCI Archives, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  14. Document "Las comisiones internas," CEDINCI Archives, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  15. Document "Las comisiones internas," CEDINCI Archives, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  16. Document "Las comisiones internas," CEDINCI Archives, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  17. Document "Asamblea general del gremio de la seda," September 1946 in CEDINCI Archives, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  18. Nari, *Políticas de maternidad*, 90. Nari argues that the unions (which were not nationally based industrial-type unions but rather craft unions) were not originally for both genders. She explains that this was due to occupational segregation and also to the preferences of men and women. Nari also refers to the existence of a union central organized by women, the *Unión Gremial Femenina*, founded in 1903 because of the initiative of the Feminine Socialist Center. No other contributions have been found on this interesting issue, which deserves further research.
  19. Marcela Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político. Buenos Aires, 1890–1940*, Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004, 90. Research on the participation of women in union organizations is limited, although there are contributions on women participation in the labor market during the first decades of the twentieth century (see for example María del Carmen Feijóo, "Las trabajadoras porteñas a comienzos de siglo" in *Mundo urbano y cultura popular. Estudios de historia social argentina*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1990), as well as about women's political militancy during that time, in particular in anarchist and socialist organizations. There are many testimonies of women arguing that their participation was not easily nor comfortably accepted by their male *compañeros* (who in many cases were their fellow political militants or even their own husbands) and that the role attributed to them was clearly secondary. Nari, *Políticas de maternidad*, 90.
  20. Mirta Zaida Lobato, "Women workers in the 'Cathedrals of Corned Beef.' Structure and Subjectivity in the Argentine Meatpacking Industry" in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers. From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*, edited by John D. French and Daniel James, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997, 53–6, and also Lobato, *Historia de las trabajadoras en la Argentina, 1869–1960*, Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2007, 85–92.
  21. An example of the documents calling for the participation of women is "A las compañeras textiles," *AOT* (publication of the Asociación Obrera Textil), Year 1, no. 1 (October 1946). Interesting trajectories of women workers who became active in politics and the labor movement see Daniel James, "Tales Told Out

- on the Borderlands.” Doña María’s Story, Oral History and Issues of Gender’ in John D. French and Daniel James (ed.), *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers. From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997; and also see interview with Alicia Fondevila (Graphic worker, shop-steward, and labor leader in the CGTA and the Federación Gráfica Bonaerense) by Victoria Basualdo, July 2006.
22. See for example Little, “La organización obrera,” 376.
  23. James, Resistance and integration, 38.
  24. James, Resistance and integration, 38.
  25. Little, “La organización obrera,” 376.
  26. Doyon, Perón y los trabajadores, 252.
  27. About working-class conflicts during the first two Peronist governments, see Doyon, *Perón y los trabajadores* and “Conflictos obreros,” Scott Mainwaring, “El movimiento obrero y el peronismo, 1952–1955.” *Desarrollo Económico* 21, no. 84 (January–March 1982); Little, “La organización obrera y el Estado Peronista,” among others. An interesting and useful recent contribution focused on the 1954 metallurgical strike is Marcos Schiavi, *La resistencia antes de la Resistencia. La huelga metalúrgica y las luchas obreras de 1954*, Buenos Aires: Editorial El Colectivo, 2008.
  28. Doyon, Perón y los trabajadores, 255–92.
  29. The economic model implemented in the mid-1940s fostered industrial development by means of reinvesting part of the profits generated by the primary sector. This eventually made the production of primary goods less profitable and attractive for the business elite. This in turn favored a decrease in primary goods’ production and exports, which were necessary to fund the imports required for furthering the process of industrialization. As a result, industrial growth slowed down along with profits.
  30. See Doyon, *Perón y los trabajadores* and Schiavi, *La Resistencia*, among others.
  31. Doyon, Perón y los trabajadores, 255.
  32. Schiavi’s interesting study about different episodes of the metallurgical strike provides a case in which it is possible to explore the dynamics of shop-floor organization. He underlines the active role of left-wing militants (especially Communists and Trotskyites) in struggles at the workplace and portrays a complex interaction between the union leaderships and the shop-floor representatives. In his analysis, it is possible to see also that while shop-stewards and CI played prominent roles in these labor conflicts, they had in many cases to endure state repression, particularly—but not exclusively—the left-wing militants. About the presence and impact of Communist militants in shop-floor struggles, see Schiavi, *La Resistencia*, 134–52.
  33. Schiavi, *La Resistencia*, 89–90.
  34. Schiavi, *La Resistencia*, 115–7.
  35. Schiavi, *La Resistencia*, 122–34.
  36. Confederación General Económica, *Congreso de Organización y Relaciones de Trabajo* (Buenos Aires, 1954), 70–1, quoted by Doyon, *Perón y los trabajadores*, 388–9. (Author’s translation).
  37. CGE, *Congreso de Organización y Relaciones de Trabajo*, 70–1, quoted by Doyon, *Perón y los trabajadores*, 388–9. (Author’s translation).
  38. See Rafael Bitrán, *El Congreso de la productividad: la reconversión económica durante el segundo gobierno peronista*, Buenos Aires: El Bloque, 1994.
  39. “Informe sobre las actuaciones del Congreso de la Productividad y el Bienestar Social,” *Hechos e Ideas* (1955), 280 quoted by Daniel James, “Racionalización y respuesta de la clase obrera: contexto y limitaciones de la actividad gremial en Argentina.” *Desarrollo Económico* 21, no. 83 (October–December 1981), 334.
  40. *La Verdad* (April 9, 1955), quoted by James, “Racionalización y respuesta de la clase obrera,” 334.
  41. Documentos del plenario nacional de las 62 Organizaciones (Buenos Aires: May, 1960), quoted by James, Resistance and integration, 135.
  42. Richard Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón. Los Montoneros*, Buenos Aires: Grijalbo, 1982, 60–4.
  43. See Alicia S. García, *La Doctrina de la seguridad nacional, 1958–1983*, Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1991 and Anzorena, Oscar, *Tiempo de violencia y utopía. Del golpe de Onganía (1966) al golpe de Videla (1976)*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1998, 13–16, among many others.

44. See James, *Resistance and integration* and "Racionalización y respuesta de la clase obrera," "Power and politics in Peronist trade unions," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Volume 20, Issue 1 (February 1978), 3–36, among others.
45. See James, "Power and politics in Peronist trade unions," 27–8.
46. One of the main sources of information was the Archive of the Comisión Provincial por la Memoria in the Province of Buenos Aires, which is in charge of administering the recently opened archive of the Intelligence Division of the Province of Buenos Aires (DIPBA). For more about the Archive of DIPBA, see: <http://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/archivo-dipba.htm> Thanks to this archive, it was possible to access previously unavailable intelligence reports and unpublished (in many cases, top secret) documents on labor activism and militancy that were of key importance and value to reflect the kind of activity and organization at some large factories of the Province of Buenos Aires. Second, it was possible to locate both in archives such as the CEDINCI and in private collections of researchers and militants, leaflets and political publications of different labor and political organizations that were helpful to document labor struggle and organization at the factories. Third, previously published studies that included interviews with key figures of the labor and political spheres or documents were also very useful, together with new statistical analysis of the labor market and the evolution of union organization.
47. One of the recent historical contributions that discussed James' interpretation and made an interesting contribution on the analysis of the 1960s is Schneider, *Los compañeros*, 205.
48. For a detailed and interesting description of the organization of the *Plan de Lucha* see the testimony of the labor leader Avelino Fernández in Osvaldo Calello and Daniel Parcerro, *De Vandor a Ubaldini*, Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984, Vol. 2, 81–2.
49. "Each leader, each activist, and each worker should: (a) execute with discipline what has been decided by the CGT, (b) constantly keep in touch with the AOT's organic bodies. From this moment onward, sectionals, branches, and delegations will not take any decisions regarding the Plan de Lucha without explicit authorization of the Directive Council. Union leaders should take full responsibility to lead workers to the completion of the adopted plan". See document "Plan de Lucha de la CGT. Orden no. 1 de la Asociación Obrera Textil" (Buenos Aires, May 15, 1964), in Table "B" folder: "Plan de Lucha, 2ª etapa, regional Lanús," DIPBA Archives, Comisión Provincial por la Memoria.
50. A DIPBA intelligence report prior to the Plan underlined the key role rank-and-file had in this process: "If workers respond favourably to the CGT's plan, success will be unavoidable and, in fact, total subversion will unquestionably arrive. If the plan is accepted or half-heartedly carried on, the CGT will no longer be a central factotum. It will go a step backward, which is not convenient for its leaders." See the document "Plan de Lucha de la CGT. Antecedentes sobre toma de establecimientos, 2ª etapa" (May 18–June 28, 1964), Table "B" folder: "Plan de Lucha, 2ª etapa, regional Lanús," Policía de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Central de Inteligencia-U. Regional San Martín, DIPBA Archives, Comisión Provincial por la Memoria.
51. An example of such documents reflecting the Plan de Lucha preparations is: "Textile union assembly in The Patten Knitting," Table B, folder 16, subfolder 7 labelled "Asociación Obrera Textil de Berisso" (April 9, 1964), DIPBA Archives, Comisión Provincial por la Memoria. The document indicates: "A general assembly of informative character took place, with the aim of clarifying the Plan de Lucha decreed by the authorities of the national CGT. The General Secretary of the Asociación Obrera Textil, Andrés Framini was the spokesman, accompanied by the CGT regional representative (La Plata), as well as by the factory's representative of the textile union. The possibility of gathering at the factory had been authorized by The Patten Knitting authorities, and the estimated attendance was of 230 workers, among whom the female element was predominant, together with workers of the exiting and entering shifts."
52. See documents by the AOT (Buenos Aires, April 1964), Table B, folder 16, subfolder 7 labelled "Asociación Obrera Textil de Berisso," DIPBA Archives, Comisión Provincial por la Memoria. See also Artemio Framini (Peronist militant and brother of Andrés Framini), interviewed by the author, March 2007.
53. Journalist Rodolfo Walsh also underlines in his book, *Quién mató a Rosendo*, the importance of the 1959/60 collective agreements: "The 1959 agreement was presented to the metallurgical workers as a triumph. Defeat was hidden in its unwritten clauses, the de facto alliance between businessmen and union leaders. The industrial sector, which had been reequipped and had received one fourth of the foreign investment, had to follow a monopolist path: economic concentration, elimination of small workshops, increase in labor productivity, higher business profits. The Vandorist leadership agreed to all of this and the consequences were serious, not only for the rank-and-file." Rodolfo Walsh, *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1968, 144–5. (Author's translation).

54. Adolfo Canitrot and Pedro Sebens, "Algunas características del comportamiento del empleo en la Argentina entre 1950 y 1970." *Desarrollo Económico* 14, no. 53 (April–June 1974), 80–1.
55. See Roberto Carri, *Sindicatos y Poder en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudestada, 1967; Doyon, "La organización del movimiento," 222.
56. James, Resistance and integration, 166–70.
57. Estatuto de la Asociación Obrera Textil, Buenos Aires, December 1966.
58. See Basualdo, *Estudios de historia económica argentina*; Mario Brodersohn "Estrategias de estabilización y expansión en la Argentina, 1959–1967" in Aldo Ferrer et al., *Los planes de estabilización en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1969, and "Política económica de corto plazo, crecimiento e inflación en la Argentina, 1950–1972" in *Problemas económicos argentinos*, Buenos Aires, Macchi, 1974, as well as E. Eshag and Rosemary Thorp, "Las políticas económicas ortodoxas de Perón a Guido (1953–1963). Consecuencias económicas y sociales" in Aldo Ferrer et al., *Los planes de estabilización en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1969, among others.
59. See for example James, *Resistance and integration* and "The Peronist Left, 1955–1975," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (November, 1976).
60. This is coherent not only for the cases of Acindar and Alpargatas analyzed in my dissertation but also with other recent case-analysis focused on large-scale industrial enterprises, such as Astilleros Río Santiago, Petroquímica Sudamericana, and Propulsora Siderúrgica, all three of them located in the surroundings of La Plata city. In all of them, it is possible to see an increasing confluence of militants and workers from Marxist organizations and the Peronist Left, as well as an opposition between this "combative" field and the orthodox lines advocating negotiation and compromise as the best strategies. See for example Darío Dawyd, "La 'huelga santa' de los petroleros de Ensenada. Petróleo, peronismo y política en el 68 argentino," Valeria Snitcofsky, "Villas de Buenos Aires y conflictos portuarios bajo el gobierno de Onganía: aportes para un análisis de la articulación entre sindicalismo de base y organización territorial." Florencia Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI. Un análisis a partir del estudio de caso de Mercedes Benz Argentina;" Federico Lorenz, "'Por la buena o por la mala.' Militancia sindical y violencia política entre los trabajadores navales de la zona Norte, 1973–1975," Belén Zapata, "'Necesitaban gente que estuviese en el oficio . . .' Del olor a plomo, al olor a tinta en los talleres gráficos de La Nueva Provincia (1973–1976);" Victoria Basualdo, "La organización sindical de base en Acindar Villa Constitución en la segunda ISI: aportes para la comprensión de sus particularidades y significación histórica" and Ivonne Barragán, "Acción obrera durante la última dictadura militar, la represión en una empresa estatal. Astillero Río Santiago (1974–1984)" in Victoria Basualdo (coord.), *La clase trabajadora argentina en el siglo XX: experiencias de lucha y organización*, Buenos Aires, Cara o Ceca, 2011.
61. The mass uprising called "*Viborazo*" in March 1971 took place shortly after a speech delivered by the governor of the province in which he referred to the struggle of workers and students in the city of Córdoba as a "poisonous serpent" whose head he intended to "cut with a single blow." See among many others James Brennan, *El Cordobazo. Las guerras obreras en Córdoba, 1955–1976*, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1994.
62. There is a vast literature about the history of the politico-military organizations that appeared and gained influence during this period.
63. For a series of articles about the increasing articulation of the opposition to the dictatorship and the increasing legitimacy of violent actions to respond to state repression, see *Cristianismo y Revolución*, July 1969 and January 1970. An example of such documents is the public letter by priest Rafael Yacuzzi addressed to General Onganía which argued that "the only positive in all this is that we have finally realized that against the sustained exploitation and the ill intended lies we can do nothing else than to organize the struggle and to walk the path of liberation." See *Cristianismo y Revolución*, July 1969.
64. As General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, President between 1971 and 1973, explained, referring to the political process after the *Cordobazo*, "a new opposition was born in the country . . . It was a youth opposition that tried to gather all the sectors that challenged the . . . economically liberal system. This youth opposition did not understand Catholicism and Marxism, or Nationalism and Marxism as antagonistic. In fact, radicals, socialists, orthodox Peronists, liberals, and Communists all participated in the demonstrations. But in this predictable opposition. . . also participated a left-wing and pro-Peronist Catholicism, which in many cases had originated in classic Nationalism." See Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, *Mi testimonio*, Buenos Aires: Laserre, 1977, and Anzorena, *Tiempo de violencia y utopía*, 75–6.

65. One example is the protest in ILASA a factory associated with IKA-Renault, in July 1969, in which workers spontaneously abandoned their work posts and called for a 24-hour strike to protest the dismissal of a worker and the attempts to implement an incentive regime in order to increase productivity. This protest was backed up by the CI of the IKA main plant, which made the decision to abandon production. Only later they informed the union, which supported the initiative. This is just one example of the kind of struggles that the CI started to lead. See Mónica Gordillo, "La irrupción de las bases y la representación del orden entre los trabajadores mecánicos cordobeses, 1969–1971," paper presented to the XVI Congress of Economic History, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1998.
66. James Brennan and Mónica Gordillo, *Córdoba rebelde. El Cordobazo, el clasismo y la movilización social*, La Plata: Editorial de la Campana, 2008, 111–15.
67. Brennan and Gordillo, *Córdoba Rebelde*, 115.
68. To study the impact of the military dictatorship on industrial workers also constituted a major challenge because the conditions of censorship and repression affected many of the archival collections destroying them or making them unavailable. Again, the archive of the former Intelligence Department of the Police of the Province of Buenos Aires (DIPBA) was of key importance, as it provided intelligence reports and documents on the situation within large industrial enterprises, political, and labor militancy and links between political and guerrilla organizations and the labor movement, which complemented other archival collections found in Europe and the U.S.
69. See Eduardo Basualdo, *Estudios de historia económica argentina* and Jorge Schvarzer, *La política económica de Martínez de Hoz*, Buenos Aires: Hyspamérica, 1987.
70. See Daniel Azpiazu, Eduardo Basualdo y Miguel Khavisse, *El nuevo poder económico en la Argentina de los años 80*, Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1986.
71. See Eduardo Basualdo, *Estudios de historia económica argentina*.
72. See Victoria Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina. Los casos de Acindar, Astarsa, Dálmene Siderca, Ford, Ledesma y Mercedes Benz," in *Suplemento especial de Engranajes a 30 años del golpe militar, FETIA-CTA*, marzo de 2006c, also available at: <http://www.riehr.com.ar/detalleInv.php?id=7> and Victoria Basualdo, with the collaboration of Ivonne Barragán and Florencia Rodríguez, "La clase trabajadora durante la última dictadura militar argentina, 1976–1983. Apuntes para una discusión sobre la 'resistencia' obrera," La Plata, Comisión Provincial por la Memoria, 2010, available at: <http://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/investigacionyense%C3%B1anza/dossiers/con%20issn/dossier14versionfinal.pdf>.
73. Comunicqué 58 of the Military Junta informed that the CGT was going to be placed under military supervision, and afterward a military authority appointed. See Fernández, Arturo, *Las prácticas sociales del sindicalismo argentino, 1976–1982*, Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1985, 62.
74. For a list of the main organizations placed under military supervision from March 24, 1976 onward, see Fernández, *Las prácticas sociales*, 135–7.
75. For detail of the status of the union organizations belonging to the CGT until 1979, see Fernández, *Las prácticas sociales*, 111–12.
76. Some of the important legal norms affecting labor were Law 21.261 eliminating the right to strike, Law 8.596 that authorized layoffs in state agencies without justification, Law 21.297 in April 1976 that changed hiring procedures, among many others. On the situation of workers under the dictatorship, and the labor policies affecting trade union activity, see among others: Pablo Pozzi, "Argentina 1976–1982: Labour Leadership and Military Government," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 20, no. 1 (1988a); Alvaro Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*, Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1984; Fernández, *Las prácticas sociales del sindicalismo*; Gerardo L. Munck, *Authoritarianism and democratization: Soldiers and workers in Argentina, 1976–1983*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998; Paul W. Drake, *Labor movements and dictatorships. The southern cone in comparative perspective*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, among others.
77. Law 21.261 passed in March, 1976 suspended the right to strike; Law 21.356 passed in July 1976, forbade all union activity vis á vis assemblies, meetings, congresses, and elections, allowing the Ministry of Labor to dismiss and replace labor representatives within the workplace; Law 21.263 passed in March, 24, 1976 eliminated labor representatives special rights; Law 21.259 passed in March 24, 1976, reinstated the Law of Residency according to which any foreigner suspected of endangering "national security" could be deported. Law 21.400 passed in September 9, 1976, known as the "Industrial



- security” Law, prohibited all collective direct action, slowdowns, and decreases in production, among other measures.
78. See Bernardo Gallitelli y Andrés Thompson, “La política laboral en la Argentina del ‘Proceso’,” in Manuel Barrera y Gonzalo Fallabella (comps.), *Sindicatos bajo regímenes militares. Argentina, Brazil, Chile*. Santiago de Chile: CES-Naciones Unidas, 1990, 28–30.
  79. Gallitelli and Thompson, “La política laboral.”
  80. See Basualdo, *Estudios de historia económica Argentina*.
  81. See, among others, Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura (1976–1982)*, Buenos Aires: Contrapunto, 1988b.
  82. See Victoria Basualdo, “The ILO and the Argentine Dictatorship (1976–1983)” in Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodríguez García, Geert Van Goethem, Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010; “La participación de trabajadores y sindicalistas en la campaña internacional contra la última dictadura militar argentina,” in *Revista Sociedad* no. 25, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales-UBA, Spring 2006a, and “Dictadura militar, sindicalismo combativo y relaciones internacionales: apuntes para una historia reciente de los trabajadores industriales” in *Antología. A treinta años del golpe*, Buenos Aires: Secretaría de Cultura de la Nación Argentina-Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos 2006b.
  83. Doyon, “La organización del movimiento,” 210.

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### Archives Consulted

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DIPBA Archive (Dirección de Inteligencia de la Policía de la Provincia de Buenos Aires), Comisión Provincial por la Memoria, La Plata, Argentina.