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DISSERTATION

Titel der Dissertation

“Argentina’s recuperated and worker-controlled enterprises:
A neo-Gramscian analysis of transnational hegemony, world
order and historical change within the global political
economy”

Verfasser

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Doktor der Philosophie (Dr. phil.)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:
Dissertationsgebiet lt. Studienblatt:
Betreuer:

A 092 300
Politikwissenschaft
Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ulrich Brand

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my supervisors Ulrich Brand and Gernot Stimmer for all their support and guidance in completing this work. I would further like to express my sincere gratitude to Rishita Nandagiri, Korbinian Gruber, Tamara Ehs, Leticia Guerrero, Sergio Alonso Castrillón, Gina D'Amato, Andrés Ruggeri, Alejandra León Rojas, Yesica Serrano Rojas, Ana Maria Serna, Raul Zelik, Nathan Michon, Joshua Large and Jane Lumumba for their contribution, encouragement, sacrifice and understanding during this time.

In every country the process is different, although the content is the same. And the content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses ... have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A 'crisis of authority' is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State.

Antonio Gramsci

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Abbreviations

AAA: Alianza Anticomunista Argentina
ALBA: Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América
AFIP: Administración Federal de Ingresos Públicos
AMBA: Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires
ANSES: Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social
ANTA: Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Autogestionados
ANTEAG: Associação Nacional de Trabalhadores e Empresaria de Autogestão
APEC: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ART: Aseguradora de Riesgos del Trabajo
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATE: Asociación Trabajadores del Estado
CEIP: Cooperativa de Educadores e Investigadores Populares
CGT: Confederación General del Trabajo
CABA: Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires
CFR: Council on Foreign Relations
CNCT: Confederación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo
COMA: Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores Autogestionados
CONTA: Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores Autogestionados
CTA: Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina
CTERA: Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina
EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional
ERP: Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo
FACTA: Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Trabajadores Autogestionados
FASINPAT: Fábrica Sin Patrones
FECOOTRA: Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina

FENCOOTER: Federación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo en Empresas
Reconvertidas

FERyCOOTRA: Federación de Empresas Recuperadas y Cooperativas de Trabajo

FOCRA: Federación Obrera Ceramista de la República Argentina

FCPU: Federación de Cooperativas de Producción del Uruguay

GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GBA: Gran Buenos Aires

IMDES: Instituto Municipal de Desarrollo Económico y Social

IMF: International Monetary Fund

INAES: Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social

INAL: Instituto Nacional de Aviación Civil

INDEC: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos

INTI: Instituto Nacional de Tecnología

ISI: Import Substitution Industrialization

MDS: Ministerio de Desarrollo Social

MNER: Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas

MNFRT: Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores

MST: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra

MTD: Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados

MTEySS: Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OSERA: Observatorio Social sobre Empresas Recuperadas y Autogestionadas

SAPs: Structural Adjustment Programs

SENAES: Secretaria Nacional de Economía Solidária

SOECN: Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados Ceramistas de Neuquén

STIA: Sindicato de Trabajadores de Industria de la Alimentación

UBA: Universidad de Buenos Aires

UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UOM: Unión Obrera Metalúrgica

UPEA: Unión Productiva de Empresas Autogestionadas

UTD: Unión de Trabajadores Descocupados

WTO: World Trade Organization

YPF: Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales

Introduction

1. Approximation to the topic

On August 12, 2010, workers of the ceramic factory Zanón in Neuquén, Argentina invoked a day of action and protest in collaboration with the regional labor union SOECN (Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados Ceramistas de Neuquén). The motive was the commemoration of the ten-year anniversary of their struggle to bring the factory under workers' control and to subordinate its services to the needs of the local community. In a press release the workers declared that over the last decade they had successfully resisted different forms of assaults, threats, boycotts and eviction orders. Despite the repression, the workers were able to increase production and to create over 200 new jobs, and this all without the support of the local and federal governments.

At different occasions the workers presented specific proposals for the amendment of Argentina's expropriation law, which included the factory's expropriation without compensation and the nationalization under the control of the workers. The local and federal governments constantly declined to discuss these proposals. In midst of a looming economic and political crisis reminiscent of the one which hit the country nine years ago the workers pledged to continue their resistance and to provide support to the ongoing struggles of other occupied and recuperated enterprises (Obreros de Zanón 2010).

During the 1990s and in the immediate aftermath of Argentina's economic meltdown in 2001/2002, the country witnessed an unprecedented formation of heterogeneous social movements such as newly founded trade unions, the

unemployed workers' movement, neighborhood assemblies¹, garbage collectors, swap shops² and recuperated factories (see Uriona 2006: 89; Wolff 2003; Boris 2005a: 474; Sitrin 2006: 13; Svampa 2002, 2006, 2007; Di Marco et al. 2003). While most initiatives quickly disappeared during Argentina's economic recovery in the years following the crisis, the movement of occupied and recuperated workplaces successfully emerged as the strongest and most organized form of popular protest.

The workers' longstanding struggle for the recuperation of the means of production, in part, radically altered existing forms of representation and participation within the workplace. Assembly-based mandates, direct elections of internal commissions, the rotation of positions and coordinators, representation of minorities and the free expression of diverging voices became established practices, which encouraged direct and democratic workers' involvement in the decision-making (Korol 2005). In their totality they replaced hierarchical capital-labor relations and bureaucratic leadership traditionally provided by client-based trade unions.

The recuperations of abandoned enterprises by the workers were a concrete response to drastic neoliberal restructuring of the country's economy, which had begun under military rule in the mid-1970s; the country's deindustrialization and recession after 1998; lack of democratic participation; and the overall trend towards social polarization and rising unemployment. In particular, the liberalization and the deregulation of the country's economy and the privatization of public assets under the Menem administration (1989-1999) resulted in a radical cutback of social services, a profound attack on organized labor and massive waves of layoffs, company closures and business bankruptcies (see MacEwan 2002; Rock 2002: 74; Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 160; Boris/Malcher 2001).

¹ See Colectivo Situaciones (2003a).

² See Thimmel 2003; Colectivo Situaciones (2003b).

Argentina's history since the 1970s has simultaneously been paradigmatic and extraordinary compared to the rest of the region. On the one hand, along with other countries, Argentina experienced a series of profound, and, in part, tragic socio-economic and political transformations such as the murderous military rule (1976-1983); massive foreign indebtedness and structural adjustment following the debt crisis in 1982; the implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s; the deindustrialization and financialisation of its economy; the impoverishment, marginalization and social exclusion of large parts of its population; rising levels of social inequality and the general precarization of labor; and the ascendancy of social protest and resistance movements during the 1990s³ (Svampa 2010; Ranis, 2010: 80).

Argentina's particular aspect, on the other hand, was the country's economic and political collapse in 2001, which in its severity and profoundness marked the most drastic downturn in the country's history (Mancuso 2002; Svampa 2003). Apart from the socio-economic consequences, Argentina's fall also resulted in the discrediting of the country's political system (Boris 2005a: 474). It triggered a "partial decomposition" (Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 163) of the country's political party system and the overall institutional structures, which subsequently led to a sharp decline in political affiliations. In particular, the non-Peronist electorate witnessed a massive fragmentation among its constituencies. Argentina's crisis, however, also laid the foundation for a significant increase in autonomous popular organizing and the ascendancy of previously unconventional forms of economic initiatives, *inter alia* the occupied and recuperated enterprises (see Svampa 2006: Weiss 2002; Zibechi 2003; Gambina 2003; Ranis 2010: 77; Arnold 2003; Salgado 2009; Boris/Tittor 2006: 86ff).

³ Apart from the multiplicity of popular initiatives in Argentina, the most prominent social movements in Latin America comprise of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico, the indigenous movements in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile and the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil (see Svampa 2010: 14; De Sousa Santos 2001; Ceceña 2004; García 2001; Kastner 2007; Fuhrmann 2005; Brand/Sekler 2009: 64ff).

2. Definition of terms

Argentina's recuperated, worker-controlled enterprises are usually placed under broad conceptual umbrellas such as 'workers' control', 'workers' self-management' 'solidarity economics', 'participatory economics', 'social and local economy, 'the third sector' or 'cooperativism' (see Guerra 1999; Trincherro 2009; Giegold/Embshoff 2008; Albert 2003, 2008: 2ff; Alvater/Sekler 2006). All concepts refer to "a form of institutionalization that rejects both external and internal bureaucratization" (Cox 1987: 32), i.e. specific forms of economic organization, which distinguish themselves from orthodox capitalist companies as they "prioritize social and community oriented goals, show corporate engagement in civic action, dedicate their profits to the community economy and (...) [are] organized cooperatively" (Auinger 2009: 6). Workers' control is characterized by a set of principles such as collective ownership, horizontal structures, democratic participation and solidarity between the workers, socially and ecologically sustainable production, and the improvement of labor and living standards (see Gubitzer 1989; Albert 2003; Mayer 2006; Programa Facultad Abierta 2003a; Altvater 2006a: 203ff).

Argentina's recuperated enterprises are companies under collective workers' control that prior to the recuperation operated as private capitalist firms (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 6). They differ substantively from companies that operate under the banner of 'employee ownership', an organizational model that has been increasingly implemented by traditional capitalist firms over the past years. In contrast to Argentina's recuperated enterprises, these companies have failed to fulfill and integrate the aforementioned criteria as they prioritize profit-making over socio-political objectives. Instead of allowing for workers' participation, direct democracy and transparent decision-making, in many cases

employee ownership actually resulted in the reduction of the workers' wages. (see Nutzinger 1982; Demirovic 2007).

3. General characteristics of workers' self-management

The collective ownership principle refers to the ownership structure of the enterprise and translates into the equal distribution of ownership shares among the workers. It transcends the class-defining division between capital and labor and replaces the fundamental characteristic of capitalist production and organization, by building egalitarian and horizontal relationships amongst the members of the enterprise (Heller 2002: 4).

The democracy principle is founded in the conviction that political equality, the fundamental principle of democracy, cannot be achieved without equality in the economic sphere. Historically, defining democracy primarily in terms of formal elections and the granting of political and civic rights has played a crucial part in undermining the formation of material and ideological capabilities to substantively transform the predominant set of social relations. Multi-party elections, the ousting of a president or the reshuffling of the cabinet are often perceived as the ultimate triumph of the people whereas in many cases, the actual social order remains intact with the same privileged minority in power⁴ (Pannekoek 1947).

By accepting difference and dissent within the process of decision-making, the democracy principle resembles the notion of 'radical democracy' (Laclau/Mouffe 1985) and Gramsci's claim that democracy "must mean that every "citizen" can

⁴ Lenin (1917) had argued that "a democratic republic is the best political shell for capitalism, and therefore, once capitalism has gained control of this very best shell (...) it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change, either of persons, of institutions, or of parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic, can shake it."

“govern” and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this.” (Gramsci 1971: 40) The democracy principle challenges both liberal and parliamentary democracy based on equality, freedom and representation and deliberative democracy focused on building a consensus through public discourse (see Calhoun et al. 2007; De Sousa Santos/Rodríguez-Garavito 2006; Pannekoek 1936; Held 1995: 67).

The solidarity principle comprises aspects of internal and external solidarity. While the former refers to equal or relatively equal distribution of wages and profits within the enterprise, the latter points towards the workers’ support for health and educational programs destined for the improvement of living standards within their local community (Guerra 2006; Auinger 2007: 22; Korol 2005: 47). The solidarity principle goes against the logic of capital valorization in which human beings are degraded to mere means for the reproduction of capital-labor relations. Solidarity-based production models view economic activity rather as a means for human self-realization and a step towards individual and collective emancipation (Schneider 2010: 77; Klar 2008). In the case of Argentina’s recuperated enterprises, solidarity between the workers as an expression of collective consciousness arose out of shared experiences cultivated during the struggles over the plant occupation, the common resistance against repression and evictions, the eventual recuperation of workplaces and the collective establishment of a system of moral values (Giegold/Embshoff 2008; Rathenow 2008).

Unlike traditional capitalist enterprises that pursue the maximization of profits, strategies of internationalization, increase in exports and profitability, the majority of the solidarity-based enterprises subordinate private individual profit-making to the accomplishment of greater social goals, collective profit distribution and the establishment of cooperative forms of organization. The main objective of workers’ self-management is not the mere generation of profits but the utilization

of the latter for social and collective aims, both inside and outside of the workplace, i.e. the re-dedication of private economic initiatives to the totality of social, ecological and moral purposes (see Guerra 2002; Schneider 2010: 77; Birkhölzer 2006: 68f; Moldaschl/Weber 2009: 93).

4. A brief history of workers' control

Throughout most of human history the relationship with nature was collectively organized and founded on the active participation of the members of a community. Pre-capitalist societies were characterized by the embeddedness of the market within society. Polanyi (1978) detailed the historic inversion of this relationship with the emergence of the capitalist mode of production (see Guerra 2002; Zelik/Altvater 2009: 38f; MacEwan 2005: 171f). Historically, the concept of workers' control has been intimately linked to the workers' struggle for a post-capitalist form of social organization (Bonnet 2011). Marx himself (1976: 171) did not conceive of the state as being the principal actor in the transition to socialism but rather viewed the self-managed "association of free men working with the means of production held in common" as the basic organizational form for the creation of an alternative social order.

Throughout the 19th century workers associations were founded on the ideals of direct democracy, solidarity and collectivism. Self-management was seen as both a means and an end to the workers' struggle for autonomy and liberation. Some of the first experiences of workers' control date back to the England of the 18th century, where small consumer cooperatives were formed in places such as Woolwich, Chatham and Mongewell.⁵ In the early 19th century, Robert Owen's utopian socialism inspired the creation of the 'London Co-operative and

⁵ For a detailed history of the origins and the first practical experiences of workers' control see Gubitzer (1989); Albert (2003); Ness/Azzellini (2011).

Economical Society' (Birchall 1994: 3ff; Leubolt/Auinger 2006: 40f). In 1871, it was the formation of the Paris Commune that witnessed the short-lived attempt and the subsequent bloody repression of a proletarian uprising (Marx 1871; Trotsky 1921; Gluckstein 2011: 34f; Ruggeri 2010). Following the failure of the Paris Commune the importance of workers' cooperatives for socialist movements gradually began to decline. Throughout the 20th century it was the achievements of reformist social democratic parties in Europe, which made associate forms of production and organization largely redundant. (The strategic focus was instead shifted towards the 'political sphere'. The formation of socialist parties and the capture of the state moved to the forefront of the socialist agenda Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009: 22).

However, there were some relevant experiences of workers' control during the 20th century, which, indeed, deserve further attention. During World War I occupations of factories occurred in Germany under the leadership of revolutionary shop stewards (Pannekoek 1936; Hoffrogge 2011) and in Russia as part of the Bolshevik Revolution (Mandel 2011). Between 1919 and 1920 the North Italian cities of Turin and Milano became the hotspots of workers' plant occupations around the world (Di Paola 2011). From the end of World War II until the late 1980s a historically unique system of workers' self-management was established in former Yugoslavia. In contrast to the Soviet Union, it rejected central planning and rather encouraged a decentralized economic, political and social model that was based on workers' participation and self-organization (see Herbert 2006: 25ff; Musić 2011; Zelik/Altwater 2009: 127f).

As a general trend, debates about democracy in the workplace and self-management in production have experienced a strong revival around the world since the 1970s, both within academic circles and social movements (Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009 23). The intensified adoption and implementation of neoliberal policies over the past decades had catapulted an increasing number of

working people into precarious working conditions and unemployment. These developments forced the disenfranchised and excluded sectors of society to look out for alternative forms of economic organization.

In particular, Latin America has moved to the forefront of the workers' struggle over the control of the means of production over the past twenty years (Quijano 2006). As a direct response to the region's structural transformation which had unfolded under the banner of neoliberal financialization in the 1970s and 1980s, heterogeneous approaches and initiatives of cooperation and democratically organized production expanded and gained ground in different parts across Latin America during the 1990s (Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009; Lucita 2005; Hafner 2009: 44). Apart from Argentina's recuperated enterprises, initiatives of self-management surfaced in places such as the indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico (Boyer 2006), Brazil (Müller-Plantenberg 2006; Novaes 2009; Auinger 2005, 2007; Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009; Sardá de Faria/Novaes 2009, 2011), Venezuela (Azzellini 2011) Colombia (Arps/Zelik 2006), Uruguay (Martí 2005; Guerra 2003; Interview with Patricia Paredes 2010), Bolivia (Lizárraga 2008; Orozco 2008), Peru and Puerto Rico (Ruggeri 2010).⁶

In the cases of Brazil and Venezuela the governments demonstrated support for workers' self-management by funding loan programs for cooperatives, promoting targeted public-sector procurement policies and by subsidizing educational programs for members of cooperatives. In addition, both governments took concrete steps towards the institutionalization of solidarity-based economic initiatives by legalizing recuperated enterprises, passing legislation that facilitated the processes of bankruptcy and expropriation and by supporting the establishment of networks between workers' cooperatives (Leubolt/Auinger 2006: 43f; Richter 2008).

⁶ During the same period significant forms of worker-controlled production also took root in India (Hoering 2006; Sen 2011).

Whereas Venezuela established a Ministry of Community Economy, Brazil in 2003 created the post of a State Secretary for Solidarity Economics (SENAES), which is closely linked to the Ministry of Work and Employment (Apertura Colectiva 2010: 16; Singer 2008a). In both countries workers' self-management forms a vital part of the broader socio-economic policy package that focuses on income distribution and emancipative poverty alleviation (Auinger 2009 14). In Brazil, however, the workers' struggle over self-management is primarily fought by the cooperatives organized around the MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*), the self-managed cooperatives under the umbrella of ANTEAG (*Associação Nacional de Trabalhadores e Empresaria de Autogestão*), several universities, political parties, non-governmental organizations, the Catholic Church, local governments and trade unions (Singer 2008).

5. The renaissance of workers' control in Argentina

Argentina has a longstanding and turbulent history of workers'-led social conflict (Sitrin 2006: 5). Since the 1920s the occupation of workplaces served as a regularly used tactic of workers' resistance (Ranis 2010: 94). In the mid-1960s Argentina witnessed a massive wave of workplace occupations, which primarily unfurled under the leadership of the dominant Peronist-trade union, CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo). In the early-1970s workers occupied factories in Mendoza (Scodeller 2011; Svampa 2002; Fajn 2004; Martínez/Ruggeri 2010). Despite these attempts, up to the mid-1990s nearly all of the bids to take control over production sites were short-lived and eventually ended in the resumption of production under traditional hierarchical capitalist relations (Geiger 2006: 93; Costa 2010: 114; Boris/Tittor 2006: 67ff).

a. Social protests during the 1990s

Following the bloody experience of military rule, marked by brutal repression against workers, first signs of social unrest reappeared in 1989 when people of the Patagonian province Chubut took to the streets to demand the resignation of their governor. During the same year Buenos Aires and Rosario witnessed riots and looting. In 1993 social unrest intensified in the provinces of Santiago del Estero, Jujuy, La Rioja, Chaco, Corrientes and Tucumán (Sitrin 2006: 5). In the mid-1990s popular protests against the Menem government further intensified.

In the absence of viable alternatives during that time, unemployed workers became more radicalized and determined to explore new methods of class struggle such as factory occupations and setting up of road blocks on major national highways. The pickets became a strategic and powerful means used by a growing number of unemployed workers ('piqueteros') in order to stall traffic with the objective to increase pressure on local, provincial and federal authorities. (Svampa 2003; Cieza 2010; Boris/Tittor 2006: 77ff). In protest against the neoliberal policies of the Menem administration, the workers' primary motives were the reconstruction of society and the creation of a new consensus based on solidarity, cooperation, the collective ownership of the means of production and the extension of social services and infrastructure; political participation and democratization; and the struggle against impunity of crimes committed during Argentina's military dictatorship (Boris 2005a: 474f).

As the number of demonstrations increased during the mid-1990s, students, workers and farmers joined forces and began to openly confront sent-in riot police in the streets of Argentina. The social protests in Cutral-Có and Neuquén in the province of Patagonia were tightly linked to the privatization of the national petroleum company YPF (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales) during the period

1994-1995. The privatization resulted in the lay-off of over 80% of the company's employees and a subsequent rise in the unemployment rate to 35.7% in both townships in 1996. During spring of the following year, nationwide riots also broke out in other places such as Plaza Huincul, Tartagal, Jujuy, La Plata, Buenos Aires and the province of Rio Negro (Camarero/Pozzi/Schneider 1998; Alves de Oliveira/Bayer/Uriona 2008).

In particular, the unemployed movement in Cutral-Có turned out to be remarkable in raising collective consciousness by using popular democratic assemblies in their decision making. In the light of rapidly exacerbating socio-economic conditions around the country, the protests increasingly became a struggle for the sheer survival for Argentine workers. The inspiring experience and the effective and innovative forms of social organization, which characterized the uprisings in Cutral-Có and Neuquén in 1996 and 1997 rapidly spread to other part of the country. They then paved the way for the massive wave of protests and novel modes of popular organizing that would sweep through the country in the consecutive years, marked by a severe recession and Argentina's subsequent financial collapse (Svampa 2006a; Fajn 2004). In that process, cultural and sports events, local radio stations, theatre groups, rock bands and some political parties and organizations such as Quebracho, Corriente Patria Libre and Partido Obrero played a significant role in connecting people and communities in their joint efforts to voice their grievances and to organize mobilizations. The federal government responded to the rising number and intensity of the social uprisings with increasing persecution and harassment of political activists. Argentina's armed forces were deployed to the streets with the purpose of breaking up road-blocks and dispersing and controlling large crowds of protestors.

b. Workplace occupations

The first occupations of factories and enterprises occurred in the early to mid-1990s, around the same time Argentina witnessed the surfacing of the piqueteros movements⁷ (Boris 2005a: 478; Petras 2002; Svampa 2008; Martínez/Ruggeri 2010; Wolff 2003). The main motives of the occupations were similar to those of other forms of protest. First and foremost, the occupations of the former workplaces emerged as a direct and need-driven response to the withholding of salaries; the closing of thousands of companies all over the country due to bankruptcy, lack of profitability or unmanageable debt⁸; and the rising unemployment among Argentina's workers⁹ (Colectivo Situaciones 2003c).

The tactic of occupying the premises was also applied as a strategic means in order to weaken the structural power of capital in its potential use of labor-disciplining measures such as plant closures, investment strikes or workers' lockouts.¹⁰ In general, neoliberal policies of market liberalization, deregulation and privatization adopted by the Menem administrations during the 1990s, the overvaluation of Argentina's exports as a result of the dollar to peso parity and the increasing numbers of cheap foreign imports were viewed as the main causes for deteriorating socio-economic conditions (Tittor 2005: 48; Boris 2006: 7; Raimbeau 2005).

⁷ The piqueteros encompassed different movements of unemployed workers such as the Union of Unemployed Workers (UTD) and the Unemployed Workers' Movement (MTD). See MTD Solano (2003)

⁸ Fajn et al. (2003: 102) estimate that over the past decades irregularities and fraudulent practices had occurred in 90% of Argentina's private bankruptcy cases.

⁹ Asked for the primary motive of occupying their former enterprises, workers responded as follows: the withholding of salaries (58%), bankruptcy (51%), plant closure (47%) and the layoff of workers (40%) (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 14).

¹⁰ In 2010, 62% of the enterprises stated that they had to take direct action in order to return to their former workplaces. In 73.6% of these cases workers resorted to the occupation of the plants, which lasted 161 days on average for the period 2001-2010. During the same time 50% of the total number recuperated enterprises had to deal with different forms of repression and/or eviction attempts (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 15ff).

In the absence of the former owners, the occupied enterprises found themselves confronted with an entirely unprecedented situation, which compelled them to develop novel and alternative forms concerning the overall organization of the new collectively run company. Ultimately, it was the employers who had violated their contractual obligations with the workers by reducing salaries and benefits or by refusing to pay outstanding wages. Against this backdrop, one needs to understand the origin of the workers' decision to adopt a disobedient and proactive stance in order to defend their source of employment (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 191).

Despite these first occupations in the mid-1990s, the number of recuperated enterprises eventually reached its peak during and in the immediate aftermath of Argentina's financial meltdown in 2001/2002.¹¹ The crisis resulted in the bankruptcies of an estimated 30,000 industrial companies and destroyed the jobs of around 750,000 workers, equaling to 9% of the country's total workforce (Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009: 39). With all its catastrophic and devastating social consequences the crisis gave birth to new manifestations of social protest and autonomous popular praxis, which, in part, contributed to the emergence of heterogeneous forms of authentic protagonism and new subjectivities among the affected workers.

c. Argentina's post-crisis context

During that period of fierce economic hardship, the federal government and the provincial authorities pursued a Janus-faced strategy towards the workers'

¹¹ Close to 6 % of Argentina's recuperated enterprises existing in 2010 were recuperated by the workers during the period 2001-2004. Before 2001 only 14.6% of the total number of was taken over by the workers. For 2005-2010 the respective tally is 20.9% (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 12f).

activism. In several cases, plant occupations were bolstered and offers were made to pay for rent and to grant workers the legal permission to produce without government interference for a pre-determined period of time. This step was mainly taken in the hope that it would revive the country's struggling economy and thus mitigate looming prospects of escalating social unrest. The co-optation of the workers by the federal and the provincial governments was concurrently paralleled by an outright attack against the workers' most radical and revolutionary segments (Cockcroft, 2003; La Vaca Collective 2007; Svampa 2007, 2008).

In most of the cases the recuperated companies entered into a process of legalization with the offer to start paying rent for the occupied premises. This step was then usually followed by the workers' demands for the expropriation of the machines and the used technology and the expropriation of the entire enterprise (La Vaca Collective 2007: 36). Following the initial stages of occupation and recuperation almost all enterprises were subsequently converted into cooperatives, which provided the companies with a legal status and thus allowed them to operate and produce under more secure circumstances¹² (Vieta 2009: 93ff).

Despite the depth and the severity of Argentina's crisis, the country has since then witnessed a general continuation of capitalist social relations. Emergency measures taken by the Duhalde government (2002-2003) in the immediate aftermath of the country's collapse, were destined to mitigate an exacerbation of socio-economic conditions and a potential escalation of social protests¹³ (Boris/Tittor 2006: 48ff ; Llanos 2002; Nolte 2002; Boris 2005: 139f). In addition,

¹² In early 2002 changes in the country's bankruptcy law had opened up the opportunity for the workers to legally gain control over the occupied enterprises for a period of two years if they agreed to form cooperatives. The majority of the companies followed suit so that in 2010 90% of the recuperated companies operated as cooperatives (Svampa 2007; Geiger, 2006: 96).

¹³ The measures included direct payments of 150 pesos/month to over two million households and price freezes of basic services and public goods such as electricity, water, telephone, gas, public transportation and railways.

the massive devaluation of the peso by 70% in the first half of 2002, significantly contributed to the relatively rapid recovery of Argentina's economy. Despite widespread fear of a return of hyperinflation, Argentina achieved budgetary surpluses both in the balance of trade and the balance of payments at the end of 2002¹⁴ (Boris/Malcher 2005: 133).

Due to these emergency measures and an overall improving socio-economic climate, the intensity and the ability to mobilize considerably declined in the second half of 2002. The Kirchner administration (2003-2007) continued on the reformist path of his predecessor with its focus on the 'normalization' of the post-crisis context in the pursuit of returning to 'less *laissez-faire*' capitalism with more regulation and elements of the welfare state (Boris 2005a: 482). Concrete steps the government took in that process included the sacking of military officers and members of the police force for crimes and violations committed during the military dictatorship; the modification of laws that prevented the indictment and persecution of military officers which had been promoted during the Alfonsín administration (1983-1989); the taking of a firm stance in the negotiations for debt repayment with multilateral financial debtors¹⁵; the mitigation of social tensions within Argentina's society through economic recovery and more progressive policies of redistribution; a move towards a stronger orientation of the productive sector for the partial revival of domestic market demand by public stimulus spending and the increase of monthly wages by 50 pesos; a reinforced commitment to the fight against corruption; and the incorporation of the less

¹⁴ In 2003 and 2004 Argentina's economy grew at 8.8 and 8% respectively. Yet, in 2004 GDP per capita still remained 13% below the level of 1998 while 45% of Argentineans still found themselves living below the poverty line (Blustein 2005: 204f). Between October 2002 and December 2004 the poverty rate declined from 57 to 40%. Unemployment dropped to 15%, yet two million Argentineans received social benefits and were thus officially registered as employed by the end of 2004 (Boris/Malcher 2005: 145f).

¹⁵ In the different negotiations with international creditors and the IMF Argentina ultimately reached a partial cancellation of its external debt. The U.S. government supported Argentina's firm negotiation stance, as the majority of the international lenders affected by the debt moratorium were from Europe, in particular from Germany and Italy (Becker 2004).

radical strands of the social movements such as ‘Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo’ the reformist wing of the piqueteros movements and the MNER, all of which in their totality aimed at the regaining of legitimacy of the political establishment and the widening of the government’s social base (Svampa 2008; Katz 2004; Boris/Tittor 2006: 51ff; Blomeier 2004; Boris/Malcher 2005: 135; Petras 2004).

The weakening of social movements and its reduced potential of a more profound social transformation in the immediate post-crisis context, were not due to the action taken by the government. The movements’ high level of internal fragmentation into different sectarian camps, in particular among piqueteros, the political culture among subordinated groups oriented towards networks of patronage and client-based co-optation and the pseudo-radical, naive and myopic strategies of political struggle played significant roles in that process of disintegration (Svampa 2006a; Wolff 2003). The fragmentation may in part also explain the eventual success of the reformist agenda of the Duhalde, Kirchner and Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-present) administrations, all of which were focused on restoration of the pre-crisis order (Gago/Sztulwark 2009: 183ff).

In retrospect, Argentina’s economic downturn had merely represented a temporary crisis of the country’s neoliberal model and not its irrevocable collapse. The politico-economic system underwent a process of re-legitimization and mass co-optation during the post-crisis presidencies. With regards to fundamental structural change in the country’s economy since 2002, the recovery has been characterized by a systematic re-industrialization, earmarked funding for small and medium-sized enterprises, a redistribution of incomes towards and an increasing effectiveness of welfare programs (Beccaria/Groisman 2006).

d. Argentina's recuperated enterprises in the present¹⁶

Returning now to the recuperated enterprises, in absolute terms, their economic relevance within Argentina's post-crisis economy is relatively small. In 2010, 205 recuperated, worker-controlled enterprises existed all across Argentina employing a total of 9,362 workers. With regards to the geographical distribution, 71.2% of the recuperated enterprises are located in the province of Buenos Aires and employ 62.7% of all the workers. 56.1% of the enterprises operate in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires, AMBA) equaling to 50.3% of all workers.¹⁷ In the rest of Argentina, Santa Fe (9.8%/10.1%) together with Córdoba (2.4%/5.5%), Neuquén (1.5%/6.4%), Entre Ríos (2.4%/3.5%) and Mendoza (3.4%/1.9%), are leading the way of nationwide workplace recuperations (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 7ff).

Argentina's recuperated enterprises differ substantially in size, economic activity and political orientation (Boris/Malcher 2005: 143). 75% of the enterprises are small and medium-sized companies and employ less than 50 workers. The majority (23.4%) forms part of Argentina's metallurgy industry, followed by the graphic and design sector (7.8%) the textile and meat industry (both 6.3%), the health care sector (4.9%) and the rest of the food industry (2.7%) (Programa

¹⁶ In this section, the vast majority of numerical information about Argentina's recuperated enterprises is derived from the *Informe del Tercer Relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas: Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina 2010* (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010). The report is the third of its kind following earlier investigations by the same institution. (see also Programa Facultad Abierta 2003, 2005). The initial list of all existing recuperated enterprises in Argentina, which provided the foundation for the subsequent qualitative and quantitative inquiry in the form of 85 on-site visits and a survey of 121 questions was based on the previous work of a wide range of organizations and institutions such as INTI, MNER, FACTA, Red Gráfica Cooperativa, ANTA, MNFRT, FECOOTRA, La Vaca, OSERA del Instituto Gino Germani, UBA and studies conducted by Argentina's Ministry of Labor ('*Guías de Empresas Recuperadas 2005, 2007*').

¹⁷ The Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires can be divided into the City of Buenos Aires (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, CABA) and Greater Buenos Aires (Gran Buenos Aires, GBA). In 2010, CABA and GBA counted 19% of all recuperated enterprises/15.7 of all workers and 37.1%/34.6% respectively. For an in-depth analysis of the recuperated enterprises in the City of Buenos Aires see Salgado (2010).

Facultad Abierta 2010: 10). Some enterprises established links to traditional leftist parties; others pursued autonomous projects or retained a specific territorial focus directed on their local context.

The recuperated workplaces also encompass a wide range of heterogeneous political and social orientations. In general, one can distinguish between two main strands: first, a group of enterprises whose prime objective is the political struggle and social emancipation (Korol 2005: 30ff), and second, a conglomerate of actors, mainly concerned with the institutionalization of the process of workplace recuperations, the consolidation of secure employment and the satisfaction of the workers' immediate needs (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 191).

The first strand pursues a rather autonomous and independent agenda by working towards the expansion of self-management and the nationalization of the workplaces without compensation. It vehemently rejects capitalist ownership and bourgeois state power and demands the expropriation of the occupied workplaces and the resumption of production under direct control of the workers. Moreover, it advocates a radical transformation of Argentina's society and the construction of new social order based on workers' administration, solidarity and participatory democracy. The group is double-spearheaded, on the one hand, by the workers at Zanón, a Neuquén-based ceramic factory and the Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados Ceramistas de Neuquén (SOECN); and, on the other hand, by the workers at Brukman, a tailoring factory in Buenos Aires, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas (MNER) (Interview with Héctor Omar Villablanca 2010; Aiziczon 2009; Cockcroft 2003; Raimbeau 2005; Svampa 2007; De Felice 2003; Esparza 2008).

With a more reformist stance, the second group of recuperated enterprises is primarily dedicated towards the gradual improvement of the position of workers within the existing context of capitalist production. It is mainly represented by the

Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores (MNFRT)¹⁸ under the leadership of Luis Alberto Caro and enjoys the support of the Catholic Church's Pastoral Social, members of the Partido Justicialista (PJ) and the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA),¹⁹ which together with the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) and the transport workers forms Argentina's three major trade unions.²⁰ (Petras 2004; Svampa 2006)

The first organization which began to act as a representative body for the occupied and recuperated enterprises was the Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina (FECOOTRA), which was then followed by the Federación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo en Empresas Reconvertidas (FENCOOTER)²¹. Eventually, in 2002 and 2003 the MNER and the MNFRT emerged as the most active and relevant organizations representing the cause of Argentina's recuperated workplaces (La Vaca Collective 2007: 211ff).

The MNER pursues a strategy outside of Argentina's legal framework for the recuperation of the enterprises. This stance, in part, has to do with anti-worker legislation under military rule;

¹⁸ www.fabricasrecuperadas.org.ar

¹⁹ The CTA was founded in 1991 following the break of a number of trade unions with the CGT. It comprises of the union of state employees (ATE), the teachers' union (CTERA) and a wide range of smaller unions. In contrast to the pro-government and pro-establishment stance of the CGT, the CTA has been attempting to develop new forms of worker representation, which is more in tune with the actions and demands of social protest movements. However, despite its alternative orientation and aspiration the CTA has still retained rather certain bureaucratic traits (Camarero/Pozzi/Schneider 1998; Svampa 2007).

²⁰ In 2010, 87% of the recuperated enterprises were affiliated to trade unions prior to the recuperations of the plants. In 44% of the cases investigated, trade unions played an active and significant role during the process of recuperation. However, 42% of the recuperated enterprises stated that trade unions had not been part of the workers' struggle. 45% still maintained some kind of collaboration with bodies of workers' representation. The two most important trade unions representing the interests of the recuperated enterprises are the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM), the Sindicato Gráfico and the Sindicato de Trabajadores de Industria de la Alimentación (STIA) (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 59ff). In addition, the aforementioned Sindicato Obrero y Empleados de Ceramistas de Neuquén (SOECN), which represents the ceramics factories of Zánón, Stefani, Neuquén and Cerámica del Valle plays a significant regional role in the province of Neuquén.

²¹ FECOOTRA and FENCOOTER were founded in 1988 and 2002, respectively.

Laws enacted first by the dictatorship and then by the formal democracy, served to consolidate a global economy model organized according to the international division of labour. (...) The only way to reclaim the company is to occupy it and show, first the judge, and then the political class, that we're not going to leave the factory. (Murúa in La Vaca Collective 2007: 213f)

The MNER's offensive posture is aimed at pushing the Argentine state towards legislative reforms and the implementation of proactive policies that favor the movement of occupied and recuperated enterprises (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 205). In particular, the efforts are focused on the struggle for the passing of a new national expropriation law, which would extend the temporary periods currently granted by the authorities (Svampa 2008: 89). Further demands include a reform of the existing bankruptcy law in favor of working people, increased technological support by the state, enhanced public capital provisions, which would facilitate the repayments of existing debt obligations with local banks, and a public retirement plan and social security benefits for workers in cooperatives (Boris 2005a: 481).

By contrast, the MNFRT is primarily engaged in the legal defense of the cooperatives, the mobilization of popular support in the face of immanent eviction and the coordination of communication among the recuperated workplaces. It strictly focuses on economic and operational matters and does not deal with socio-political and macroeconomic aspects of the movement. The MNFRT hence only supports the expropriation of the workplaces under particular conditions such as compensation, rent payments for the plants and time limits to expropriation (Interview with Luis Caro 2011; Apertura Colectiva, 2010: 14; Ranis 2010: 84).

Over the past years a multiplicity of other organizations has surfaced at both the national and provincial level, which provides the recuperated enterprises with legal, technical and political advice and thus ensures the survival of the worker-

led initiatives. In particular, the FACTA²², ANTA, FERYCOOTRA²³, UOM, Red Gráfica Cooperativa, Mesa de Empresas Recuperadas de Mendoza, Foro de Cooperativas de las Matanza, UPEA and CNCT have moved to the very forefront of representative bodies.²⁴ Recent attempts have aimed at the national unification of all organizations under the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores Autogestionados (COMA). In addition to the above, leftist parties, grassroots print media, community radio stations and universities have provided cogent political, legal and advisory support to both strands.²⁵

The particularly new about Argentina's occupied and recuperated enterprises is the close cooperation and the high levels of collaboration between the different initiatives and its organizational structure, both on a local and national level. (Boris 2005a) Even though the struggle for economic survival is placed at the centre of the workers' efforts, it is the political and legal battle over issues such as the expropriation of the workplace without compensation and the demands for the nationalization under workers' control that have drawn international attention (Aiziczon 2009: 13; Korol 2005: 30). Despite their relatively small relevance to Argentina's economy in quantitative terms, the recuperated enterprises have reformulated questions about self-management, solidarity, collective ownership and participatory democracy. As the horizontal structures and the bottom-up approach present a challenge to the conventional authoritative and vertical forms of sociopolitical and economic organization, the workers' activism has triggered heated debates among social movements, political parties, media and academia about how production and society at large should be re-organized in times of crises (Gaudin 2004; Tilly/Kennedy 2005; Petras (2001).

²² FACTA was founded in 2006 as an offshoot of MNER.

²³ FERYCOOTRA has unified a host of recuperated enterprises around the UOM.

²⁴ 78% of the recuperated enterprises maintains some form of collaboration with one or more of these organizations and movements (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 76ff; Ruggeri 2009a: 84ff).

²⁵ For detailed information see www.nuestralucha.org; www.lavaca.org; www.argentina.indymedia.org; www.lafogata.org; www.pts.org.ar

6. Research focus

The vast majority of the existing empirical studies about Argentina's recuperated workplaces have narrowly analyzed their resurfacing as a direct or indirect consequence of the implementation of neoliberal policies. Although not wrong, such an argumentation in its historical myopia, however, underrepresents the broader historical context. The renaissance of workers' control in different parts of the world needs to be analyzed in relation to increasing rates of unemployment, the precarization of work, the dismantlement of the post-war welfare state and the decline of the public sector, all of which went hand in hand with the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant regime of accumulation in the 1970s (Altwater 2006: 18f; Korol 2005: 18).

In Argentina, the neoliberal restructuring of the country's economy that began under the military dictatorship in the 1970s involved a fundamental transformation of the social relations between capital and labor as well as a radical redefinition of the role of the state (Gambina 2003). In its national specificity, it formed part of a broader set profound ruptures and structural transformations within the global political economy. These transformations originated in fundamental shifts of social relations of production and a redefinition of the relations between social forces. Analyzing ruptures in the existing social relations, one creates the basis for evaluating potential changes of transnational relations within states and within the global order. The increasing importance and influence of transnational social forces are part of a broader process of historical transformations, which has unfolded since the end of World War II. The primary intent of the present study will thus be to explore the renaissance of Argentina's recuperated and self-managed enterprises against the backdrop of profound socio-historical transformations that occurred within the post-war world order during the 1970s.

To capture the dynamics and the complexity of the processes, the thesis will work with neo-Gramscian perspectives that provide a holistic framework for the analysis of power relations and historic change within the global political economy. Every political practice as that of Argentina's recuperated enterprises cannot do without a profound theoretical understanding of itself. Theory opens up specific opportunities and spaces for action and defines potentialities and limitations of every meaningful social project. Dismissing a positivist approach to theory testing, theory is rather conceived of as "an evolving structure of argument sensitive to encounters with the complex ways in which social processes are materially embedded in the web of life." (Harvey 2005: 79)

In particular, the Coxian concept of 'historical structure', which focuses on the reciprocal relations between structural and agential aspects of world order, will serve as the principal theoretical and methodological framework of the analysis. This specific approach of the thesis will hopefully shed some new light onto the workers' struggle, not only in Argentina, but also around the world. Apart from the larger historical context, it is also indispensable for the recuperated enterprises to have a profound understanding of their own potentialities and limitations. In its second focus, the thesis will analyze the possibilities and the main obstacles of Argentina's recuperated workplaces.

7. Research questions

The thesis is thus guided by two different, yet interrelated, set of research questions. It will examine the broader socio-economic and political-ideological context that provoked the renaissance of Argentina's recuperated enterprises. In addition, it will discuss the emancipatory potential and the main obstacles and limitations of Argentina's workers' control.

1) Historical-theoretical:

Which specific socio-economic and political-ideological context has contributed to the renaissance of factories and enterprises under workers' control in Argentina? What is the relationship between the workers' experiences within Argentina's specific socio-historical context of competing social forces and the profound structural transformations at the international/global/transnational level, which has provoked the unfolding of Argentina's default in 2001-2002 and the subsequent intensified emergence of recuperated, worker-controlled factories and self-managed enterprises? To what extent did Argentina's crisis of 2001 modify the previously existing balance of social forces within the country?

2) Political-practical:

What is the emancipatory potential of self-management? Is it realized and materialized in the praxis of Argentina's workers? What are the main obstacles that have led to the failure of different self-managed initiatives in Argentina? Why has the number of self-controlled companies in the country increased over the past ten years following the economic and financial meltdown in 2001-02? Which conditions have nurtured such a development? What role have political constellations played? And finally, what are the prospects for a future expansion of workers' self-management?

8. Thesis structure

Chapters I and II will respectively outline the methodological approaches that the thesis is based upon and introduce the theoretical framework for the analysis. Chapters III and IV will briefly examine Argentina's specific embeddedness

within the British imperial world order of the 19th century following its formal independence and the country's incorporation into the reformulated constellation of social forces under U.S. leadership after World War II. As the centerpiece of the thesis, Chapter V will rigorously analyze the structural transformation of the post-war world order in the 1970s, and, by drawing on the broader historical narrative of the previous chapters, detail how the specific socio-economic and political-ideological global context may have provoked, or at least, contributed to Argentina's crisis and the concurrent renaissance of workplace occupations at the beginning of the 21st century. Finally, Chapter VI will discuss the emancipatory potential, the principal obstacles and limitations, and the prospects for the future expansion of Argentina's recuperated enterprises within the existing regime of accumulation. The thesis will end with a section that succinctly summarizes the main conclusions that can be drawn from the research.

I Methodological approaches

The chapter will discuss and determine the methodological framework of the investigation. The preference of a certain research method and the simultaneous rejection of another will not only shape the entire research process, but it will also influence the overall findings of the investigation. A profound reflection on the suitability and applicability of various research tools is thus inevitable and necessary.

Any particular method is always merely part of a more comprehensive methodological framework that explains structures and guides the overall research process. The inner inconsistencies and contradictions of all methodological perspectives put the researcher in a position that calls for the openness towards dialogue with the initially established set of methodological rules. This thesis applies four different qualitative methodological approaches: 1) literature research (Simonis/Elbers 2003), 2) expert interviews (Hopf 2000; Hermanns 2000, Rapley 2004; Arksey/Knight 1999; Minichiello 1995; Rubin/Rubin 1995), and 3) hermeneutical content analysis (Krippendorff 1969, 1980; Mayring 2000) and discourse analysis (Parker 2000).

Qualitative research is from the outset more cyclical and nonlinear than quantitative research. It is rather;

A source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. (...) [Qualitative methods] help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks. (Miles/Huberman 1994: 1)

The overall objective of qualitative research is the construction and production of meaning in relations to a specific social action or statement. Meaning depends heavily on the context in which it emerges. Ignoring this context, which is always the outcome of a specific historical process, distorts the meaning and significance of a certain social action (Neumann 1999; Seale et al. 2004).

The literature research focuses on written material in English, German and Spanish in the form of books, book chapters, articles in specialized journals and newspapers, interviews, speeches and reports. The material was obtained through research in different libraries, data bases and internet searches. In addition, numerical (statistics, surveys, diagrams)²⁶ and audio/video material (documentaries, recorded live footage, etc.) were analyzed and later incorporated into the thesis during the writing process. Written material was further obtained by conducting expert interviews during field research in Argentina.

Interviewing is probably the most widely used method within the qualitative research practice (Seale et al. 2004: 10). The purpose of qualitative interviews is the generation of authentic, elaborate and detailed material through the method of questioning and other verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Personal face-to-face interviews enable an in-depth look into “subjectivity, voice and lived experiences of the interviewed persons.” (Rapley 2004: 15) This thesis presents original research in the form of qualitative expert interviews that were conducted in different parts of Argentina in 2010. However, for the present thesis, qualitative interviews do not represent the main source for the construction of a comprehensive empirical foundation. In fact, the expert interviews provide additional primary material in the form of background knowledge that is

²⁶ Fundamental for the working with statistics is the researcher’s own development of a criterion for understanding statistical methods. Given the ubiquitous and extensive use of statistics in social sciences nowadays it is imperative to apply strict analytical criteria to the used material.

necessary and indispensable for the rigorous dealing and conducting of the research.

Expert interviews are a specific type of guideline-based interviews.²⁷ The latter have been widely utilized as useful methodological instruments in the collection of qualitative material (Flick 1995: 94). Unlike standardized interviews or questionnaires, the relative openness of guideline-based interviews allow for the role and the relevance of the interviewed subject to be more emphasized. As a general rule, guidelines are used in a flexible and adoptable manner. During the interviews, a committed attempt is made to cover the entire range of aspects and topics relevant for the research.

The task of the interviewer consists of introducing the most pertinent topics and simultaneously allowing the interviewee to address new issues. If a gap emerges between those two tasks, the interviewer inserts transitions in the form of specific questions with the purpose of leading the interview back to a certain aspect that had previously not been sufficiently dealt with. The dilemma of guideline-based interviews is to adequately address the criteria of specificity and profoundness on the one hand and broadness on the other (ibid: 97). The interviewer on a case-to-case basis, spontaneously and effectively deals with problems with regards to this problem.

The guidelines of the interview are structured along thematic areas. All interviews are instigated with an open question. The latter is accompanied by questions based on the used theory and the focus of the study's research questions. The purpose is to elicit the interviewee's implicit knowledge. Finally, the interviewer initiates confrontational questions. The intent here is to critically question and to

²⁷ There are different types of guideline-based interviews: 1) focused interview, 2) semi-standardized interview, 3) problem-centered interview, 4) expert interview, 5) ethnographic interview and 6) biographical interview (see Flick 1995).

contrast the interviewee's positions with alternative viewpoints, both theoretically and thematically. Guideline-based interviews are characterized by a relative openness of the raised questions and the general interview environment, allowing the interviewee to answer freely and without constraint.

Limitations of guideline-based interviews are the problems of mediation and control. The former is related to the issue of adequate mediation between the established guidelines and intuition of the interviewer and the actual presentation of the interviewee (Flick 1995: 112ff). The effective dealing with the dilemma requires a high degree of sensitivity and a competent and broad understanding of the received responses on the part of interviewer. This is achieved through a permanent mediation between the guidelines and the direction of the conversation. Apart from time factors, the benefits of guideline-based interview lie in the comparability of the qualitative material and the generation of specific and structured responses. Both have to do with the interview's originally determined intention and the code of practice.

Turning now to expert interviews, their conduction includes four different working steps: 1) the recruitment of the interviewees, 2) the formulation of an initial list of questions, 3) the actual interaction between interview participants and 4) the analysis of the interviews. Prior to the conduction of the interviews a list of selected individuals is compiled according to latter's "insider knowledge" (Merton 1972) or "specialized particular knowledge" (Sprondel 1979) on a specific topic related to the research questions. Frequently appearing names within the relevant literature are shortlisted and then contacted via email. The interview participants have been deeply involved in Argentina's recuperated enterprises over the past years.

As an expert on a certain topic, the interviewee is viewed not only as an individual case, but also rather as a representation of a certain group of people.

Experts organically form part of a specific field of knowledge. For somebody to become an expert in a certain field, entirely depends on the researcher's definition and the overall intent of the investigation. Criteria for the nomination and selection of experts are "responsibility in the design, implementation and control of solving a problem" and a "privileged access to information about groups or people or decision-making processes." (Meuser/Nagel 2005: 73) The intent of expert interviews is directed towards experts as "bearers of functions of an organizational or institutional context." (ibid: 74). In many cases of research it is not the top representatives of an organization or company that are viewed as experts, but rather as people from the second or third level of the decision-making hierarchy.

Central for the successful conduction of the interview is to limit the interview and the interviewee to the specific expertise of interest. Within the literature, this is usually referred to as "problems of control". (Flick 1995: 112) In expert interviews the exclusive experience and the particular knowledge of the interviewees are at the center of expert interviews. It is the task of the interviewer to rein in on digressions into private matters by the interviewee. During the interviews the list of questions that was created upon intense study of the most relevant literature focusing on existing knowledge gaps is not used in a rigid manner. The list instead functions as a broad guideline to structure conversations. An overall open and cooperative stance is taken throughout the interviews. During the conversation the interviewer and interviewee are "seen as actively and unavoidably engaged in the interactional construction of the interview's content." (Gubrium/Holstein 2005:15) Expert interviewing

Aims to explore the contextual boundaries of that experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection or to penetrate to more reflective understandings about the nature of that experience. (Johnson/Weller 2002: 500)

Interviewing should be seen as an “undone interaction”, an “engaged, active of collaborative” talk between the interviewer and interviewee with some level of direction and control (Rapley 2004: 25f). Both parties are required to jointly develop a dialogue. The task of the interviewer is to be flexible and forthcoming and to actively provide complementary input to the interview (Denzin 2002; Meuser/Nagel 2005: 78).

Following such a collaborative stance, qualitative interviews allow for the gathering of a wide range of complementary and contrasting information on one and the same issue. A strict focus on ‘neutrality’ during the interviews tends to create hierarchies and asymmetries between the interviewer and the interviewee. This may turn the latter into a research object and may encourage passivity. A more engaged and active format of interviewing enables trust building that encourages openness and disclosure (Denzin 2002; Oakley 1981; Doulgas 1985).

During the interviews a digital tape recorder was used for practical reasons. There is controversy within the existing literature if and to what extent a tape recorder may influence the authenticity and frankness of an interview (Rapley 2004; Arksey/Knight 1999; Minichiello 1995; Rubin/Rubin 1995). It is argued that a tape recorder together with the recruitment conversation, the chosen physical space, the introduction, the state, gender, class and race of the interviewer forms the overall context of the conversation. Ultimately, all these factors have a certain influence on the interview. There is no ideal and unbiased interview situation.

Finally, during the research process hermeneutic content analysis was applied to the evaluation of the compiled sources. The hermeneutic method is a specific form of qualitative content analysis that is “a replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from texts to statements or properties of its source.” (Krippendorff 1969: 103) Qualitative content analysis on the other hand is a suitable approach for the systematic, methodically controlled empirical evaluation

of different sources such as documents, audio/video recordings or interview transcripts. It focuses not only on the actual content of the material, but also analyses the different levels of the content; the primary topic and the latent content accessible through interpretation, and the formal aspects of the sources (Mayring 2000: 2). The purpose of using content analysis in the present study is to apply a strict set of rules that guides and structures the textual analysis of the utilized sources.

During the process of analysis segments in the different interviews that address similar topics are synthesized and put under unifying headlines. This is done through a process of content-oriented categorization. A category is the outcome of a process of abstraction, in which particular aspects of generally shared knowledge between the interviewed experts are condensed and then made explicit. Each category requires rational justification and has to undergo a continuous process of revision and re-evaluation throughout the entire investigation. In the final step of the analysis, the empirical and generalized findings are systematically organized and interpreted. Here the categories are combined into typologies and theories.

The criteria for definitions of the different categories originally derive from specific research questions and their theoretical justification. Both determined which aspects of the material is first studied and then meticulously analyzed during the research process. The application of the hermeneutic model comprises of three interrelated stages. First, the material (documents, texts, books, etc.) is analyzed by using previous knowledge. Second, following the first evaluation of the findings, emerging gaps in theory or methodology of the studied material are identified and dealt with by consulting additional written sources and/or qualitative interviews. In the third and last stage, the original material is again analyzed bearing in mind the additionally acquired knowledge of stage two. If the

final analysis still shows some disturbing gaps that impede a rigorous analysis, steps two and three are repeated (Simonis/Elbers 2003: 127).

The purpose of the interpretative method is to filter out representative and general knowledge, statements and opinions through the comparison with transcribed texts of other interviewed experts. Expert interviews form part of a “tool box” of interpretative social research. In contrast to interpretation with a single interest and the focus on sequentiality, the analysis of expert interviews focuses on the evaluation of theatrical blocs, which are dispersed throughout the text of the interview. The statements given by the experts are from the outset viewed and analyzed in relation to their specific institutional and organizational context. Together with the guidelines, this commonly shared context is what eventually allows for the comparability of the interviews. In addition to the interpretative content analysis, discourse analysis is used to foster understanding of the origins of the interviewees’ communicated ideas. The interviewee’s responses are not viewed as the ‘truth’ of his or her actions, thoughts and beliefs. Discourse analysis rather focuses on how specific “truths are produced, sustained and negotiated.” (Rapley 2004: 26)

II Theoretical framework

Based on the assumption that the social world needs to be approached, analyzed and understood as an inseparable whole in its totality, the present thesis aims at transcending disciplinary boundaries that have fragmented the study of contemporary social sciences. It rejects the separation between economics and politics, which characterizes realist and liberal discourses. Instead, it positions itself upon the tradition of critical International Political Economy/Global Political Economy (IPE/GPE),²⁸ which analyses social relations in their complex interweavement and sheds light on different manifestations of domination by bringing together the political and production conditions. Critical IPE/GPE is strongly influenced by the Marxist tradition that rejects the liberal position, which argues that the economic sphere functions under its own rules independently from politics (Jackson/Sørensen 1999a: 184). Critical IPE/GPE aims at determining the relation between the state and the economy and inquires into the conditions for the reproduction of dominant social structures in the face of the crisis proneness of the capitalist mode of production (Hartmann et al. 2009: 7).

1. The role of theory

Social research presupposes the existence of basic structures within reality that define its foundational units and explain the relationships between them. A theory provides a practical framework for analyzing such social structures through the establishment of specific principles of selection, which help narrow down the

²⁸ The academic field of International Relations (IR) which primarily focus on the interactions between states within the international system is viewed as “a subdiscipline of IPE.” (Strange (1994: 218) In comparison to IPE, which in its name is still focused on states, GPE puts more emphasis on the multiplicity of actors within the global political-economic context.

scope of the inquiry. By means of simplification, a theory functions as a viable tool for the tangible organization of an otherwise overwhelmingly unorganized bundle of social phenomena. A conceptual analysis based on consciously selected theoretical categories eventually enables a logical and coherent dealing with a research problem.

The applicability of a theory, however, is necessarily always relative in time and space. Consequently, the study of social phenomena cannot be separated from history without simultaneously lapsing into metaphysical speculation. Social theory in turn needs to be continually updated and corrected in order to retain its relevance for understanding ongoing processes of social change- (i.e. the structural transformations and the emerging contradictions and conflicts between different social actors)- by capturing the latter in the totality of their concrete historical political-economic and socio-cultural dimensions. As Cox (1981: 128) noted;

Social and political theory is history-bound at its origin, since it is always traceable to an historically-conditioned awareness of certain problems and issue, a problematic, while at the same time it attempts to transcend the particularity of its historical origins in order to place them within the framework of some general propositions or laws.

New developments call for the adjustment and, if necessary, the rejection of existing theoretical concepts and their replacement by new frameworks, which emerge from the constant interaction of the researcher and the reality that the theory intends to explain. The thesis rejects realist and liberal positions, which argue that the principal purpose of theory in IR and IPE/GPE is either to explain the laws of state interaction and national behavior (Waltz 1979: 6), to predict and explain individual actor behavior (Smith/Hollis 1990), to use empirical data in order to test hypotheses about liberal-democratic state interaction (Doyle 1983) or to elucidate the use of the dominant concepts within the field of IR and IPE/GPE (Butterfield/Wight 1966).

Theory is not merely a conceptual framework for explaining the world. It is rather a practical tool that allows for the criticizing of the established order and the different forms of domination and power associated with it. As human beings and their actions can only be understood in historical perspective, theory is able to contribute to such an understanding of human behavior in the past, present and future through the identification of specific historical patterns (Gill 2008: 17; Puchala 2003: 6). It is argued that the purpose of critical theory is to attain a “rational cognitive understanding of history” (Boggs 1976: 56) that helps demystify the socially constructed and seemingly natural aura of reality and to open up new paths for social change, human emancipation and alternative forms of living. Critical theory is thus always a criticism of existing and prevailing relations of domination and exploitation.

Theoretical analysis and understanding are indispensable for goal-oriented political action. Theory, however, remains abstract and sterile as long as it fails to establish norms, which hold the potential to serve as a basis for concrete collectivist strategies. By evaluating and creating new possibilities for human action and social engagement, theory can become an indispensable resource in the elaboration of strategies for popular movements and social forces in their collective struggles for a new configuration of power. It can inform practical attempts to overcome existing forms of oppression, exploitation and dominance, strengthen alliances between different social actors and therefore actively contribute to the concrete forming of potentialities and the evaluation of the existing possibilities for the construction of an alternative socio-economic- and political-cultural order.

2. Neo-Gramscian approaches

In an attempt to answer the research questions, the thesis will rely on the conceptual apparatus provided by neo-Gramscian approaches that form part of the neo-Marxist revival that began in the 1970s.²⁹ Neo-Gramscian perspectives emerged in the early-1980s as a historical-materialist challenge to the static approaches of Neo-Realism (Waltz 1979), Neo-Institutionalism (Keohane/Nye 1977) and World System Theory (Wallerstein 1974) within the field of IR and IPE/GPE³⁰ (Bieler/Morton 2010: 372; Murphy 1998: 418; Budd 2007);

Neo-Gramscian scholarship thus seems to provide an alternative paradigm in a discipline long dominated by behavioralism, positivism and neorealism. In a sense the different neo-Gramscian approaches within International Relations theory reconstructed historical materialism by transcending the abstract structuralism of Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar and the world-system theory of Immanuel Wallerstein. (Ayers 2008: 5)

In particular, Robert Cox's critical theory of historic change, hegemony and world order (Cox 1981, 1983, 1987) opened new avenues for the analysis of the transformative processes, which had redefined transnational relations of power

²⁹ Neo-Marxism refers here to the renaissance of Marxist theory since the mid-1960s. Rooted within of tradition of 'Western Marxism' structural studies by Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, discourse-theoretical analyses by Ernesto Laclau, Neo-Gramscian approaches by Robert W. Cox and Stephen Gill and 'cultural Marxism' as in the works of Edward P. Thompson and Raymond Williams. This later generation of Marxism can be distinguished from its 'first generation' of the early and mid-19th century: Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir I. Lenin, Karl Kautsky, Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Leon Trotsky, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Galvano Della Volpe, Henri Lefebvre and Lucio Colletti (see Bieling (2006: 378f); on Neo-Marxism in International Relations/International Political Economy see Linklater (2005); Sterling-Folker (2005); Teschke (2010); Weber (2009); Hobden/Wyn (2001); Jackson/Sørensen (1999a); Rupert (2007).

³⁰ For a basic introduction to neo-Gramscian approaches see Bieling/Deppe (1999); Bieler/Morton (2003, 2004); Morton (2003); Gill (1993b); Borg (2011a); Rupert (2005); for criticism of using Gramsci's concepts in International Relations/International Political Economy see Germain/Kenny (1998); for criticism of different aspects of neo-Gramscian perspectives see Burnham (1991, 1994); Drainville (1994); Panitch (1994, 1996); Scherrer (1998); Baker (1999); Ling (1996); Cammack (1999); Saurin (2008); Bieler/Bonefeld/Burnham/Morton 2006; Schechter 2002; Bieler/Morton (2010).

and domination during the 1970s. Cox attempted to apply Gramsci's most relevant insights, notions and concepts³¹ such as hegemony, 'passive revolution', 'historic bloc', 'integral state', 'common sense' and 'organic intellectuals' to developments in world order, socio-historical transformation, civil-society complexes, forms of state and transnational class formation (Ayers 2008: 5f; Borg 2001a: 67). Cox's theoretical and methodological concept of 'historical structure' will serve as a useful theoretical framework for the analysis of the socio-economic and political-ideological context that contributed to the the renaissance of workers' control in Argentina. Central to Cox's historical-materialist conception of social change within world orders, as will be seen at a later stage, are shifts in the sphere of production (Cox 2002: 31).

Neo-Gramscian perspectives within the IPE/GPE have focused on a wide range of issues such as (a) the relations between labor and different fractions of capital (van Apeldoorn 2002; Bieler 2000; Cox 1987; Holman/Overbeek/Ryner 1998), (b) global hegemony and the conditions of uneven development (Augelli/Murphy 1988; Bilgin/Morton 2002; Morton 2003b; Robinson 1996), (c) different forms and capacities of class struggle, resistance and counter-hegemonic social movements (Bieler/Morton 2004), *inter alia* the Landless Workers' Movements (MST) in Brazil and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico (Morton 2002, 2003b); (d) transnational organization (Augelli/Murphy 1997; Bieling 2007; Cox 1999; Gill 2000; Murphy 1999) and (e) the role of transnational classes with the global political economy (Gill 1986; Overbeek 2004; van der Pijl 1984, 1998; Röttger 2009). With respect to normative questions, Neo-Gramscian approaches primarily focus on the conflicting relation between capitalism and democracy, in particular on different aspects of social inequality and injustice and shortcomings of democratic control and popular participation (Bieling 2009: 33).

³¹ Echoing Gill (1993: 3) and Morton (2003a: 199), the present thesis rejects the notion of a 'singular', 'true', 'real' or 'correct' reading and interpretation of Gramsci's work.

3. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

With respect to ontology and epistemology, classical Marxist Political Economy is based on historical materialism and materialist dialectics. Historical materialism takes a holistic view on the totality of social relations, as it incorporates both structure and agency into the analysis. Ideas, cultural aspects, politics and economics are not conceived of as separate spheres, but rather viewed as reciprocally interrelated (Rupert 2005: 483). The defining characteristic of historical materialism is its emphasis on production. One of Marx's basic claims was that the "*ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life." (Marx/Engels 1895) The production of the means of existence by human beings is the fundamental activity in any given society, and it is thus production that forms the basis on which all other human activities can flourish.

Materialist dialectics holds that the dialectics of the material world produces the dialectics of ideas. Marx (1859) argued;

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.

Neo-Gramscian approaches draw from the same philosophical base, yet they also incorporate Gramsci's anti-economistic interpretation of orthodox Marxism. Gramsci (1971: 427) distinguished between historical materialism and historical economism (Gill 1993a). During Gramsci's political activity, historical

economism had emerged as a strong historic tendency alongside classical Marxism (Hobden/Wyn 2001: 229; Jones 2006: 5). In its predominant emphasis on the economic sphere as the critical factor for determining the course of history, economism tended to downplay the role of the superstructure by explaining it merely through the material base. The narrow, mechanistic and one-dimensional focus on the material, economic and empiricist aspects of Marx's critique of the capitalist mode of production reduced economic development to changes in technology. Human action, consciousness and historical change were viewed as being primarily determined by material conditions (Boggs 1976: 56).

Contrary to an economic, positivistic and materialist reading of Marx, Gramsci viewed the base and the superstructure reciprocally intertwined in complex and dynamic ways. Even though he dismissed economism as "the doctrine according to which economic and historical development are made to depend directly on the changes in some important element of production" (Gramsci 1971: 163), he did not reject the assumption that the mode of production was the ultimate driving force behind historical development and social change. The superstructure, however, did not merely reflect the particular configuration of forces of the material base, but played itself a crucial role in situations of social transformation. It is not an autonomous sphere, yet an essential factor in shaping the course and outcome of revolutionary efforts during transitional periods. In this dialectical understanding, ideas are real and material forces in their potential to provoke concrete and target-oriented action (Merkens 2006).

Neo-Gramscian perspectives are to a large extent based on the assumptions that classical Marxism was indeed deterministic in the sense that it established a one-dimensional and mechanical relationship between the material base and the political, cultural and ideological superstructure, in which the former determines the latter (Ayers 2008: 5). Similar to Marx, Cox (1987: 32) locates the dialectical transformative potential of society in the processes within the sphere of

production and social relations in general. Cox's notion of power resembles that non-deterministic relationship between the material base and the superstructure. Drawing on Gramsci's critique, Cox relates power to a specific structural and systemic constellation, which refers to "a conjunction of the outward and inward, of material capabilities and consciousness leading to purposive action." (Cox 1976a: 195) Structures are viewed as intersubjective, i.e. as the outcome of the mutually constituting and reciprocal relationship between agents and structure (Joseph 2008: 69).

In contrast to 'scientific Marxism', neo-Gramscian approaches reject the empiricist³²-positivist³³ claim that a scientific³⁴, neutral and value-free study of social science is possible (Schechter 2002: 5). All forms of social inquiry are ultimately political in terms of their implications and consequences (Cox 1979: 257). Empiricist research orthodoxy approaches social reality from the standpoint of methodological individualism. Its epistemology is based on the ontological notion of the separation between subject and object, which consequently allows the generation of 'objective' knowledge (Jones 2006: 18). Observed facts are equated with reality itself, whereas distinct theoretical approaches and concepts are merely viewed as suitable tools in the process of unbiased knowledge production (Abrahamsen 1997: 144).

Positivist methods explore regularities and predictable trends within reality by collecting and studying 'objective' data, i.e. specific observations that are 'given' within the outside world. In its pursuit of this data, positivist methods divide the totality into separate observable sub-units that are subsequently converted into

³² Empiricism is a theory of knowledge, which holds that human beings attain knowledge primarily from sensory experience.

³³ As a school within the philosophy of science, which goes back to the work of Auguste Comte (1865), positivism argues that experience, observation and testing are the only adequate methods to support knowledge claims about the world (see Sinclair 1996: 6f; Jackson/Sørensen 1999b: 288ff.)

³⁴ Science is here conceived as applied rationality, which can be observed "in the form of regularities in the relationships among externally observed phenomena." (Cox 1976a: 178)

variables by means of classification. Different variables are then placed in relation to each other in order to draw causal inferences. The interaction and the linkages between these variables are eventually arranged in a certain order and organized into a system (Silverman/Marvasti 2008: 13).

Contrary to these assertions and in accordance with post-positivist epistemology, Neo-Gramscian perspectives hold that there is neither an 'objective' view nor an unbiased analysis of a particular subject of study nor universally valid laws or undeniable truths, which determined and shaped the process of human history (Gill 2008: 12ff). A strict separation between subject and object and between facts and values within the research process is ultimately unattainable (Neumann 1999: 33). The production of knowledge is a social practice in which subject and object are inseparably unified. Researchers cannot transcend the reality they are analyzing, as their identity and interests cannot be detached from the knowledge they acquire. Theories and intellectual operations are consequently never value-free or neutral, but rather serve, deliberately or not, the interests and strategies of certain political agendas and constituencies.

The positivist claim that 'objective' knowledge can indeed be obtained through scientific research needs to be rebuffed as merely ideological. All social interaction ultimately includes moral judgments based on certain values, which cannot be separated from the interpretation of facts and the observation and experience of reality. Within the field of political science and international relations the positivist-behavioralist³⁵ approach with its rejection of subjectivity and its concurrent commitment towards the production of 'objective' knowledge in politics has tacitly perpetuated the established order of social relations (Cox 1976a: 187).

³⁵ Behaviorism holds that the scientific method, which had evolved in the study of nature can equally be applied to the world of social relations (Jackson/Sørensen 1999: 45ff).

In its acclaimed ‘objectivity’ and value-free operations, orthodox science is being turned into the voice of established forces and used for legitimizing the existing power structure. A critical analysis thus becomes;

One of the most effectively used [means] against the prevailing orthodoxies which, when stripped of their putative universality, become seen as special pleading for historically transient but presently entrenched interest. (Cox: 1979: 257)

Neo-Gramscian perspectives are rooted in a historicist-dialectical epistemological approach to the study of social reality, as they recognize the latter as a subjective creation of the human mind (Cox 2002: 26). Historicism, together with other approaches, focuses on understanding and explaining social interaction by dealing not with conventional data, but with facts about generally comprehensible people-made events, institutions or processes. It is a method that facilitates the understanding of historical processes with regards to the functioning of the human mind, which “conceives and comprehends [that] historical action is itself molded by history – thought and action are bound together in a structural interrelationship that can only be understood historically.” (Cox: 1979: 300)

In his critique of the Hegelian idealist dialectics, Marx had integrated his own materialist dialectics into Hegel’s framework and thus concomitantly dismissed the dualism between mind and matter. This Marxian conception is also reflected in Gramsci’s understanding of reality. As Gramsci (1971: 446) noted, “we know reality only in relation to man, and since man is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming and so is objectivity, etc.” ‘Objective’ thus;

Always means “humanly objective” which can be held to correspond exactly to “historically subjective”: in other words, objective would mean “universal subjective”. Man knows objectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race historically unified in a single unitary cultural system.

Human history is the permanent production and reproduction of “a complex and dialectical interplay between agency, structure, consciousness and action.” (Gill 1993: 9) It is identical with human nature and human institutions, all of which need to be comprehended in a generic historical way. An essentialist understanding of human nature that views it as separated from the course of history often serves the ideological purpose of justifying existing social conditions on naturalistic grounds (Vico 2000).

History is the continuous and ongoing transformation of human nature and the arduous struggle to meet basic material needs. In the labor process, human beings do not merely modify nature, but they also change their own needs and aspirations. The history of the development of human beings - and thus human nature itself - can only be understood through analysis of the evolution of the dominant modes of production throughout human history. By drawing from Hegel, Marx argued;

In the course of their history human beings acquire a deeper appreciation of what it means to be free and a better understanding of why society will have to be changed before freedom can be realized more completely. (Linklater 2005: 115)

As Gramsci (1985: 181) pointed out, history always needs to be understood as ‘world history’ in the sense that “particular histories only exist within the frame of world history.” Gramsci’s historicism claims that ideas and events need to be analyzed and evaluated in relation to their specific context and historical circumstances in the sense that they are “bound together in structural totalities that condition the possibilities of change.” (Cox 1979: 258) In other words, the analysis and the transformation of existing social structures must be embedded in time and space, i.e. in the concrete understanding of the complexity of socio-historical development. By rejecting positivist claims to universal validity and objectivity that would transcend history, historicism recognizes its own relativity

within social sciences (Morton 2003a: 120). Because it views the subject and the object as identical, the historicist-dialectical approach challenges the positivist dichotomy as well as the structure-agent problem³⁶.

Gramsci's dialectical understanding of history was highly influential for neo-Gramscian epistemology in which both material economic forces and forms of consciousness play a significant role in provoking revolutionary social change within the course of history.³⁷ In his methodology of "absolute historicism" (see Morton 2003a: 121), he understands the historical process as a synergetic unity of past and present. Here the central question needs to be asked whether a theory can contribute to the practical understanding of concrete conditions that are distinct from the historical context of its origin. Gramsci's historicism places ideas both in and beyond their historical context and thus allows them to become useful also for the analysis of the present. By applying this approach to different social conditions, it becomes absolutely crucial to consider the historical limitations of certain theoretical and practical ideas and to assess their relevance and applicability within a historically distinct context.

Neo-Gramscian approaches recognize the importance of past ideas and previous historical circumstances in framing subsequent dominant ideas and social practices. This may lead us to the reasoning that past ideas and philosophical concepts may still be relevant beyond their specific historical context for the understanding of contemporary social realities. The study of the past therefore becomes an absolute necessity for the analysis of past, present and future conditions. Gramsci's intellectual and practical concepts may thus be adopted and enriched to present circumstances and social arrangements. They can, as (Morton 2003a: 135) pointed out, "be taken as a point of departure to deal with a similar

³⁶ Historically, the structure-agent problem emerged as a debate within International Relations Theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Wight 2006; Hay 2002: 101ff).

³⁷ Braudel/Matthews (1982) argued that history involved "a relatively fast-moving events-time (*histoire événementielle*) and a much slower-moving time of structural change (*longue durée*)."

problematic in our own time whilst critically appreciating the need to also move *beyond* Gramsci as a necessary reflection on present political conditions.”

4. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and its neo-Gramscian extension

Central to neo-Gramscian approaches is Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Bohle 2005: 204). In contrast to neo-realist scholarship (Waltz 1979; Keohane/Nye 1977; Keohane 1984) that narrowly defines hegemony in terms of the economic and military capacities of states, neo-Gramscian approaches develop a historical concept of the emergence of hegemony. Neo-realism views hegemony as the dominance of one powerful state over subordinated states within the international system. The latter is reduced to the balance of power, which emerges from a particular constellation of the states’ material capabilities, such as economic and military potential, while the relevance of social forces is rejected (Cox 1981: 139; Gill/Law 1993: 94). Hegemony in the neo-realist sense involves “a static theory of politics, an abstract ahistorical conception of the state and appeal to universal validity.” (Bieler/Morton 2004: 86)

In the 1980s, it was the work of Robert W. Cox that marked a significant break in the traditional concepts of hegemony within the mainstream theories of IR and IPE/GPE (Bieler/Morton 2004: 85). In contrast to neo-realist scholarship, neo-Gramscian approaches are rooted in a structural conception of power. Over the past decades they have studied the interrelation of ideas, institutions and material capabilities at the levels of social forces, state-civil society complexes and world order for the analysis of historical change, global hegemony and transnational social forces (Gill 1986: 205f).

Neo-Gramscian theories of hegemony question the dominant global structure; examine how an existing social order with its norms, institutions and practices has

historically emerged and evaluate the emancipatory potential of social forces to transform the equilibrium of power. They extend the conventional understanding of hegemony and rather define the latter as;

An expression of broadly based consent, manifested in the acceptance of ideas and supported by material resources and institutions, which is initially established by social forces occupying a leading role within a state, but is then projected outwards on a world scale. (Bieler/Morton 2004: 87)

Neo-Gramscian approaches view hegemonic structures as the concrete outcome of historical processes that imply social, cultural and ideological aspects. Hegemony refers to the predominant structure of power and domination that is maintained by a broad consensus between different antagonistic social forces (see Borg 2001; Merkens 2007; Hobden/Wyn 2001: 236; Plehwe/Walpen 1999: 3; Jones 2006: 50). This consensus is on the one hand expressed in the general acceptance of particular dominant ideas and, on the other bolstered by material resources and a set of institutions. World hegemony is;

Thus not merely an order among states. It is an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries. World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three. World hegemony, furthermore, is expressed in universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behavior for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries – rules which support the dominant mode of production. (Cox 1983: 169f)

Gramsci's idea of hegemony focuses on the consensual character of political rule or domination, i.e. the "intellectual and moral leadership" (Gramsci 1971: 57) of the dominant class or class fraction within society. It is inherently linked to social forces and to processes in which the latter shape and reproduce different forms of state (Merkens 2007; Scherrer 2007: 72f; Adolphs/Karakayli 2007: 122ff). World

hegemony inquires into the material and ideological fundamentals on which state power ultimately rests. It creates;

A unity between objective material forces and ethico-political ideas - in Marxian terms, a unity of structure and superstructure – in which power based on dominance over production is rationalized through an ideology incorporating compromise or consensus between dominant and subordinate groups. (Cox 1977: 387)

Ideas and ideologies are not conceived of as independent aspects in relation to material capabilities, but they rather “legitimate the control of production and the forms of social relations of the production process.” (ibid.) Gramsci (1995: 155f) viewed ideas as organically embedded within a “material structure of ideology,” by which he referred to the state’s ideological base in the form of educational institutions, libraries, architecture, etc. (Cox 1977: 387). The state is consequently social in character and reflects a particular constellation of social forces within the state-civil society complex.

Hegemony refers to the capacity of the dominant social group to universalize its norms, values and interpretations of the world and achieve their acceptance and internalization by the subordinated sections of the population (Brand 2007a). The state plays a significant role in the construction and reproduction of hegemony, yet it is the miscellaneous institutions of civil society such as the media, the church, the family, educational institutions, sport teams and the like, which manufacture a broad consensus that is widely accepted across all social groups (Boggs 1976: 39; Sekler 2009: 60). Gramsci (1971: 419ff) views this process of popular ideological penetration as constitutive for the creation of what he called ‘common sense’ (Hobden/Wyn 2001: 236; Jones 2006: 54).

For Gramsci, hegemony had to be conceived of as an actively managed consensus that required permanent adaption and readjustment to changing politico-economic

circumstances and social conditions. It is a radically dynamic form of rule, which thrives by being in a state of permanent transformation. In that process of maintaining hegemonic rule, leading groups will be forced from time to time to grant economic or political concessions to subordinated groups in order to make the established relations of power and domination more acceptable to the latter (Abrahamsen 1997: 150; Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 9; Boggs 1976: 70).

Crucial for the maintenance of hegemonic rule is: 1) the shaping and the diffusion of dominant values, beliefs, attitudes, norms and opinions within the institutions of civil society, 2) the internalization of these ideational forces; 3) the ideological interpretation of processes and events according to the established power structure; and 4) the simultaneous sidelining heterodox voices (Boggs 1976: 39). Hegemony operates subtly and, if possible, seeks to avoid the escalation of open conflict. It instead functions through bureaucratic channels and consensual strategies. The established rules, ideas and practices of a certain hegemonic project always reflect the interests of the dominant social groups. At the same time, however, they appear to the subordinated fractions of society as the expressions of a universal natural arrangement, which provides them with certain sense of satisfaction and predictability. The accentuation of a 'common interest' often framed in nationalist terms and its universalistic appeal, serve as effective rhetorical means to consolidate existing relations of power and oppression.

Hegemony goes far beyond dominance and the capacity to use brute force. In this context it becomes essential to distinguish hegemony from domination and supremacy. Domination is merely based on the potential use of force and lacks moral leadership, which again is an integral feature of Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Jessop 1990: 201). In reality, hegemony appears as a sophisticated form of subtle pressure and indirect coercion that grows from the basis of an organic synergy between the dominant and the subordinated social groups. Actual

dominance is disguised and portrayed as a broad and generally approved consent. As Gramsci (1992: 155f) notes;

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony (...) is characterized by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion.

Supremacy on the other hand refers to the preservation of a predominant position by a particular social class or class fraction within a historic bloc, which can be sustained either through domination, i.e. the use of force and violence, and/or hegemony. As Gramsci (1971: 57f) points out;

The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership." (...) A social group dominates antagonistic groups; (...) it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power; (...) it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to "lead" as well.

In the relation between hegemony and supremacy, changes in the former determine the level of consolidation and effectiveness of the latter, i.e. the ration between active and passive consent on the one hand and the potential use of force on the other at the level of world order. For counter-hegemonic forces, the struggle over ideological hegemony includes two phases: 1) the confrontation and radical criticism of the ideological forms and established systems of belief and 2) the creation of a new intellectual-cultural framework, which redefines values, ideas, popular culture, etc. For Gramsci a racial transformation of ubiquitously-operating ideological forces and authorities such as nationalism, religion, family, technology, etc. was a *conditio sine qua non* for the transcendence of the capitalist mode of production and its subsequent replacement by a new social order focused on human liberation.

For a situation “where the national bourgeoisie was too weak to establish hegemony in the sense of an ideological bond between itself and the masses,” (Abrahamsen 1997: 149) Gramsci introduced the concept of ‘passive revolution’³⁸. The latter is;

A theory of the survival and reorganisation of capitalism through periods of crisis, when crucial aspects of capitalist relations are not overcome but reproduced in new forms, leading to the furtherance of state power and an institutional framework consonant with capitalist property relations. (Morton 2003b: 632)

The concept allows for the analysis of the consensual elements of a particular hegemony and always points towards a situation of social conflict, instability and crisis in which the leading social group is anxious to transform any existing potential for real social change to its own benefits - the maintenance or expansion of its power and predominance (see Adolphs/Karakayli 2007: 123ff; Boggs 1976: 50; van der Pijl 1993: 237ff).

A fundamental characteristic of ‘passive revolution’ is the dialectical conjunction and confluence of progressive and reactionary aspects as indicated by Gramsci in the terms “revolution-restoration” or “revolution without revolution.” (Gramsci 1971: 59) Gramsci further introduced the concept of ‘transformismo’, which refers to the active absorption and incorporation of charismatic leaders and political figures of emerging antagonistic and subordinated groups or classes in their rise to power into the ranks of the dominant elites and the established structure of social relations.

³⁸ Gramsci borrowed the term from the Neapolitan historian Vincenzo Cuoro (1770-1823).

Within Neo-Gramscian approaches, the concept of ‘passive revolution’ has been employed to analyze historical changes in the formation of states in industrializing countries (Morton 2003b). The main purpose is to address;

The arrangements within particular forms of state that lead to the incorporation of fundamental economic, social, political and ideological changes in conformity with changes in capitalism on a world scale. (ibid: 634)

The notion of ‘passive revolution’ deals with class struggle as a consequence of the expansion of capital and the condensation of class interests in historically constructed forms of state. Potential challenges such as changes in capital-labor relations are captured and undermined through state intervention or the incorporation of newly emerging social groups within the existing hegemonic formation and without an actual extension of popular participation in the decision-making.

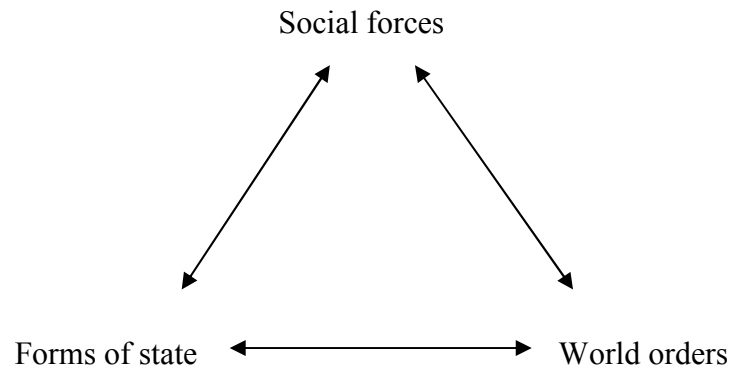
In a nutshell, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony was an attempt to conceptually capture the reciprocal and dialectical dynamics between superstructure and base. Unlike orthodox Marxism that defined power and class domination primarily in terms of force and coercion rooted in the sphere of production, Gramsci’s notion of hegemony added to the latter “pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all repressive structures.” (Boggs 1976: 38) Political control is viewed as the combination of domination and consent. Neo-Gramscian approaches extended Gramsci’s concept of hegemony towards the analysis of world orders and historical change therein.

5. The Coxian ‘historical structure’

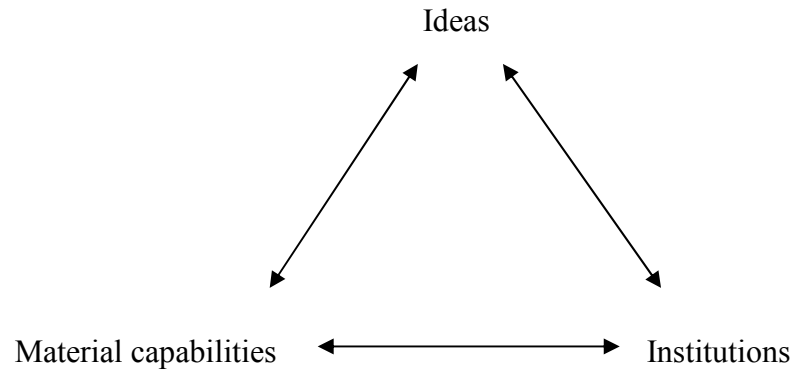
For the analysis of world hegemony and the dynamics of historical change associated with it, Cox (1981) introduced the concept of ‘historical structure’. It is a theoretical framework, which integrates both static and dynamic structural aspects within different forms of states and world orders, and tries to capture the complex interplay of social forces, which exercise pressure on the state from the level of world order as well as from the internal sphere of civil society (Sinclair 1996: 3). Cox’s historical structure is also;

A framework for action, (...) [as it] constitutes particular and interrelated configurations of thought patterns or ideas, material conditions or capabilities, and institutions, through which agency is defined, constrained and realized. (Ayers 2008: 5)

For Cox, world hegemony emerges within a specific historical structure on three different levels of action: 1) social relations of production, which are material, institutional and discursive forms of social relations that shape social forces; 2) forms of state, which refer to historically evolved state-civil society complexes; and 3) world orders, which conceptually point towards historical periods of stability and conflict including the potential of the emergence of an alternative world order. These three spheres of activity that are interrelated in a non-deterministic way constitute a particular ‘historical structure,’ which may function as a point of departure for an investigation of historical processes (Cox 1981: 135ff).



Within each of the spheres three forces or potentials in their specific combination further reciprocally determine a historical structure: 1) ideas, 2) material capabilities and 3) institutions.



Ideas comprise of intersubjective meanings and collective images. Intersubjective ideas are “those shared notions of the nature of social relations, which tend to perpetuate habits and expectations of behavior.” (Cox 1981: 136) They are widely accepted and commonly shared ideational fundamentals of social organization. Collective images on the other hand are opposing and competing views held by different social groups about the origin and the legitimacy of the relations of

power within a particular social structure. On the basis of its rival character, collective images imply the potential for the emergence of an alternative material and institutional or structural fix of forces.

Material capabilities refer to technological capacities, natural resources, equipment and material wealth that can be used for both productive and destructive purposes. Institutions are materializations of ideas and material capabilities, “which administer the order with a certain semblance of universality.” (Cox 1981: 139) They serve the purpose of maintaining and reproducing a particular social equilibrium of forces by managing potential conflicts in a way that the use of force is hardly required. Institutions significantly contribute to the construction and the continuous reproduction of a general consensus that represents the interests, ideas, values and orientations of the dominant social groups within a particular structural order. In doing so, they increase the level of general acceptability and apparent naturalness of existing power relations and thus become a vital component in the stabilization of hegemonic rule (Sinclair 1996: 11). In their particular design and setup, institutions are the expressions of ideational and material power capabilities, yet they concomitantly affect the progression of the latter.

The origin, potential and weakness of the three potentials need to be analyzed with reference to the interdependencies between the three aforementioned structural levels, i.e. social forces, forms of state and world orders (Cox 1981: 140). Hegemony equates to a particular constellation and specific arrangement of material capabilities, ideas and institutions within a historical structure. By highlighting the reciprocal, dialectical and non-deterministic interplay of material capabilities, ideas and institutions, Cox’s framework shares fundamental conceptual traits with Gramsci’s ‘historic bloc’ (Gramsci 1971: 363). It is deeply rooted in Gramsci’s rejection of a mechanical non-dialectical, ahistorical and

apolitical understanding of the relationship between base and superstructure (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 10).

Historical structures shape and condition the agency of social forces, forms of state and world orders in concrete, non-deterministic ways that reflect a specific historic moment of capitalist development. Historical change is thus the outcome of the interplay between the aforementioned potentials at these three levels in their complex interrelatedness of social, economic, ideological, cultural, technological, institutional and political aspects. Despite their interconnectedness, social forces, forms of state and world orders may be analyzed separately as particular compositions of material capabilities, ideas and institutions. The method of historical structure enables an inquiry into the specific mode of how these three potentials interact and consequently constitute social relations within the production process, state-civil society complexes and the power structures of world orders.³⁹

a. Relations of production and social forces

‘Social relations of production’⁴⁰ in a national context now determine whether a historical structure eventually results in a hegemonic world order. Within the Coxian framework social relations of production are the point of departure for analyzing the functioning and the operation of transnational hegemony (Cox 1987: 1ff). Social relations of production include the production of physical

³⁹ Gill/Law (1993: 95) compare Cox’s ‘historical structure’ of accumulation with the concept of ‘regime of accumulation’ used in French regulation theory. By stressing the similarities between the two concepts, they argue that they are frameworks that regulate class and intra-class relations and that serve as “forms of socio-economic reproduction which together constitute the conditions of existence of economic development in a particular historical period or epoch.” (ibid.) In comparison to regulation theory, Cox’s concept is less focused on the state and thus allows its application to analyzing shifts within the global political economy.

⁴⁰ Cox (1987) used the terms ‘production relations’, ‘social relations of production’ and ‘power relations of production’ in an almost interchangeable way. All three concepts refer to relations in the production process, yet they address different aspects within the latter (Bieling 2006: 442).

consumer goods, knowledge, social relations, morals and institutions, necessary for the production of physical goods (Cox 1989: 39). The concept refers either to social relations of production within different forms of state or within a world order. The state is regarded as a social relation, an expression of hegemony and capitalist class rule and thus forms part of the social relations of production.

The concept of historical structure allows for the analysis of “how changing production relations give rise to particular social forces that become the base of power within and across state and within a specific world order.” (Bieler/Morton 2004: 89) It is the dynamics of the social relations of production that determine a particular configuration of social forces, which in turn shape the national state-civil society complex and impact on the structures of world orders (Bieling 2009: 28; Bedirhanoğlu 2008: 94). Changes in the relations of production lead to a new configuration of social forces, which provide the foundation of state power. What follows, is a historical construction of different forms of states and world orders, which examines ruptures in the existing social relations that create the basis for analyzing potential changes of transnational relations within states and within the global order (Gill 1986: 217).

What is fundamental for the analysis is the Coxian concept of ‘modes of social relations of production’. Within Cox’s theoretical framework, the latter are critical for explaining transformations at the levels of social forces, forms of state and world order. Modes of social relations of production are imagined as “Leibnizian monads, as self-contained structures each with its own developmental potential and its own distinctive perspective on the world.” (Cox 1987: x) These modes or ‘forms of production relations’ are the point of departure for the Coxian inquiry into hegemony. Cox (1987: 32) distinguishes between twelve different modes of social relations of production: subsistence, peasant-lord, primitive labor market, household, self-employment, enterprise labor market, bipartism, enterprise corporatism, tripartism, state corporatism, communal and central planning. In this

list, Cox excludes slavery as well as self-management or autonomous workers' control, even though he attributes to the latter a genuine potential for expansion in the future. Different modes of social relations of production coexist next to each other during different historical periods. According to Cox, capitalism comprises a wide range of modes of social relations of production, as it is the latter that characterize particular global production structures during different historical periods in their complex interrelationship.

The reciprocal relationship between production and power becomes essential for understanding the transformation of a particular mode of social relations of production. In line with traditional Marxian analysis, Cox views work and production as fundamental human activities that create the material foundation for the different forms of social life. This also includes the political sphere. One can therefore establish the relationship between power and production as one that is marked by reciprocity and interdependence. The central position of production leads Cox directly to the issue of social classes that are engaged in the production process.⁴¹ The different ways production are organized shape the relations between social forces that define the power structure of the state and world order (Cox 1987: 4).

The different types of production relations are being structured and organized by the state in such a way that a hegemonic structure of accumulation emerges, which in turn is strongly oriented towards the most dominant of these forms of production relations. The structure of accumulation that Cox (1987: 6) also calls "structure of production" provides the foundation for the class structure within a given society. The latter defines the power basis on which the state is founded.

⁴¹ Even though Cox (1987: 355ff) defined class as a historical category, which needs to be heuristically rather than analytically and statically conceptualized, his concept of class is problematic. It stops short of being a "static, positional, ideal-typical, and descriptive category, rather than a dynamic and historically specific relationship that actually shapes the capitalist system and its evolution." (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 113)

Actions taken by representatives of the state are conditioned and constrained by this class structure which ultimately becomes part of the state itself. As mentioned, this specific configuration of structural elements combining production relations and state power refers to what Gramsci once defined as a ‘historic bloc’.

Even though Cox argues that transformative processes of historical structures originate in fundamental changes in the social relations of production, he fails to fully explain the relationship between these changes and the reorganization of hegemonic word orders. Cox treats the capitalist mode of production in a rather reductionist way by replacing it with ahistorical categories such as ‘forms of productions’ or ‘social relations of production’. (Bedirhanoğlu 2008: 94) This reductionism provides the basis for Cox’s strong emphasis on social forces within his concept of ‘historical structure’. Even though he acknowledges that these social forces hold a transformative potential, he underestimates the need for a profound understanding of the social context in which they are operating.

Cox conceives of the complex relation between political and economic structures at both the national and international level as the outcome of a particular historical hegemonic order, rather than the product of the capitalist mode of production. By defining the role of capitalism “in terms of a succession of historic blocs, each incorporating a particular configuration of modes of social relations of production in a structure of accumulation, rather than as a mode of production,” (Lacher 2008: 58) he recognizes it merely as *one* mode of social relations of production within a particular hegemonic order based on a specific structure of accumulation. Simultaneously, the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production penetrate empirically Cox’s entire analysis.

What is being lost in the Coxian model is a clear understanding of the structure-agency dynamics that shape the particular transformative processes between

historical structures. By narrowly integrating the capitalist mode of production into the dynamics of ‘transnational historic blocs’, historical change, i.e. the transition from one historical structure to another, may only occur through the voluntaristic agency of class forces. In his analysis of how the behavior of classes and class fractions constitute historic blocs, Cox seems to pay too little attention to the existing relations between those blocs and the role capitalist production plays in shaping these relations. As a consequence, world order and changes therein come fairly close of being reduced to top-down processes in the form of the interaction of dominant groups, both domestically and internationally.

As Lacher (2008: 47) argued, Cox “fails to provide a satisfactory account of the relationship between transformative (and reproductive) agency and prevailing social structures – and tends to account for changes between historical structures in terms of elites agency rather than class struggle.” By explaining structural change and the ascendancy of a global post-Fordist, neoliberal order in terms of “a realignment of social forces, either by consent (through hegemony) or by the more or less forcible stabilisation of contradictory forces (through caesarism)” Cox (1987: 283), he largely argues from an instrumentalist standpoint focused on the actions of an transnational elite operating through international organizations, multinational corporations and private, in part, secretive networks.

In his methodological eclecticism and his lack of a “methodologically structured and systematic account of the nature of accumulation and its temporal proneness to crisis” (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 113), Cox neglects the dynamics of class struggle as a significant source for bringing about historical change. Gill/Law (1993: 98) therefore suggested to shift the focus of analysis towards changes in forms of regulation and modes of accumulation and to examine the relationships of the latter to strategies of states and hegemonic projects. This thesis acknowledges this criticism and will therefore incorporate elements of the

Marxian analysis of the capitalist mode of production into the analysis of hegemonic world orders.

b. Historic blocs and forms of states

Theories of critical IPE/GPE claim that the concept of the state and politics can only be analyzed within their socio-economic and historical contexts. They reject and criticize notions of ‘pure politics’ and the ‘autonomy of political’ and emphasize the social character of the latter (Bieling 2006: 381). In the tradition of historical materialism the notion of the political is defined by institutional, material and ideological elements that refer to structural antagonistic class interests and conflicts within the system over political representation and over the influence of the political apparatus. Class conflict is considered to be more fundamental than the conflict between states within the international system. Social relations of power are condensed in the arena of the state and the political system, both of which remain subject to continuous changes in the relationships between particular groups of social forces (ibid: 383). Dominance within the economic sphere translates into political power, and it is thus the leading economic class which in many cases also dominates politically.

Neo-Gramscian approaches view “the state/society complex as the basic unity of international relations” (Cox 1981: 127)⁴² and as “the place where hegemonies of social classes can be built.” (Gill 1986: 217) In his analysis of the state, Cox draws heavily on Gramsci’s aforementioned concept of the ‘integral state’

⁴² The central status of the state in Cox’s analysis and his strong tendency to define it along positivist or realist lines, primarily through formal institutions which often appear to be the mere instruments of dominant groups in the pursuit of their interests, has provoked intense criticism. At a later stage, however, Cox clarified that the state “cannot be considered as merely the direct instrument of a dominant class. The state is an arena of class struggle, but it also comes especially during periods of relative stability in class struggle, to embody certain principles bearing on the regulation of production that act as a constraint on class interests narrowly conceived.” (Cox 1987: 19)

(Gramsci 1971: 263ff; see Demirovic 2007a), which transcends liberal and realist notions that distinguish 'state' and 'civil society' as two separate spheres within a political system. Gramsci defined the state as "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities, with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules." (Gramsci 1971: 244)

In general, Gramsci distinguishes between a state in the narrow sense, and an 'extended' or 'integral' form of state (Gill 1986: 210). The first concept refers in a narrow sense to the 'political society', which encompasses the state's administrative and coercive apparatus. In contrast, the 'extended' or 'integral' notion of the state comprises both 'political society' and 'civil society'. It is "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules." (Gramsci 1971: 178) The integral state comprises the totality of public (government, military, political parties, etc.) and private/civil society (media, educational institutions, church, etc.) spheres and it is within this totality where hegemony is created and continuously reproduced (Demirovic 2007a: 24ff).

Within 'political society' hegemony concerns the construction of consent through the incorporation of antagonistic forces and opposing groups into the established order. Within 'civil society' the hegemonic rule of the dominant class occurs indirectly in the market place and through the manufacturing of a generalized social consensus within specific institutions and through hegemonic discourses (Demirovic 2007a: 29ff). 'Civil society' functions as the "basis for the State in the narrow sense of the governmental-coercive apparatus." (Gramsci 1971: 264f) The market is embedded in a specific socio-political context, which guarantees the protection of property relations, the legal organization of exchange processes and social assistance measures. The regulation of the market does not merely

occur through the measures of the state apparatus but also through the practices of civil society actors.

What follows from this is that this integral state complex needs to be understood as a social relation between different forces and as a concrete and dynamic expression of capitalist class rule and hegemony. Dominant classes arrange moral, intellectual as well as cultural and political functions of the state in such a way that allows them the pursuit of hegemony and the establishment of, what Gramsci (1971: 258) called, an “ethical state”. As discussed, hegemony is a form of class domination and as such it always refers to a particular relationship between class forces. The basis for hegemony, which is characterized by the domination of a powerful elite, resides in the latter’s capacity to organize the economy in accordance with their interests of maintaining the established power structure.

The state is the concrete expression of a social relation, which implies the concern for the interests of different social groups. It is neither an autonomous actor nor merely an instrument at the disposal of a specific dominant class or class fraction for the purpose of domination. The state is rather an arena in which the struggle over hegemony unfolds. In the different institutions of the state, social conflicts are being condensed through a process in which competing and antagonistic social groups fight over the enforcement of specific interests through the institutional framework of the state. The ability to gain access to the state apparatus is not the same for all antagonistic social groups. This means that certain interests enjoy a privileged status within the state, which, in turn, tends to find concrete expression in the actions and decisions taken by the state.

The way leading, social groups establish domination over subordinated social groups within a specific national context through the integration of different class interests and the creation of a specific fix of social forces is captured by the concept of ‘historic bloc’ (Cox 1981: 128; Rupert 1993). Gramsci’s concept

“refers to a historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies” (Gill 1986: 210) and permits the analysis of a specific constellation in which different classes and class fractions are interrelated and unified in a specific form of state (Gramsci 1971: 366; Deppe 2011: 54). As the state becomes the condensation of a hegemonic relation between the dominant class and other class fractions, a critical role is played by the leading social class:

A historic bloc cannot exist without a hegemonic social class. Where the hegemonic class is the dominant class in a country or social formation, the state maintains cohesion and identity within the bloc through the propagation of culture. (Cox 1983: 168f)

The emergence of a historic bloc is always contingent upon a hegemonic class within a national context and it is consequently within the latter where the struggle over hegemony and the formation of counter-hegemonic blocs needs to unfold. Leading forces within a national context incorporate antagonistic and contending social forces under one umbrella which conveys the unity of economic and political aims under the accepted moral and intellectual leadership of the dominant class or class fraction (Demirovic 2007a: 34ff). In this context, Gramsci (1971: 418) points out that;

If the relationship between the intellectual and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion. (...) Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders (...) and led, and can be the shared life be realized which alone is a social force – with the creation of the “historic bloc.”

Intimately related to both hegemony and historic bloc is Gramsci’s concept of ‘organic intellectuals’. For the sound functioning of hegemonic rule a historic bloc requires organic intellectuals whose task it is to unite and bridge structure and superstructure. Organic intellectuals engage in organizing hegemony in such ways that it eventually increases the cohesion and stability of the latter; they play

a vital and strategic role in sustaining the political and economic rule of the dominant group within a particular historic bloc. Crucial for the operations of organic intellectuals are "institutional frameworks in which intellectuals develop, produce and disseminate ideologies and theories." (Gill 1986: 211) Gramsci referred to them as "ideological apparatuses", which functioned to penetrate civil society with the dominant ideology.

The production of ideology unfolds as a conflictual process in which different notions of the world are being created, contrasted, modified and discarded through intellectual activity at different levels within civil society. The consolidation of hegemony therefore requires the dominant social group - which can be either a class or class fraction- to collaborate with intellectual elites in the elaboration and amplification of its own ideological interpretation of the world. In this process, political parties, universities and other educational entities, cultural institutions, private associations, religious organizations and elements of the state *inter alia* function as principal institutional foundations for the successful propagation of the dominant worldview and the general acceptance thereof by the subordinated classes.

Throughout history different forms of state have emerged as the concrete manifestations of their specific social context of political struggle. The different forms of state vary in terms of the particular composition and the characteristics of their historic blocs, i.e. the expressions of a certain set of social relations within the state-civil society complex (Bieler/Morton 2004: 91). Cox incorporated Gramsci's concept of historic bloc into his analysis of different forms of states that allowed him to inquire into the social basis of both states and world orders.

c. World orders and transnational class formation

In one of his rare comments on world order, Gramsci (1971: 182) viewed the emergence of the latter as the result of the expansionist drives of a dominant group within a national context (Gill 1993: 3). It is “the development of expansion of the particular group [which] is conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force, of a universal expansion, of a development of all the “national” energies.” The consolidation of hegemony at the domestic level thus holds the potential to transcend the limitations of that context and to expand to a point where it may establish a hegemonic world order. In that process, the expansionist dominant class is integrating other social forces from different countries into such an order.

A strict dichotomy between national and international level and external and internal causes is ultimately highly ideological. Gramsci (1971: 240) argued;

The international situation should be considered in its national aspect. In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination, which is “original” and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. (...) The point of departure is “national” – and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. Yet, the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, it is necessary to study accurately the combination of national forces which the international class will have to lead and develop in accordance with the international perspective and directives.

The Coxian concept of world hegemony allows for a unified analysis, which transcends the dichotomy as it recognizes “the intertwined relationship between ‘international’ forces and ‘national’ relations within a society which react both passively and actively to the mediations of global and regional forces.” (Morton 2009: 5) Applying Gramsci’s concept of hegemony now to the analysis of a particular world order requires determining “when a period of hegemony begins

and when it ends.” (Cox 1983: 169) In his historical analysis of world orders since the mid-19th century distinguished between two hegemonic orders *pax britanica* (1845-75) and *pax americana* (1945-65), one non-hegemonic order (1875-1945), and an eroding hegemonic order in transformation (1965/early1970s-present) Cox (1981, 1983).

Historically, hegemonic periods were shaped and protected by powerful states. The existence of a dominant state is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the emergence of world hegemony; power concentrated within a particular state does not automatically translate to hegemonic leadership. The establishment of a particular hegemonic world order by a powerful state on the one hand reflected its interests and on the other included the creation of a universal consensus that was accepted by the other countries. In the Coxian view, world hegemony “is thus in its beginnings an outwards expansion of the internal (national) hegemony established by a dominant social class.” (Cox 1983: 171)

Neo-Gramscian approaches view the global political economy as an integrated totality within which world hegemony “occurs when there is an ‘organic’ relationship between the dynamic aspects of an historical order.” (Gill 1986: 209f) It is an open system in the sense that processes of change can unfold both at the level of relations within production, classes, historic blocs, forms of state and ultimately also within world order. The latter is primarily founded in ideological hegemonic control rather than in the use of brute force and coercive methods. World hegemony is the concrete expression of a particular order between states and within a world economy determined by the expansion and “the penetration of a dominant mode of development into all countries through the activities of the ruling classes.” (Bedirhanoglu 2008: 92) This establishes a strong relationship between specific accumulation structures, regulatory institutions and a dominant set of norms, ideas and world views (Borg 2001a: 67; Brand 2007 162ff). However, in the national context hegemony operates within a historic bloc that

determines a particular form of state, on a world scale it is being established following the expansion of a dominant mode of production⁴³ Borg (2001a: 68).

World hegemony of a national ruling class may be established if it is propelled by the growth of a particular mode of the social relations of production. As such, it always has “to be concerned of as hegemony for a specific project of capitalist accumulation that reflects the balance of powers between classes domestically, and between states as well as transnational classes internationally.”⁴⁴ (Lacher 2008:57) Hegemony produces a specific unequal configuration and distribution of power between social forces and states, both within the national and the international context. It must therefore;

Always be understood as having two aspects – an agential one, as represented in the activities of agents – and a structural one, as related to underlying social structures and the conditions of their reproduction and transformation. (Joseph 2008: 77)

In a hegemonic world order “production in particular countries becomes connected through the mechanisms of a world economy and linked into world systems of production.” (Cox 1987:7) The way production is organized is contingent upon its specific political and social context and the relations of power that exist therein. Cox (1987:17) maintains that each mode of production consists

⁴³ In this context Morton (2003: 139) points out that “the fabric of hegemony cannot be analysed at the level of theory but only by a concrete analysis of different forms of state and specific change in the social relations of production.” Only by confronting theory and practice can signs of crisis formation and the possibilities for historical social transformation of the contemporary global political economy be identified.

⁴⁴ Here Morton (2003b) distinguishes between an ‘accumulation strategy’ and a ‘hegemonic project’. The notion of an ‘accumulation strategy’ refers to a particular economic model, which is oriented to the facilitation of growth and expansion for the sake of accumulation. Its success is contingent “upon the complex relations among different fractions of capital as well as the balance of forces between dominant and subordinate classes, hence the importance of hegemonic project.” While an accumulation strategy is “primarily oriented towards the relations of production and thus to the balance of class forces, (...) hegemonic projects are typically oriented towards broader issues grounded not only in the economy but in the whole sphere of state-civil society relations.” (Morton 2003b: 636)

of a dominant and a subordinate group of social forces, leading to the formation of social classes. The original social power of the dominant class is rooted in its capacity to control the process of production.

Neo-Gramscian perspectives view hegemony as “a dynamic set of structures and processes which are in a dialectical relationship.” (Gill 1986: 209) These structural and procedural aspects of hegemony comprise of ‘ideas’ (values, theories, ideologies, universal norms), ‘institutions’ (the state and other social institutions) and ‘material capabilities’ all of which determine the behavior of states and transnational actors of civil society. For hegemony to be successfully established on a world scale, it requires a strong correspondence and a specific configuration of these three forces at both the national and international level. In order to achieve this correspondence, which constitutes hegemony, a broad consensus needs to be constructed that serves the purpose of the construction, reproduction and legitimation of a particular world order. In a constellation of forces in which consent is paramount and coercion not openly noticeable, hegemony operates successfully (Cox 1981: 139).

World hegemony is a form of class rule in which the dominant group successfully persuades subordinated classes to support its conception of the established social order. It is “a creation of, an expression of, hegemonic societies in the dominant countries of the world system.” (Cox 1989: 829) As a specific social, economic and political structure hegemony is in essence consensual dominance, which finds expression in specific norms, practices and values. For hegemony to operate on a world scale, it “must be expressed in universal norms (such as sovereignty and private property) as well as rules of behavior and institutions to regulate those forces of civil society which act across national boundaries. These rules should support the dominant mode of production.” (Gill 1986: 217)

International institutions “administer the order with a certain semblance of universality” (Cox 1981: 139) and establish mechanisms that in turn shape and condition the behavior of states and the activities of particular transnational social forces therein (Cox 1983: 171). Institutionalization and regulation in the dominant country or countries undermine the potential of social conflict so that from there a foundation can be laid to institutionalize conflict on a global scale. International institutions and transnational organizations play a vital role in the construction and stabilization of world hegemony, as they perform the significant ideological task of legitimizing universal norms, standards and values. To attain world hegemony;

A dominant society must be capable of universalizing its own constitutive principles, it must be supremely self-confident in its own internal strength and expansive potential, before it can become the founder and guarantor of a world order grounded on these same principles. (Cox 1989: 830)

Links need to be established between the leading social groups of the dominant country and equivalent classes and class fractions in the other countries. In this process distinctive historic blocs are being linked and organized on the basis of shared interests and common ideological interpretations of the world. According to Cox, this is the moment when a global class structure begins to emerge. Such a scenario is then followed by a process, which Cox calls ‘the internationalization of the state’ in which the policies, mechanisms and institutions of the different states are being brought in line with the exigencies of the previously established world order. In order to capture the collaboration between different classes and class fractions beyond national borders, Cox extended Gramsci’s historic bloc to think about transnational class alliances within the global political economy (see Cox 1981, 1983, 1987).

Neo-Gramscian approaches share a common conception of hegemony at the global level;

In terms of the hegemony of a transnational class, drawn from many countries, dominating and incorporating other classes and interests in a 'transnational 'historic bloc', more-or-less organized on a world-wide basis. Such domination and incorporation should be seen as rooted in structural dominance, which can be seen as cultural as well as economic. This would thus include hegemonic ideas and value, and their embodiment in institutions. (Gill 1986: 206)

The sharing of ideas at various levels among the advanced capitalist states, transnational corporations and supranational entities that constitute a 'transnational historic bloc' plays an essential role in the coordination and organization of a global hegemonic order (Gill/Law 1993: 111). The different levels of a transnational historic bloc in turn;

Can only be understood in the context of the others – their “logics” can only be derived from the social purposes that social classes, in their struggles for hegemony, have implanted in them for the period of the existence of an historic bloc. (Lacher 2008: 58)

The notion of transnational historic bloc implies a strong connection between the interests of dominant classes or class fractions to structural transformation in the sphere of production and the reorganization of political power within the global political economy. A transnational historic bloc is;

Not simply a relation between social groups, and certainly not an intersubjective relationship, but a deeper, more structural (as opposed to conjectural) process that creates, in Gramsci's words, a “unity of structure and superstructure”, or unity between such groups and underlying social conditions. (Joseph 2008: 76)

In relation to world order, a transnational historic bloc of social forces becomes a historically defining structure for the behavior of states as it is simultaneously

incorporated into the state itself by the internalization of the attitudes and interests of classes and class fractions. The role of the state is critical in bridging the expansionist dynamics of a particular mode of production and the political aspects of dominance related to specific social and territorial contexts.

III The British hegemonic world order

Following a period of systemic instability and disorder, which had lasted from the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776 until the suppression of bourgeois revolutions all over Europe in 1848, a new hegemonic world order (*pax britanica*) had emerged under British leadership by the mid-19th century (Arrighi 1993: 170). *Pax Britanica* was created around the British Empire in the mid-19th century and was based on four main components: the establishment and administration of a liberal economic world order founded on free trade imperialism, the gold standard and the free movement of capital and people, British indisputable sea power and the balance of power in Europe (Cox 1980: 378; 1983: 172; Imhof/Jäger 2007: 148ff; Toporowski 2005: 106).

In addition, the City of London functioned as the financial center of the world economy (Cox 1981: 140; Hobsbawn 1996: 39). The period of British rule (1845-1875) was characterized by the rise of manufacturing capitalism, the increasing use of large-scale industrial production, and the emergence of the nationalist and imperialist state. It was hegemonic, for there existed a world economy with universally applied and accepted economic doctrines under British leadership. Liberal ideas, such as free trade, comparative advantage, and the gold standard were gradually adopted by many countries through the world (Cox 1983: 169f; Bieling 2007a: 61f; Arrighi et al. 1999: 58ff).

This reorganization of the inter-state consolidated British supremacy and gave rise to a new hegemonic form of global capitalist accumulation: British free trade imperialism. Over the past centuries the expansionist character inherent in the capitalist system has resulted in the establishment of different forms of imperialist rule all across the globe. Imperialism as an analytical category thus always needs

to be defined in relation to a specific historical period. A common characteristic of different imperial systems, however, is the separation of a dominant imperial core in the form of either a single powerful state or a group of states and a subordinated periphery constituted of collaborative and dependent countries. Core and periphery differ with regards to their internal structure and the functions they perform within the imperial system.

As the leading capitalist state of the epoch, Britain was able to fully manage the global balance of power through the Concert of Europe and thus ultimately attained hegemonic status. During the 19th century, Britain managed to substantially expand its imperial rule globally by channeling territorialist and capitalist logics of power (Hobsbawm 1989: 38f). London became the world's financial center and the home of haute finance. Free-trade imperialism transformed the Westphalia system fundamentally by establishing the world market as a metaphysical, higher authority, which operated supranationally above the states.

By the mid-19th century free trade had become the dominant practice and ideology. The opening of her domestic market allowed Britain to create economic dependencies in countries around the world. This control of the world market together with the successful management of the global balance of power and her close ties to financial elites enabled Britain to establish an extraordinary world hegemonic order. This status was based on the claim that Britain's national interests coincided with those of all other nations. Free trade would, so Britain's argument, enhance the universal expansion of wealth, at least for property holders (Arrighi 1993: 166ff).

1. The import-export regime in Argentina

Throughout the modern history of Latin America changes in national contexts have always been contingent upon respective transformations in the leading capitalist countries. Historically, Latin America has been structurally dependent on the center with regards to a tendentious worsening of the terms of trade, general technological dependency, the economic penetration of the region by foreign capital and the different forms of domination exercised by the international financial markets. The internal relations of power in the advanced capitalist countries have for the most part shaped the economic, socio-structural and politico-institutional conditions that still define the dependency and the path of development of Latin American countries (Boris 2007: 246ff).

During the mid-19th and early-20th century, Latin America was informally integrated in the British free trade imperial order (Hobsbawn 1962: 35). The concrete manifestation of the dominant hegemonic accumulation model, i.e. British free trade imperialism, at the national level across the region was an import-export regime (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 18ff; Boris/Tittor 2006: 9). The latter was facilitated by the centralization of state bureaucracy and professionalization of the military, which both contributed to Latin America's integration into the world markets. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the region increasingly emerged as an important exporter of processed primary goods (Hobsbawn 1989: 119). This development was enhanced by foreign direct investments in the export sector and the region's infrastructure, such as railroads, ports, and highways (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 14f; Hobsbawn 1996: 35).

In the case of Argentina the import-export regime was primarily based on the exportation of natural resources to the imperial center (Hobsbawn 1962: 303). Argentina's orientation toward the exportation of agricultural products dates back

from the time following the country's formal independence from Spain in 1810 (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 22ff). The break from the European colonial power also marked the onset of decades of intense battles over the country's supremacy between the provincial feudal landlords and the urban elites of the capital Buenos Aires. In 1861 the latter eventually emerged as the victorious. A federal constitution had been adopted in 1853 and the formation of a new national government in 1862 began to dismantle the influence of regional warlords known as 'caudillos' and tilted the political power towards the capital Buenos Aires (Rock 2002: 58).

Between 1875 and 1879 violent expropriations of vast territories owned by indigenous populations took place in different parts of the country. The conquered lands were subsequently distributed among a few hundred families of powerful landed oligarchs, military general and politicians. During the mid-19th and early 20th century - a period in the country's history which is often referred to as the *belle époque* - Argentina emerged as one of the world's wealthiest countries with about 80% of the GDP/capita of the most industrialized countries of that period⁴⁵ (Morazán 2004: 9; Blustein 2005: 16; Bértola 2007: 78). The era was marked by a massive economic expansion largely driven by agrarian exports, the replacement of traditional 'gauchos' and 'estancieros' by an emerging capitalist class and the formation of strong middle- and working-class organizations in the country's capital (Rock 2002: 58ff; Hobsbawn 1989: 178).

During the period 1870-1914 between three and six million immigrants arrived on the shores of Argentina, mainly from Southern European countries such as Spain and Italy (Boris/Tittor 2006: 9; Morazán 2004: 11; Blustein 2005: 16). In contrast to immigrants arriving on the shores of Canada or Australia, which afterwards contributed to the agricultural expansion of capitalist industrial production,

⁴⁵ The year before the outbreak of World War I Argentina's GDP per capita surpassed those of France, Spain, Germany and Italy (Blustein 2005: 16).

immigrants getting to Argentina were forced into wage labor by the powerful landed oligarchs. At the outbreak of World War I, 70% of workers in Buenos Aires had an immigrant background. This fact consequently led to increasing social tensions between the workers and the wealthy elites.

Until the financial crash in 1929, Argentina's ruling class had profited massively from the boom in the mid-1920s by investing heavily in the stock markets in London and New York. Despite the country's formal and official independence in 1810 Argentina in fact remained deeply enmeshed in the British net of financial and economic imperial dependence, at least until the outbreak of World War I. Throughout its entire post-independence era up until the early 20th century Argentina maintained a weak and uncompetitive national industry due to its neo-imperialist relationship with Great Britain. Argentina served for the latter as a perfect destination for investment and the selling of its products, which profoundly undermined the development of a national industry. Central in this constellation was the alliance between Great Britain and Argentina's ruling agricultural oligarchy, which massively profited from the informal integration into the British sphere of imperialist influence and domination (Boris/Tittor 2006: 12).

Since 1860 there had been strong a alliance between Argentina's agricultural oligarchy and British industrial capital. Argentina's agro-elites exported wheat and meat to Great Britain and in return received capital and investment goods. Argentina's relationship of dependence embedded within the global framework of British free trade imperialism quickly turned the country into an informal model colony of the Empire. The lack of industries that produced capital goods required Argentina to import them from Great Britain. It was not until the Baring Crisis in 1890 when Argentina's export-led accumulation model came to a sudden halt.

The crisis led to the collapse of the economy, a suspension of foreign-debt repayments and threw the country into a profound depression. The downturn,

however, also provided the breeding ground for popular democratic uprisings and the emergence of a new political movement that became known as ‘radicalismo’. Its leader, Hipólito Yrigoyen, who became president in 1916, shifted power even further away from the countryside towards the metropolitan capital. The Radicals increased federal-government expenditure, expanded public sector employment and university education and co-opted trade unions in a system of patronage and repression (Rock 2002: 59f).

2. The disintegration of British hegemony

Following decades of unchallenged supremacy and the successful expansion of imperial rule around the world, the British hegemonic world order slowly began to crumble by the mid-1870s, with Germany challenging its regional and global supremacy (Arrighi et al. 1999: 68). At the same time, the United States emerged as the centre of the world economy. Britain’s capability to effectively govern the inter-state system declined, which eventually led to a new struggle for world leadership between the three contenders (Hobsbawn 1989: 41f). By the early-20th century the United States had become;

The main pole of attraction for the labor, capital, and entrepreneurial resources of the world-economy which was closely connected with the continental scope attained by its domestic economy in the course of the nineteenth century. (Arrighi 1993: 176)

The United States was favorably endowed with vast natural resources and it pursued an economic policy, which would keep out foreign products from its domestic market but allow access to foreign capital, labor and enterprises. The combination of these factors had allowed the United States to become the main beneficiary of Britain’s free trade imperialism (Hobsbawn 1989: 143ff; 1996: 46).

The period 1875-1945 can be considered as non-hegemonic in the sense that it was marked by the dismantlement of British supremacy and the destabilization of the European power structure in the course of two world wars. Protectionist policies replaced free trade in many countries. This led to the disintegration of the world economy and the creation of nationalist economic blocs that significantly contributed to the Great Depression and the eventual collapse of the Gold Standard in the 1930s (Cox 1983: 169f; Bieling 2007a: 64; Arrighi et al. 1999: 72ff). In contrast to the liberal periods during the heyday of British hegemony, which saw the increase of the relative and structural power of mobile capital on an international scale, the period 1914-1945 instead led to a decline of that power (Gill/Law 1993: 115).

The dismantlement of British hegemony had significant implications for the management of the imperial system and thus for the countries in the periphery. It was, however, not until World War I when Latin America slowly began to shift away from the acceptance of imperial subordination and towards a strategy of import substitution (Jäger/Köhler/Leubolt 2007; Holman 1993: 229; Boris 2006: 6; Altvater 2007). This development was intimately linked with the rise of national classes of industrial workers, which in turn gained further momentum through the foundation of socialist and communist parties following the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 18; Boris/Hiedl 1978: 35ff). Up until the late 1920s, the landed gentry, high ranked civil servants, merchant capitals and the military were still able to maintain their privileged positions as the dominant social groups in most Latin American countries.

Following the Great Depression in the 1930s, the industrial bourgeoisie and a newly emerging middle class in the cities had managed to push back this new social constellation (Rock 2002: 60). The global financial crash in 1929 marked a turning point in the history of Latin America as it began to sever the region's ties with the most advanced capitalist countries. The fragmentation of the world

market and the decline in foreign demand for Latin American exports created a sharp fall in foreign exchange that had allowed the importation of industrial goods from the countries in the center. As a consequence, the region saw itself compelled to increasingly shift its attention to the strengthening of domestic markets (Boris/Tittor 2006: 12).

The ramifications of the global recession provoked the rise of economic nationalism and profound violations of the principles, rules and norms of the Westphalia system, which subsequently led to the disintegration of the world market. The impact of the World War II together with the social revolutions of national liberation and decolonization in the non-Western world in its aftermath eventually led to the complete collapse of free trade imperialism and the disorganization of the inter-state system. In the course of the restoration the United States emerged as the hegemonic leader and similar to Britain in the 19th century transformed the post-war world space according to its national interests by portraying the latter as universal (Arrighi 1993: 179).

IV The post-war hegemonic world order

Following the slow decline of British hegemony between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and World War II, a new world order was established under the hegemonic leadership of the United States. The order was hegemonic, as it engendered a widely accepted consensus between dominant and subordinated social forces in the core countries under U.S. influence. In many peripheral countries the use of brute force was required for the maintenance of the prevailing power relations between antagonistic social groups and the simultaneous integration in the new world order (Bieling 2007a: 83ff).

The new constellation of social forces was based on the Fordist model of mass production and tripartite corporatism in terms of social relations of production and the Keynesian welfare state with regards to state/civil society complexes. At the level of world order, *pax americana* rested on the general framework of an open post-war world economy, which was formulated at the international conference of Bretton Woods in 1944. The Bretton Woods system included the introduction of the U.S. dollar as the international reserve currency and the creation of a widely accepted consensus around U.S.-driven trade liberalization, which was regarded as the foundation for the generation of material wealth and the preservation of social peace (Bieler/Morton 2004: 94, Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 111; Morton 2009: 123ff; Toporowski 2005: 107).

The new U.S. arrangement was placed on a more solid institutional framework than under British hegemony. It was founded on the Bretton Woods institutions, i.e. the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), all of which simultaneously promoted trade liberalization around the globe and national government intervention. The

Bretton Woods institutions were on the one hand at the forefront of disseminating dominant norms and values in ‘technical’ manners under the leadership of the United States in order to guarantee the maintenance of a liberal international economic order that favored the expansion of U.S. capital, in particular U.S. corporations, around the world. On the other hand, by introducing a U.S. dollar peg to gold, a system of fixed and stable exchange rates and political control of international capital flows, the Bretton Woods system was meant to provide the U.S.-led world order with financial and monetary stability (Cox 1987: 219ff; Gill 2008: 59ff; Felder 2008: 177f).

Under U.S. hegemony, the right to self-determination was granted to all people in the Western and non-Western world and the legitimate objective of pursuit of wealth was expanded to all members of the inter-state system in the form of the Fordist model of mass consumption (Becker et al. 2007: 25). Simultaneously, the rights and the power of sovereign states were considerably restricted by a growing number of supranational organizations, which acted as overarching authorities within the inter-state system. In comparison to British hegemony, sovereign states enjoyed less autonomy and freedom to organize inter-state and intra-state relations in the post-war era. Densely-knit networks between international organizations such as the United Nations and all its specialized agencies, the Bank of International Settlement, the IMF and the World Bank, and U.S.-based transnational corporations functioned as the instruments of world government in the hands of the United States (Arrighi 1993: 179; Ziai 2006).

The main purpose of such an institutional setup in the post-war U.S. hegemonic order was to simultaneously satisfy the social needs of domestic populations and to establish a solid basis for capitalist expansion within a liberal world economy. The IMF and the World Bank were at the forefront of providing financial assistance to a large number of countries, supervising the implementation of the institutions’ policies and assuring the application of the norms that the system was

founded upon. In addition, key agencies within the U.S. government played a central role in terms of coordination and in providing overall leadership.

1. Fordism

During the first quarter of the 20th century Fordism⁴⁶ emerged as a dominant regime of capitalist accumulation. Originating in the United States from where it subsequently expanded around the world, Fordism was characterized by industrial mass production and mass consumption (Bieler/Morton 2004: 94; Cox 1987: 219ff; Aglietta 2000, Braverman 1974; Brand 2000; Merkens 2007). According to Gramsci, Fordism represented “the ultimate stage in the process of progressive attempts by industry to overcome the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.” (Gramsci 1971: 280; see Morton 2009: 102ff)

Fordism originated as a regime of accumulation primarily in the capitalist core countries and there regulated capital-labor relations by successfully creating a broad compromise between both camps. In the periphery it largely failed to successfully establish its particular wage-relation (Lipietz 1982). As a model of production, Fordism developed “through the introduction of new productive methods by individual companies, eventually leading to the macroeconomic principle of combined increases in productivity and real wages.” (Holman 1993: 221)

The Fordist model of mass production was largely based on the Taylorist theory of scientific industrial management, developed for the efficient organization of U.S. large-scale industry at the beginning of the 20th century. Taylorism⁴⁷ focused

⁴⁶ Fordism is named after Henry Ford (1863-1947), the founder of Ford Motor Company, who became famous for assembly line, mass automobile production in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century.

⁴⁷ Taylorism is named after Fredrick Taylor (1856-1915).

on the rational and scientific management, control and programming of large-scale, profit-seeking enterprises and was oriented towards the worker's docile and uncritical subordination to specialization, professionalization, rationalization, mechanization and the logic of efficiency. In detail, Taylorist production was based on the 1) methodological isolation of the individual worker from the rest of the work force and the transfer of control to representatives of the company's management; 2) the systematic fragmentation of the working process into individual, timed working steps; and 3) a discriminatory wage system that provides incentives for the worker to maximize the level of individual production (Taylor 1911, Hobsbawm 1996: 44f; 1996a: 45; Jones 2006: 109; Holub 1992: 175).

During the first half of the 20th century the union of Fordism and Taylorism managed to establish itself as a hegemonic ideological force that allowed the dominant classes in industrialized countries to overcome potential blockage points within the accumulation process (Gramsci 1971: 280; Boggs 1976: 46; Harvey 1996 125ff). In their combination, they propelled the "intensification of (...) [a] deskilled and repetitive form of labour" (Jones 2006: 112) and the production of affordable consumer goods at a massive scale. Following World War II, the Fordist accumulation regime drew additional support from the financial architecture of the Bretton Woods system, international trade liberalization under GATT, strong labor unions and an expansionist Keynesian welfare state. (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 11).

2. The Keynesian welfare state

Forming part of the Fordist regime of accumulation and thus of the post-war hegemonic world order, the Keynesian welfare state emerged as the dominant state/civil society arrangement in both the center and the periphery following

World War II (Bieler/Morton 2004: 94, Cox 1987: 219ff). Keynesianism rested on a particular constellation of socio-political, economic, institutional and ideological elements within the national context. In macroeconomic terms, it was based on the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, the regulation of capital flows, low interest rates and expansionary fiscal and accommodating monetary policies, which were implemented by an interventionist state (Harvey 2005: 8; Schui/Blankenburg 2003: 18ff).

Keynesianism was characterized by a social contract and tripartite corporatism⁴⁸, a consensual social arrangement between government, capital and labor (Bieler/Morton 2004: 94; Cox 1987: 219ff). In the industrialized countries the social contract, which rested upon guaranteed employment and the provision of social services financed by a progressive tax code and economic growth served as the two main pillars legitimizing the post-war hegemony within state/civil society complexes. In particular, economic growth functioned as;

The principal factor which allowed industrial conflict to become institutionalized and which diminished its intensity. Unions could dispute with employers over the division of increments to growth without attacking either the basic distribution of wealth or the structures for reproducing wealth. (Cox 1976: 364)

The social contract was institutionalized in the form of the corporate state that unified business, organized labor and the government in their dealings with the economy. The state pursued Keynesian policies of demand management and full employment, which created favorable conditions for the expansion of capital and the social benefits for workers (Deppe 2011: 54). Economic growth was indispensable for the maintenance of this widely perceived ‘win-win scenario’. The Keynesian welfare state was further characterized by the creation of a social

⁴⁸ Cox (1977: 389) defines corporatism as “a form of production relations, one based on an ideology of non-antagonistic class relations and on bureaucratized structures of representation and control.” He distinguishes between state corporatism and enterprise corporatism.

security net and the partial redistribution of wealth within societies and interventionist economic policies, achieved through government deficit spending (Cox 1987: 219ff).

Tripartite corporatism on the one hand regulated the distribution of productivity gains and wage negotiations and on the other facilitated the integration of political reformist and in part more radical leftist parties into the established configuration of power relations. Finally, for Keynesianism to become the dominant socio-political and economic arrangement within national contexts in the post-war era, it drew significant support from the international hegemony of the United States with its;

Unmatched levels of output and productivity, the availability of capital, financial system depth, and control of the development of technology, in addition to the comparatively vast U.S. gold reserves and military power. (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 118)

3. The Bretton Woods System

Following the end of World War II the reorganization of hegemony under U.S. leadership was intimately related to a particular phase of capitalist expansion. During the war the United States had moved to the forefront of promoting the expansion of a liberal global economy driven by 'free' enterprise and private investment as the only acceptable development strategy for itself and the rest of the world. The establishment of the Bretton Woods system in 1944 primarily reflected the interests of capital owners in the United States, which called for the restoration of a liberal economic world order in the aftermath of World War II. Such an order provided the leading U.S.-based international banks and corporations with favorable conditions and opportunities for unrestricted expansion and growth (Jackson/Sørensen 1999a: 192f; Arrighi et al. 1999: 87).

The Bretton Woods system began to regulate the international financial and trading system and facilitated the incorporation of a large number of countries around the world into the U.S.-controlled international system of accumulation. Under the Bretton Woods system the United States had to run balance of payments deficits on a regular basis in order to sustain the international economy by providing it with sufficient U.S. dollar money supply (Gill/Law 1993: 96). The deficits permitted the United States and its population to spend beyond their limits in terms of domestic personal consumption, foreign direct investment and the military budget (Zeller 2007). It is crucial to point out that the U.S. deficits were not the mere outcome of excessive consumption and government spending sprees but there were rather a necessary response by the United States to the structural exigencies of the post-war liberal international order (Tabb 2004: 108ff; Imhof/Jäger 2007: 150ff).

Industrialized OECD countries, of which the United States played the leading role due to establishment of the U.S. dollar as the international reserve currency and the strength of its transnational corporations and international banks, dominated the post-war world order. From the outset, the order was marked by a “rapid internationalization of production and exchange, a progressive liberalization of trade, and an increasing interpenetration of capital across national boundaries, notably in the OECD economies.” (Gill 1986: 207)

The United States was at the center of a global imperial order of indirect control that became vertically integrated in terms of production, distribution and accumulation. The predominant position of the U.S. provided a solid base for the rapid expansion of U.S. transnational corporations around the world during the ‘golden age’ period (Hobsbawm 1996a; Konings 2008: 57ff). An international division of labor, which was dominated by transnational corporations based in the advanced capitalist countries continuously maintained and deepened the existence

of a class structure on a global scale. It was in the interest of the industrialized capitalist countries at the top of the system to generate a universal consensus about the operations and functioning of the system in order to preserve the necessary 'open' conditions, which allow for the expansion of capital accumulation and economic growth. Dependent countries were incorporated into the hegemonic world order by the United States and other core countries, in particular Western Europe and Japan, in such ways that served the interests of the imperial centers (Gill 1986: 208).

Central to the post-war world order, was the emergence of a new U.S.-centered international historic bloc, which resulted from the outward expansion of hegemonic social forces with the United States. Its main goal was to internationalize the Fordist model of capital-intensive mass production and mass consumption, to create opportunities for U.S. exports and foreign direct investment and to secure and facilitate the access to raw materials, primarily oil (Becker et al. 2007: 27). The bloc embraced financial interest on Wall Street to promote global investment opportunities and to strengthen the role of the U.S. dollar in the global economy. Apart from the business and finance sector, it further included elements of the state apparatus, centrist political parties and non-communist labor unions. The social forces of the historic bloc in the United States went about and established links with their respective counterparts in Europe, which ultimately led to the formation of a transatlantic historic bloc (Gill/Law 1993: 96f).

4. Tripartite corporatism and import substitution industrialization in Argentina

Argentina never fully recovered from its decline and the subsequent collapse of the British Empire, which had functioned as the main basis for the country's

export-driven prosperity until the onset of a worldwide recession in 1929 (Hobsbawm 1996a: 307; Vidal 1998). The latter in combination with the military coup during Yrigoyen's second presidency in 1930 marked the beginning of Argentina's slow and gradual decline during the 20th century, which ultimately culminated in the country's implosion in 2001/2002 (Blustein 2005: 16). Due to a drastic decline in European demand following the onset of the worldwide recession in the late 1920s, Argentina suffered a first serious collapse of its agrarian exports between 1929 and 1953 (Morazán 2004: 12).

The fall in commodity prices of agricultural products on the world market during the Great Depression signified the end of Argentina's liberal-export development model in the 1930s. With stagnating exports, which had always functioned as the engine behind the country's economic growth, the economy started to decline and then stagnated (Rock 2002: 60). The country was forced to end the importation of industrial goods and instead embarked on a path of self-centered development. This shift towards import substitution industrialization (ISI) in 1929 demanded an active and interventionist role of the state that became the main propeller of economic activity (Becker et al. 2007: 14).

Import substitution industrialization⁴⁹ was based on high customs tariffs, a proactive and interventionist economic policy pursued by the state and corporatist trade union structures, all of which replaced the previously dominant free trade

⁴⁹ The initial idea of the ISI model goes back to the Argentinean economist Raúl Prebisch, who served as Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) between 1959 and 1965. Prebisch (1950, 1959) attempted to adopt the Keynesian economic policies, which had become predominant in the post-war era to the Latin American context. He argued that Latin America as a producer of commodities suffered a structural disadvantage on the world markets due to deteriorating terms of trade over time. This structural detriment turned the pursuit of comparative advantage by less developed countries, as they were largely commodity exporters, into a pointless exercise. Instead, import tariffs would need to be introduced in order to protect the domestic market from foreign exports. This would eventually strengthen the development of the national industry, which sells its products to the domestic market and thus gradually converts itself into the engine of industrialization (Boris/Malcher 2001; Becker et al. 2007: 14).

import-export regime (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 18ff; Bértola 2007: 63f; Saad-Filho 2005a: 222). World War II further reinforced Latin America's disintegration from the world markets and added fuel to the implementation of the ISI, model which rested on the consumption of the urban upper and middle classes. The ISI model had a fundamental transformative impact on Latin America's social structure, as it propelled a process of rapid urbanization all across the region.

In the early 1950s the dynamic economic development began to slow down due to the Latin America's inability to successfully replace imported capital goods and long-lasting consumer goods; the limitations of the domestic market related to the high levels of inequality in incomes and land, and the re-integration of the world market, which led to a decline in the prices for primary goods (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 76ff). The latter in combination with high rates of exchange resulted in growing balance of payment and trade deficits that reinforced the already existing tendencies of debt accumulation. Throughout the entire post-war era Argentina's economic development will be distinctively characterized by chronic budget deficits and strong tendencies towards inflation.

Following the negative repercussions of the global depression Argentina switched to ISI in the mid-1930s. In concrete terms, the model comprised of the control of exchange rates, the regulation of the production of meat and wheat, the strengthening of the central bank, taxation reform and newly negotiated trade agreements with Great Britain (Morazán 2004: 12). ISI protected Argentina's domestic producers on the one hand from international competition through high tariffs. On the other hand, the strategy led to an increasingly outdated and uncompetitive national industry (Boris/Malcher 2001.)

Between 1933 and 1944 the country went through a period of strong economic growth, even though it mainly produced light consumer goods destined for

exportation to the regional Latin American markets rather than capital goods.⁵⁰ This meant that machines and industrial equipment still needed to be imported from abroad (Dos Santos 1996: 153f). During World War II, Argentina failed to replace heavy and high-tech industrial goods by internal production due to a lack of industrial and insufficient research and development capacities. The military coup in 1943 under the leadership of Juan Perón resulted in the consolidation of a nationalistic mentality within Argentina's military, which had been slumbering within the latter since the failed overthrow in 1930. It also signified the beginning of an open conflict with the United States, which ended the selling of strategically important industrial goods to Argentina between 1942 and 1949.

The 1950s marked the onset of a development of economic cycles in which periods of boom were followed by slumps, recessions and economic recoveries (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 100ff). The scenario was strongly characterized by the contradiction between Argentina's domestic market and the country's export sectors. An export boom, primarily in the wheat and meat industry, usually negatively impacted on the domestic market due to its tendency of leading to over-accumulation and under-consumption. On the other hand, a dynamic development of the internal market normally triggered a decline in Argentina's exports due to the increasing domestic demand (Boris 2001: 471f). This dynamic resulted in an ongoing discontinuity of Argentina's economic policies that were dependent on the preferences of the dominant bloc and its relation with the international business community and the demands of the latter.

Another significant element closely related to the ISI model was the creation of a corporate welfare state and the establishment of clientelist and cronyist networks under the first Perón administration (1946-1955) (Boris/Tittor 2006: 14). This radical socio-economic and politico-cultural transformation had profound effects

⁵⁰ Between 1929 and 1949 similar to other countries in Latin America Argentina's economy grew on average at an annual rate of 4.9% (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 21).

on Argentina's society that still shape and determine the country's political and social life today. The Peronist era was characterized by the redistribution of incomes in favor of Argentina's workers⁵¹, the weakening of the influence and power of the agrarian oligarchy, investments in industrial projects, the nationalization of parts of Argentina's industry and corporative state leadership with fascist traits (Morazán 2004: 14).

Under Perón, the focus of the economy was shifted even further towards the domestic market and to the production of wage goods for a fast growing urban working population. Argentina began to utilize the incoming export revenues for the country's industrialization and the build-up of a vibrant domestic market. Newly established industries, however, remained highly dependent on the importation of foreign industrial goods, which put significant pressure on public expenditures and the country's balance of payments deficits. At the same time, trade unions became the backbone of the government's ISI policies, which in turn led to the emergence of a powerful and corrupt bureaucracy within the union's organizational structure.⁵² The recovery of the economy under Perón was relatively short-lived, when by the mid-1950s the manufacturing industry together with the agrarian-export industry began to sink deeper into stagnation (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 71ff).

As a response to these alarming developments the Peronist government began to significantly increase the state's role and ownership in foreign trade, strategic industries and public services. In addition, income was further redistributed to workers and the urban poor (Boris/Tittor 2006: 15). Powerful trade unions were won over by wage rises and increased social expenditures. In 1955, Perón was

⁵¹ Between 1946 and 1949 the share of incomes of Argentina's GDP increased from 40 to 49% (Morazán 2004: 16).

⁵² Trade unions had been a dominant force of the populist coalition since the 1940s. Of particular importance in Argentina's post-1945 era was the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), which was founded in 1962 and from then onwards steadily increased its power within Argentina's political system.

ousted by a military coup and no political force was able to consolidate power until the military took over in 1976 (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 173ff).

Under Perón, Argentina was transformed into a “‘corporatist’ society based on membership of state-controlled associations.” (Rock 2002: 61) The historic bloc that was constructed around this corporate form of state successfully integrated organized labor, corporate management and the government with the objective to control the smooth functioning of managed accumulation pursued by the ISI model (Boris/Malcher 2001). The construction of the corporate state in Argentina coincided further with the spread of enterprise corporatism, which established closer ties between Argentine workers and both national and transnational capital. In particular, the latter provided the ideological ground, which favored Argentina’s increasing penetration by U.S. and European transnational corporations and financial operators. Between 1955 and 1975 Argentina witnessed a considerable growth in the share of foreign enterprises in the country’s industry, primarily through the presence of foreign-owned transnational corporations, which were looking for new investment opportunities and new markets (Morazán 2004: 18). This development further propelled the importation of foreign goods.

Simultaneously, uncompetitive domestic enterprises were artificially kept alive through state financing. Only a small share of the profits made by transnational corporations in Argentina was afterwards reinvested in the country. The repatriation of profits contributed on the one hand to the maintenance of the inefficient industrial structures and on the other hand helped increase Argentina’s balance of payments deficits during that period. For Argentina’s trade unions, the fall of Perón had a negative impact, as they ended up being fragmented into conservative and radical socialist strands (Boris/Hiedl 1978: 89ff).

In the early to mid-1970s Argentina witnessed the rise of armed resistance movements such as the ‘Montoneros’, a leftist Peronist faction, and the radical Trotskyite ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo), which were both fighting for the creation of a socialist society. Following years of intense battle between the insurgency on one side and a coalition of Argentina’s armed forces and paramilitary death squads known as the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (AAA) on the other, the military eventually took over in 1976 with the intention to violently crush the protest movements of impoverished workers and leftist military oppositions groups. In the dirty war that ensued, Argentina’s military aggression was used against any form of political opposition (Boris/Tittor 2006: 16; Morazán 2004: 19f).

In sum, tripartite corporatism under Peronism (1946-1973) profoundly affected and transformed capital-labor relations in Argentina as it institutionalized conflict and thus undermined the potential for class struggle by co-opting the power of the working class Cox (1977: 385). Peronism successfully isolated and marginalized the efforts and the potential of organized labor and left-wing parties (Harman 2002a; Svampa 2006a). In retrospect, it was with the rise of Peronism “when Argentina’s workers were expropriated of their social autonomy and political independence.” (Lucita 2005) The military dictatorship that followed engaged in severe U.S.-backed repression and the outright assault against any form of opposition, which eventually claimed an estimated 30,000 casualties between 1976 and 1983 (Partnoy 2002; Harman 2002; Petras 2002). Around half of those detained, killed and disappeared during Argentina’s military rule were workers (Vilas 1997: 5). The coup simultaneously marked the onset of Argentina’s profound socio-economic and political transformation along neoliberal, post-Fordist lines (Martínez/Ruggeri 2010).

V The structural transformation of post-war hegemony

Following more than two decades of economic expansion in the advanced capitalist countries the foundations of the post-war world order gradually began to crumble in the mid-1960s (Hobsbawm 1996: 286; O'Brien/Williams 2004: 148). Until then, the corporate compromise between capital and labor had generated high growth rates due to rapidly improving levels of productivity and an expanding money supply. *Pax Americana* was marked by a strong consensus-based interrelation between ideas, institutions and material capabilities, both at the domestic and the international level. Firmly based on the concept of “embedded liberalism” (Ruggie 1982), it found concrete expression in the Fordist model of accumulation, the Keynesian welfare state and the Bretton Woods system. First signs of the erosion of this consensus in the most industrialized capitalist countries were rising inflation and falling profits in the productive sector (manufacturing and extraction) and on investment due to rising wages, increasing costs for new technology and intensified international competition, oil-price shocks and the subsequent re-appearance of financial crisis and economic downturns⁵³ (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 111; Holman 1993: 221; Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 11; Harvey 2005; Deppe 2011: 55).

Similar to previous periods of economic expansion the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s ended in a real estate and banking crisis in the early 1970s and in a severe slump between 1973-1975, which slashed industrial production in the industrialized countries by an annual 10% and reduced international trade by 13%

⁵³ Since the 1970s there have been 378 financial crises around the world compared to 56 crises during the period 1945-1970 (Hawkins 2010: 214). The most severe of these crises were the oil crisis (1974/75), the debt crisis in the periphery (1982), the U.S. stock market crash (1987), the savings and loan crisis (late 1980s/early 1990s), the Asian financial crisis (1997/98), the ‘new economy crash (2000) and the most recent financial crisis (2007-present) (Foster/Magdoff 2009: 11; Altvater 2009: 77ff; Bieling 2007a: 153f; Toporowski 2005: 110).

(Hobsbawm 1996a: 258ff, 405). The underlying explanation for the transformation of the post-war hegemonic world order is related to the structural crisis of Fordism, which resulted in the stagnation within the productive sectors of the most industrialized capitalist countries and a process of financialisation, i.e. the increasing transfer of capital towards the financial sector (banking, insurance, stockholding and real estate) (Arrighi 1994; Gowan 1999: 4; Foster/McChesney/Jamil 2011). The crisis of Fordism, however, was not only a crisis of the accumulation process. It was also a crisis of U.S. hegemony, inherently related to profound structural changes in the global political economy that consequently provoked increasing hegemonic instability (Amin 2009; Cox 1992: 26).

The reconstitution of *pax americana* resulted in a radical redefinition of Fordist social relations of production, which subsequently gave rise to new social forces. It led to the establishment of a post-Fordist regime of accumulation and the emergence of the financial sector as the primary engines for capitalist accumulation. In addition, the restructuring propelled the roll-back and dismantlement of the Keynesian welfare state and corporate arrangements, which went hand in hand with the weakening and the disciplining of organized labor and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system (Harvey 2009). Central for the understanding of the major restructuring of post-war hegemony, are the interrelated processes of the internationalization of production and the internationalization of the state (Cox 1981: 144ff, Callinicos 2003: 38f, Hobsbawm 1996a: 244; Gill 1986: 217, Bieling 2009: 20).

The reorganization of U.S. hegemony in the 1970s, however, did not coincide with the waning of the fundamentals of the post-war liberal world order. Since the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in the early 1970s, the United States managed to increase its structural power, in particular finance and the military. This newly re-arranged structural constellation of the post-war hegemonic order

has been essential in sustaining the liberal character of global political economy, which has further strengthened the predominant role of the U.S. transnational corporations and transnational financial operators around the world.

1. The crisis of Fordism

The 1950s and 1960s marked an era of unprecedented economic expansion around the world. The post-war boom had resulted from the accumulation of consumer savings during World War II, the automobile boom in the United States, the reconstruction of European and Japanese societies, the arms race following the onset the of the Cold War, an increased sales effort, the expansion of the financial, insurance and real estate sectors and the dominant position of the U.S. dollar within the world economy (McChesney et al. 2009). As by the late-1960s growth rates, productivity levels and profits started to decline, Fordism as the hegemonic model of accumulation plunged into a deep crisis (see O'Brien/Williams 2004: 148; Zeller 2007: 9; Hobsbawm 1996a: 414; Cox 2002a: 81; Brand 2000; Girón 2010: 119; Hawkins 2010: 219; Harvey 1996 141ff; Adolphs/Karakayli 2007: 131ff).

Productivity levels and profits had begun to fall for a number of reasons. First, by the late-1960s, Taylorist work and production methods had reached their limits in terms of generating constant productivity gains. Second, intensified competition and the advancing mechanization of the labor process resulted in growing expenses on machinery and technology. Third, powerful and well-organized trade unions had achieved significant wage increases during the boom in the 1950s and 1960s. As growth levels began to slacken, the high wage rate increasingly began to force down productivity and thus profits (Sablowski 2004: 29ff).

During the 1960s, the global environment had increasingly become more competitive. In particular, Japan and Western Europe emerged as potential challenges to the dominant position of U.S. transnational corporations. U.S. profits started to decline and, for the first time in the post-war era, the United States began to run trade deficits. This, in turn, posed a serious threat to the dominant and hegemonic role of U.S. capital operating around the world under the established Bretton Woods system (Jackson/Sørensen 1999a: 193; Gill 1986: 205).

The intensified competition at the global level triggered an accelerated introduction of new technology by individual capitals in their pursuit of relative surplus value. For the aggregate capitalist class, the new technology had the positive side effect as it could be used for bringing down wages and the weakening of labor movements (Harvey 2009). New machinery and technological innovation began to shed labor at such a tremendous rate that the newly-generated jobs were not capable of absorbing the masses of unemployed workers. Throughout the entire history of industrialization human skills and human labor were tendentially replaced by machines and mechanical forces, thus increasingly rendering former workers redundant.

Following this “iron logic of mechanization, (...) the performance and productivity of machinery could be constantly, and for practical purposes, endlessly raised by technological progress, and its cost could be dramatically reduced. (...) The higher the technology, the more expensive the human component of production compared to the mechanical. (Hobsbawm 1996a: 413f)

2. The internationalization of production

In the late-1960s the internationalization of production emerged as the principal strategy to reestablish the profit rate pursued by capital against the backdrop of

the crisis of Fordism. It simultaneously marked the transition towards a post-Fordist model of accumulation (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 111; Peter 2003). The internationalization of production refers to “the integration of production processes on a transnational scale, with different phases of a single process being carried out in different countries.” (Cox 1981: 146, see Cox 2002a: 81; Strange 1994: 210; Bowles/Edwards/Roosevelt 2005: 540)

National economies around the world, in particular low-wage destinations in the periphery, were opened up to the products and financial investments from the most advanced capitalist countries (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 111). The export of capital and segments of the labor process to low-wage countries in the dependent world led to the ascendancy of a new international division of labor;

In which technological development and innovation is concentrated in a core area, while physical production of goods is moving slowly from the core area (...) into peripheral areas (...), periphery production being linked to the core by control mechanisms located in the core area. (Cox 1980: 384)

The internationalization of production brought about an uneven and hierarchical development and was marked by increasing competition between regions, countries, cities, municipalities, companies and people (Birkhölzer 2006: 62). In the 1970s social polarization of incomes and rising inequality became generalized trends throughout the world (see Bértola 2007: 66ff; Cox 1989: 832; Schneider 2010: 74; Butterwege 1999: 37f). The periphery progressively became a target for the extraction of surplus, which in turn propelled the outflow of net payments towards investors and creditors in the centre (Duménil/Levy 2006; Strange 1994: 210). This further entrenched the periphery’s dependence and simultaneously hastened the concentration of power and wealth in the industrialized centre.

By the end of the 1970s, a new post-Fordist global political economy had emerged. Through the successful expansion and integration of production processes across national borders the accumulation of capital had increasingly become transnational in character. Post-Fordism was based on the enhanced mobility of capital, increasing mechanization of production, the heightened use of cheap labor and the shift of production to low-wage countries in the periphery (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 113; Dörre 2003). As Cox (1989: 846) noted;

In this post-Fordist restructuring, large-scale mass production is being replaced by more flexible and complex production system able to produce a variety of outputs quickly in response to change in demand in a global market. This requires well-coordinated production systems with a central brain activating a wide variety of flexibly connected productive components, some highly technology- and capital-intensive and some relatively standardized and labour-intensive.

3. The formation of a transnational historic bloc

Directly related to the internationalization of production was the reconfiguration of social forces provoked by the dynamics of struggle between different fractions of capital and labor (Bieler/Morton 2004: 102). The internationalization of production fragmented capital and labor into transnational and national forces. Moreover, it contributed to the transnationalization of cooperation and interaction between national constituencies, both in the centre as well as in the periphery (Poulantzas 1975: 73ff; Schmitthenner/Urban 1999: 50).

Even though post-war imperial hegemonic system under U.S. leadership increasingly become transnational in character since the 1970s, the traditional imperial subdivision into dominant core and dependent periphery has largely remained unaltered. On the side of capital, the contradictions between transnational and national fractions significantly intensified. Transnational capital

managed to increase its structural power both in comparison to national capital, states and organized labor. Simultaneously, transnational finance capital in the form of international investment banks, hedge funds, private equity funds, etc. replaced trading and industrial capital as the dominant class fraction. In part, this development was fostered by different forms of elite cooperation through supranational institutions and transnational networks, which included business, state officials, employees of international organizations, representatives of the major media conglomerates and members of international royalty (Cox 1981: 147; Gill/Law 1993: 104ff; Tabb 2008). Transnational finance capital took the lead, as it began to operate a transnational network that managed and controlled the flows of direct investment around the world. Direct investment became the main engine for the expansion of international production, as it allowed international investors to keep control over the production, in particular over technology.

On the part of labor, the internationalization of production resulted in a twofold fragmentation, both in the industrialized and peripheral countries: first, between established and non-established workers and second, between those sectors of established workers, which benefited from the dynamics of internationalization and those, which were primarily aligned with national producers (Cox: 1981: 148). All around the world, the pressure on domestic wages increased due to intensified foreign competition and notably diminished the capacity of governments to intervene in the economies as a counter-balancing and protectionist force (Hobsbawm 1996a: 417). In the centre, the structure of the labor force was significantly re-shaped as jobs in the sophisticated service sector increasingly replaced manufacturing labor (Cox 1976: 347). The transfer of jobs from rich to poor countries ended in a decline of wages in the industrialized centre due to the increasing global pressure of wage competition (Hobsbawm 1996a: 572).

The shift in production to low-wage countries also led to rising rates in unemployment in the core countries.⁵⁴ In the periphery the internationalization of production evoked the mobilization of new working class movements. Here, a vital role was played by the non-established workforce in the expansion of international production. In particular in the less industrialized countries, the outsourcing of parts of the production processes mobilized non-established labor integrating millions of people into the ranks of a rapidly growing global workforce, which in many cases led to the formation of new working class movements. The most common strategy to deal with the growing strength of organized labor in the South was its incorporation into the existing power structures by setting up large trade unions that were closely linked and controlled by the government or the leading political party.

The rise of transnational social forces on the side of capital and labor resulted in the reconfiguration of different forms of states according to the reorganization of historic blocs within the national contexts. As a result of the internationalization of production the state itself became part of a profound process of internationalization, both in the core countries as well as in the countries in the periphery. The internationalization of the state refers to the different ways “transnational processes of consensus formation, underpinned by the internationalization of production and the thrust of globalization, have been transmitted through the policy-making channels of governments.” (Bieler/Morton 2004: 95f; see Brand 2007a)

The increasing need for mutual adjustment and policy harmonization between the national and international level due to the accelerating integration of national

⁵⁴ Unemployment in Western Europe climbed from 1.5% during the 1960s to 4.2% in the 1970s and even further to an average of 9.2% in the European Community by the late 1980s (Hobsbawm 1996a: 406). In the largest Western European countries (France, Italy, Western Germany and the UK) unemployment increased from 2.6% during the period 1960-1973 to 6.8% between 1973 and 1990. For the same periods the unemployment rate in the United States jumped from an average of 4.9% to 6.9% (Eurostat; Bureau of Labor Statistics).

economies into a rapidly expanding world economy led to the replacement of the post-war national corporative structures by a “new informal corporative structure (...) [which] reflected the dominance of the sector oriented to the world economy over the more nationally-oriented sector of the country’s economy.” (Cox 1981: 146; see Murphy 1998: 423; Brand 2007: 164ff)

The internationalization of the state provoked the emergence of a global class structure, which was headed by a transnational managerial class:

The transnational managerial class is not limited to persons actually employed among the managerial cadres of multinational corporations and their families. It encompasses public officials in the national and international agencies involved with economic management and a whole range of experts and specialists who in some way are concerned with the maintenance of the world economy in which the multinationals thrive – from management consultants, to business educators, to organizational psychologists, to the electronics operators who assemble the information base for business decisions, and the lawyers who put together international business deals. (Cox 1987: 359f)

Within the national context, it is comprised of social forces oriented towards the world markets and international affairs such as finance ministries, internationally-operating local businesses and banks, etc. While the internationalization of production and the internationalization of the state largely benefited transnational, nationally-oriented capital saw itself confronted with a serious challenge from foreign competitors. Consequently, a widening gap began to emerge between the interests of national businesses and those national groups that formed part of the transnational class (Colás 2005: 71).

The transnational managerial class formed part of a shift within the relations among social forces in the global political economy from a dominant post-war international historic bloc towards a transnational historic bloc of forces that increasingly began to operate beyond the delimitations of the national state

(Morton 2009: 126ff). The expansion of the global capitalist economy in the 1970s undeniably increased the relevance of transnational networks and institutions. Linkages between key governmental institutions such as the finance ministry, the central bank, and the presidential office and their ties to international financial institutions increasingly gained in importance under post-Fordism. (Sablowski 2009: 122ff).

In the design of their domestic policies, states were compelled to take into consideration local as well as international concerns and demands. International organizations and transnational networks such as the OECD, IMF, World Bank, G8/G20, the GATT/WTO, NATO, EC/EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, APEC, the Trilateral Commission⁵⁵, the Bilderberg Group⁵⁶, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), multinational corporations, policy planning groups, international financial institutions, elitist universities, government commissions and councils, leading think-tanks and foundations, international corporate media and national elites, both in the advanced capitalist states and the periphery, became responsible for the development of both the ideological framework and design of government policies representing the interests of transnational capital that were subsequently adopted and implemented at the national level in process of the internationalization of the state (Gill 1995: 400).

The principal objective of this highly interconnected constellation of transnational social forces was the creation of a global hegemonic consensus “among corporate, financial, intellectual, university, civic, intellectual and government leaders around major policy directions.” (Gill 1986: 216) In their totality, this transnational “nébuleuse” (Cox 2002: 39) functioned as institutional and ideological pillars in order to bolster the networking of transnational capital and

⁵⁵ The Trilateral Commission was founded in 1973 by the initiative of David Rockefeller (see Gill (1990), Sklar (1980).

⁵⁶ The Bilderberg Group started its annual non-public meetings in 1954.

thus to intensify market discipline and the commodification of social relations (Boris/Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 271; Zelik/Altvater 2009: 167f).

This newly emerged transnational historic bloc began to organize the international system through a “new constitutionalism” (Gill 1990; see Bieling 2007: 151ff), propelled by neoliberal policies and the increasing penetration of societies by the logic of the markets (Gill 2008: 123ff). The notion of ‘new constitutionalism’ refers to

the narrowing of the social bases of popular participation within the world order (...), the hollowing out of democracy and the affirmation, in matters of political economy, of a set of macro-economic policies such as market efficiency, discipline and confidence, policy credibility and competitiveness. (Bieler/Morton 2004: 97)

The concept encapsulates the pursuit by a transnational historic bloc to establish neoliberalism as the only acceptable path for socio-economic development through the promotion of market solutions for socio-political problems, the ideological dominance of neoliberal orthodoxy, which functions as a means of naturalizing social relations of oppression and exploitation, and the reproduction of structural and procedural aspects and patterns that guarantee the maintenance of social hierarchies (Gil 1995: 399).

4. The rise of neoliberalism

Intimately related to the processes of the internationalization of production the internationalization of the state and the formation of a transnational historic bloc, were the introduction and subsequent implementation of neoliberal policies, which by the mid-1970s increasingly began to replace Keynesianism in the centre and import substitution industrialization in the periphery (Radice 2005: 91). The

overall context for the ascendancy of neoliberalism was provided by the crisis of Fordism (Boris/Malcher 2001; Boris 2006: 6; Altvater 2007; Hobsbawm 1996a: 431).

During the 1950s and 1960s neoliberalism had emerged as an intellectual program among conservative circles in the United States and Europe. Institutions such as the Mont Pelèrin society, founded in 1947, the Institute for Policy Studies, the Adam Smith Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, the Cato Institute, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Center for the Study of American Business, the National Bureau of Economic Research, the American Enterprise Institute and the Project for a New America Century began to actively disseminate economic and social ideas and policies, propagated by neoliberal intellectuals such as Ludwig v. Mises, Friedrich August von Hayek and Milton Friedman, and to construct and deepen a general consensus within civil society by providing the technical, empirical, political and philosophical justification for the neoliberal project (Gill/Law 1993: 121; Brand/Sekler 2009b; Altvater 2008: 53ff). Drawing on neoclassical notions of self-regulating markets and rational expectations in individual decision-making, neoliberalism presented itself as a ‘neutral’, positivist science, “dominated by largely meaningless abstractions, mechanical models, formal methodologies, and mathematical language, divorced from historical developments.” (Foster/Magdoff 2009: 136; see Schui/Blankenburg 2003: 7ff; Treanor 2005; Ptak 2007: 27ff; Schui 2003; Palley 2005: 20).

As a political and social theory, neoliberalism proposed “that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade.” (Harvey 2005: 2) As a discourse it attained hegemonic status in the early-1970s by increasingly shaping and influencing the political decision-making processes, controlling and restricting the flow and dissemination of information and ideas in education and the media, and by regulating global and

national finance, business and trade (McChesney 2008). The introduction of neoliberal policies was necessarily accompanied by the propagation and consolidation of a “neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism.” (Harvey 2005: 42) at the inter- and intrapersonal ideological level (Gill/Law 1993: 111; Amin 2009; Merkens 2006).

During the late-1960s and early-1970s neoliberalism was converted into a political project and a strategy of accumulation in response to the structural crisis of capitalism, aimed at the “restoration of the income and wealth of the upper fractions of the owners of capital.” (Duménil/Levy 2005: 14; see Morton 2003b: 633; Ptak 2007: 73ff; Colás 2005: 70; Havey 2006; Macdonald/Ruckert 2009: 3; Deppe 2011: 55; Saad-Filho/Johnston 2005: 4f; Clarke: 2005 57f; Taylor 2009: 23ff) The two main components of the restoration of class power were the restructuring of the relations in production and in the state-civil society complex. Neoliberal policies aimed at the;

Restructuring of productive space and distribution; deregulation of markets; reform of the state and transfer to the private sector of its goods and responsibilities, new conditions for the insertion of the country in the world-wide market and, above all, for establishing a durable relationship of forces favouring capital. (Lucita 2005)

A leading role in that class project was held by transnational financial capital that advanced to become the “main instrument for the imposition of the project of accumulation and social domination associated with neoliberalism.” (Saad-Filho/Ayers 2008: 110) As mentioned before, it was neoliberalism, which provided the ideological basis and the corresponding set of policies pushed through by transnational elites in order to expand the structural power of transnational capital around the world (Brand 2005: 38). The generation of a broad hegemonic consensus around the increasing progress and penetration of neoliberalism required business and financial elites to fund and promote the

production of ideas and ideologies via think-tanks, the training of technocrats and to take control of the major media outlets in order to establish neoliberalism as generally accepted new normality (Overbeek/van der Pijl 1993: 1ff; Butterwege et al. 2007: 12; Demirovic 2008: 19ff; Thomas 2008; Adolphs/Karakayli 2007: 134ff).

The rise of neoliberalism fundamentally transformed the relationship between the market and the state, as it went hand in hand with the gradual cancellation of the post-war Keynesian tripartite corporatism (Palley 2005: 27ff; Munck 2005: 60; MacGregor 2005). The dissolution of social security nets was propelled by the intensified competition between states vying for transnational mobile capital, which became increasingly significant in the face of declining public revenues (Gill 1986: 217). States found themselves in a situation of nearly non-stop appraisal of their 'business-friendly climate' by market analysts and investors. Financial markets began to use credit ratings as a coercive mechanism against countries whose economic policies threatened the interests of transnational operators (Boris/Malcher 2001). By undermining the pursuit of sovereign economic policies, transnational capital indirectly forced states to compete with each other in a self-permeating pursuit of an 'acceptable' macroeconomic framework.

The neoliberal transformation of the state was, however, not a global top-down process coordinated and propelled at the global level. The state itself emerged as a driving force behind the expansion of neoliberal policies. It increasingly began to prioritize the interests of capital, as the power of trade unions was considerably weakened by the internationalization of production, technological innovation, rising unemployment, the flexibilization of labor and the shift from traditionally unionized manufacturing towards the service sector (Hobsbawm 1996a: 417; Gill/Law 1993: 109; Tabb 2008). The neoliberal restructuring of national economies all around the world further produced new forms of de-skilling, de-

professionalization, degradation, precarization, unemployment and underemployment of formerly privileged mental and physical labor (Nitsch 2006: 159).

At the personal, behavioral level of workers, the post-Fordist neoliberal remodeling of societies contributed to the “atomisation of workers” and “the individualisation of the wage relationship”, i.e. “establishment of individual programme objectives, individual performance evaluations, permanent evaluations, individual salary incomes (...) [and] individual career paths”, all of which fosters to the “self-exploitation of staff” and the imposition of an attitude towards the “over-involvement in work.” (Bourdieu 1998)

The growing importance of the informal sector was related to the increasing pressure of intensified competition at the global level. The expansion of informal sector work primarily served the interests of local and transnational capital, as it created a massive reserve army of cheap labor for global production and valorization chains, and concomitantly facilitated the increased exploitation of the workforce in terms of real wages, working conditions and social protection (Komlosy 2007). In addition, the growth of informality allowed for the improvement of competitiveness through the increasing use of subcontractors (Gómez 2009; Altvater 2007: 16; Pacheco 2009).

Within the national context, the implementation of neoliberal policies fundamentally transformed the relations between productive and financial capital. Power and wealth were shifted from the working population and fractions of local capital focused on domestic markets towards technocrats, national export and import capital, financial operators and transnational elites. The new constellation of social forces in turn began to undermine the capacity of governments to regulate and intervene in national economies (Cox 2000: 48; Boris 2006: 6).

The ascendancy of neoliberal policies also marked a new historical stage of imperial, informal and non-territorial domination. In conjunction with national governments, above all the United States, transnational financial capital began to control and to exploit countries and populations around the world. In most countries, the shift from embedded liberalism towards neoliberalism was enabled through the use of military force or financial coercion mainly through the international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, which facilitated the unrestricted expansion of the operations of transnational mobile capital around the world (Gill (1993: 11; Harvey 2005: 42; Ziai 2006). The IMF and the World Bank pushed for the continuous reproduction of the existing imperial relations of domination and dependency by ensuring that the bulk of the cuts and negative externalities that the system produced were being covered by the peoples in the periphery (Gowan 1999: 129; Boris 2006: 6; Strange 1989).

5. The financialization of the U.S.-led world order

Since the early 1970s the global economy witnessed a general decline of overall economic growth, the tendency towards the formation of monopolistic and oligopolistic market structures driven by the increasing power of transnational corporations; and the rise of the financial sector, from being a mere facilitator of the accumulation process towards being the driving engine behind economic growth (Foster/McChesney 2009; Klages 2004; Zelik/Altvater 2009: 55ff; Duménil/Levy 2005: 13). The expansion of the financial sector was a response to the profound stagnation within the productive sector in the center (Epstein 2006; Magdoff/Yates 2009; Butterwege 1999: 31f).

For capitalism to sustain continuous economic growth, it is dependent on the perpetual accessibility of new sources and outlets that generate the necessary demand for the re-investment of a share of the surplus necessary for the

perpetuation of the accumulation cycle. A lack of profitable investment opportunities that generates a crisis of over-accumulation may result from a variety of reasons, such as the maturation of economies, the lack of new technologies over a long period of time, increasing inequality of income and wealth that reduces demand, blocks investment and encourages financial speculation and the monopolization and oligopolization of economies (Therborn 2005; Foster/Magdoff 2009: 102; Milanovic 2005).

Following the crisis of Fordism, capital was confronted with another serious dilemma: While the reproduction of the accumulation process required a reduction of real wages, expansion was simultaneously dependent on wage-based consumption that ultimately sustained economic growth and investment. More generally, the necessity to increase productivity through the introduction of new technology in pursuit of relative surplus value by the individual capitals simultaneously reduces the human component in the production process. The consequence is a decline of the value incorporated in commodities and growing pressure on the profit rate. In the late-1960s, the emergence of the new international division of labor and the incorporation of millions of peripheral workers into the global production process subsequently resulted in huge productivity gains. The rapidly improving levels of productivity and rising inflation in the center primarily related to a massive increase in the world's money supply due to large U.S. deficits triggered an enormous expansion of the economy (Hobsbawn 1996a: 286, 414; Brenner 2009: 26; Bischoff 2009: 42; Exner 2009: 76; Wichterich 2009: 84; Gambina 2010: 81; O'Brien/Williams 2004: 148).

In combination with oligopolistic pricing, a declining wage rate and regressive taxation reforms, the gains produced a massive absolute surplus that could not be absorbed by consumption and investment (Harvey 2009). Over-accumulation and overcapacity reduced the opportunities and outlets for profitable investment and

thus propelled the economy's drive into stagnation. In such a situation, the system fails to expand at adequate levels that encourage reinvestment of the generated surplus. In the 1970s the combination of stagnation and inflation in the capitalist core created a situation of 'stagflation' (see Marx/Engels 1848; Marx 1981; Keynes 1936; Hansen 1938; Baran/Sweezy 1966; Caputo 2010: 26; Zelik 2011; Schmidt 2009: 531f).

The aforementioned shift of the economy's focus from the productive to the financial sector is as a long-term trend in response to the structural crisis of over-accumulation (Sweezy/Magdoff (1972: 7ff; Tabb 2008; Lapavistas 2010 9ff). In particular, the expansion of debt and speculation in the 1970s began to function as the main counter-factors in preventing economies from falling into severe recessions:

The reduction of real wages (adjusted for inflation) and the redistribution of wealth upward (through reduced taxes and reductions in social services) – the results of class war waged unilaterally from above – have not been enough to guarantee an ever-increasing spiral of return on capital invested in the productive economy. (...) The huge expansion of debt and speculation provide ways to extract more surplus from the general population and are, thus, part of capital's exploitation of workers and lower middle class. Foster/Magdoff (2009: 61)

During the 1950s and mid-1960s the world economy had remained international rather than transnational in character. The internationalization of production not only provoked an increasing activity of and power shift towards transnationally operating firms, primarily multinational corporations and international banks, and a new system of international division of labor, but it also triggered the ascendancy of offshore finance (Hobsbawm (1996a: 277).

Following WWII, the Bretton Woods system had emerged as the underlying foundation for the post-war liberal global order with fixed exchange rates, a U.S. dollar peg to gold and most-favored-nation treatment in international trade (Imhof

2003: 37). In the mid-1960s the crisis of Fordism began to seriously call the foundations of the system into question. Massive military spending for the wars in Southeast Asia, increasing foreign investment by U.S. corporations and rising imports provoked an enormous efflux of U.S. dollars onto international markets. U.S. capital had increasingly begun to lose ground to foreign competitors (Hobsbawn 1996a: 214; Hufschmid 2004: 12).

The U.S. dollars leaving the country rapidly became the basis of an uncontrolled global currency market focused on the granting of short-term loans. At the heart of this market was the City of London, which emerged as the world's leading centre for unregulated, off-shore banking and financial operations (Hobsbawn 1996a: 278; Strange 1972: 198). Banks in the City started to attract off-shore dollars from around the world and subsequently to lend 'euro-dollars' at flexible rates to governments and private entities (Grahl 2010: 58; Bieling 2007a: 96). As U.S. banks and transnational corporations increasingly began to fund their operations with 'euro-dollars' from the City, speculative attacks against the Bretton Woods system and the stable exchange rates intensified (Toporowski 2005: 108; Gowan 1999: 18).

As a result of the massive military spending since the mid-1960s, in 1971 the U.S. dollar's gold cover, which was legally stipulated at 25% of Federal Reserve currency, was nearly depleted (see Hudson 2003: 4, Hobsbawn 1996a: 242; Amin 2009; Gill/Law 1988: 176ff). In combination with deepening trade and balance of payments deficits, the shrinking gold reserves created an increasingly unsustainable situation, as a weakening dollar would have seriously undermined U.S. economic and political power. In 1964 the United States had reached the point at which its debts of foreign central banks exceeded the value of its treasury gold stock. The military expenditures for the war in Vietnam threatened to bankrupt the country. The United States, however, continued to run balance-of-payments deficits, while European banks mainly recycled their surplus dollars

into American gold reserves. This trend continued until March 1968 when the U.S. Treasury suspended further gold sales and thus broke the link between the dollar and the price of gold (Toporowski 2005: 108; Sarai 2008: 76ff).

In 1971 the United States under the Nixon administration decided to cut the dollar loose from gold. The elimination of gold as the universal money commodity significantly strengthened the already dominant role of the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency (Imhof/Jäger 2007: 148ff). Most companies and states began to hold a large part of their foreign exchange reserves in dollars and to invest them in the financial markets in the United States or the City of London (Hudson/Sommers 2008). The free-floating exchange rates between currencies widely opened the doors for speculation and increased the role and influence played by banks and other financial institutions. Moreover, they particularly forced countries in the periphery to constantly adjust to the fluctuations of the global financial markets which, in fact, were mostly unrelated to the country's own economic performance.

Gold was ultimately replaced by an arrangement, referred to as "U.S. Treasury bond standard" (Hudson (2003; see Halevi 2002) or "dollar standard regime" (Gowan 1999: 4) in which IOUs issued by the U.S. government and the U.S. dollar became the new quasi-anchor of the world financial order (Bieling 2007a: 99f). The system of fixed exchange rates eventually had to be abandoned by the mid-1970s. The United States had managed to keep its privileged position within the global economy and was simultaneously able "to spend internationally without limit, following whatever economic and military policies it wishes to, without any gold constraint or other international constraint." (Hudson 2003: 5)

Decoupling the U.S. dollar from gold formed part of a greater strategy to perpetuate the international supremacy of American capitalism around the world in the post-war era. The definition of its predominant position within the

international monetary and financial system compensated for the lack of U.S. competitiveness in its productive sector (Strange 1986). With the closing of the gold option, the U.S. forced the rest of the world to pay for its imports, military spending and wars, but also for its takeover of foreign companies. Since 1971 the United States has been able;

To pursue domestic expansion and foreign diplomacy with hardly a worry about balance-of-payments consequences. The new financial regime allowed the United States to impose austerity measures on a foreign debtor country rather than on its own people as it would have been the case had it remained with the gold standard. (Hudson 2003: 9)

The United States managed to turn its payment deficits into “an unprecedented element of strength rather than a weakness.” (ibid: 10) Under the new constellation the U.S. government, the U.S. dollar and U.S.-dominated financial markets entered into a relationship of mutual, reciprocal reinforcement. Harvey (2010a) called this new configuration of forces the “state-finance nexus”. The dominant role of the U.S. dollar within world trade facilitated the expansion of Wall Street (and the City of London) which in turn increased the strength of U.S. financial firms and thus boosted the importance of the U.S. dollar. U.S. financial capital and U.S. corporations greatly expanded their power and control around the world while the U.S. government was able to unilaterally shape international monetary and financial policies (Gowan 2009; Hudson 2009).

The debased dollar system provided the U.S. government and U.S. capital with an unprecedented and extraordinary benefit in comparison to all the other countries (Callinicos 2003). As debt was issued in U.S. dollars, it allowed them to spend abroad without any foreign exchange constraints (Hudson 2003; Küblböck/Staritz 2007: 164). At the same time, governments and companies around the world were forced to raise the foreign exchange necessary for the repayment of interests and the principal on their issued bonds (Blustein 2005: 10). In contrast to the

United States, external deficit problems brought dependent countries rather quickly to the edge of insolvency, as they could not borrow funds in their own currency. This structural shift towards the U.S. dollar standard made the countries in the periphery even more vulnerable to crises and to changes within the global political economy. The increasing number of financial crises since the mid-1970s following the dismantlement of the Bretton Woods system disproportionately benefited financial operators, financial markets and transnational corporations located in the United States (Strange 1987: 553; Hufschmid 2006: 126; Panitch/Konings 2008).

Given the chronic trade and balance of payments deficits the U.S. economy became highly dependent upon the ability of U.S. financial markets to attract massive inflows of capital from countries around the world (Zeller 2007: 125; Shaikh 2005: 45). External capital flows became of great significance for the maintenance of U.S. capitalism, as they contributed massively to economic expansion and the financing of both the public and private deficits (Duménil/Lévy 2006: 3). The United States used its newly defined predominant position within the international monetary and financial system primarily for the purpose of compensating the lack of competitiveness in its productive sector.

The economic crisis in 1973 and the subsequent shift towards deflationary monetarist policies in the dominant countries propelled the accumulation of capital resources in the deposits of the international banks, primarily located in the United States and Europe (Newstadt 2008: 98ff). Apart from these recourses, the banks were also awash with petro-dollars as a result of the quadrupling of the oil prices since 1973, triggered by the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil embargo (Deranyigala 2005: 101). The oil crisis was provoked by the United States in order to 1) wreak havoc on the economies of Western Europe and Japan, which were both highly dependent on the oil imports from the Middle East, and 2) to strengthen the international role of U.S. private banks, which became the

principle beneficiaries in the recycling of petro-dollars from oil exporting countries (Gowan 1999: 21). The over-accumulation and hyper-liquidity of private international banks rapidly expanded the scope of loans that were given to peripheral countries from 1974 onwards (Gill 2010; Tabb 2004: 118f; Zelik/Altvater 2009: 88ff).

The oil shocks and the setting-in of stagnation in the most advanced capitalist countries in the mid-1970s provoked increasing current account deficits in the countries of the periphery (Gowan 1999: 48). Low U.S. interest rates and favorable terms of repayment in the absence of political and economic conditionalities increased the attraction of foreign loans. The latter were made possible in the first place by the aforementioned credit expansion from public to private institutions, which opened new lucrative investment opportunities for international banks in the periphery. The activities of the banks were accompanied by technological and institutional changes within the global banking business such as financial innovations especially securitization, i.e. the bundling of debt obligation into pools of commercial securities; the deregulation of financial markets and capital flows; technological innovations in information transfer and data processing; and dramatically reduced transaction costs (Boris 1987: 26ff; Held 1995: 128f).

The deregulation of international finance and the rise of private banks resulted in a massive diversion of investment away from the productive, towards the financial sectors within countries. In the face of stagnating productive sectors in the centre countries, more and more money began to flow into the financial industry. This development thus entailed the rapid expansion of securities markets, the enormous growth of risky derivatives trading, massive speculation of unprecedented scale and the rise of hedge funds (Becker et al. 2003: 10; Gowan 1999: 53f; Bieling 2007a: 140ff). Deregulated and innovative financial markets became essential means of co-ordination, the procurement and concentration of

wealth and the restoration of class power. The bulk of that money was not used for productive investment, but for speculation in securities and commodities markets and the real estate sector. Contrary to orthodox neo-classical claims that the function of financial markets was facilitating the efficient allocation of financial resources, speculation emerged as the dominant activity of financial operators (Redak 2003: 25). This boost in speculation in turn increased the vulnerability of national economies to the fluctuations of the global markets and to transnational money flows entering and leaving countries.

Following the liberalization of transnational capital flows and the introduction of floating exchange rates, money could be quickly moved out of a country and transferred to a more attractive destination. This provided transnational financial capital with the capacity to willingly create foreign exchange or payments crisis, primarily in small open economies in the South. Through such means, governments could rapidly and forcefully be brought in line by international finance capital and coerced into the adoption of suitable policies (Gill/Law 1993: 107). National, regional and global financial crises or recessions further benefit transnational capital, in particular transnational corporations and international banks, as during the process of recession and recovery, weaker competitors either go bankrupt or are taken over by stronger players.

Since the 1970s financial crises in the periphery, in fact, have primarily strengthened U.S. financial institutions and the role of the U.S. dollar. Capital flight had a strong stimulating effect on Wall Street, as it increased its liquidity. This in turn led to the lowering of U.S. interest rates and thus stimulated the economy at large (Gowan 1999: 35). U.S. governments therefore continuously refused to reduce the volatility and the crisis proneness of the existing international financial and monetary order (Epstein 2006; Altvater 2006: 109ff; 2009: 75ff).

The collapse of the Bretton Woods system was followed by a wave of financial innovation and deregulation in the financial sector in the United States. The U.S. took the lead in eliminating restrictions on money flows entering and leaving the country (Cardim de Carvalho 2009: 37.) The absence of financial regulation in the United States increased the pressure in other countries to follow suit on adopting deregulatory policies. Otherwise, domestic operators would have increasingly been incapable to compete with the Wall Street/City of London financial complex (Gowan 1999: 28; Bsriske 2009; Emunds 2009).

The creation of more integrated global financial markets in the 1970s the recession of the 1980s led to the rise of “competitive regulation” (Gill/Law 1993: 98) of national capital markets in the pursuit of attracting capital flows and foreign direct investment. The liberalization of U.S. financial markets provoked a power shift towards transnational finance capital and the emergence of the financial sector as the primary source for the generation of corporate profits⁵⁷ (Harvey 2010; Callinicos 2003). It put private U.S. banks at the very centre of international finance⁵⁸ and reduced the government’s control over financial operators. Moreover, it increased the vulnerability of other countries, in particular in the periphery and allowed U.S. financial institutions;

To weaken the barriers to its penetration into domestic financial systems, (...) to remove barriers to the free flow of funds in both directions between Wall Street and private operators within the target state, (...) to give full rights to Wall Street operators to do business within the financial systems and economies of the target states, (...) to redesign the financial systems of target states to fit in with the business strategies of Wall Street operators and their American clients. (Gowan 1999: 27)

⁵⁷ In the 1960s 15% of all U.S. domestic profits originated in the financial sectors. By 2005 that number had increased to 40% (Foster/Magdoff 2009: 54).

⁵⁸ Between 1975 and 1990 private bank loans increased from US\$ 40 billion to US\$ 300 billion (Gowan 1999: 27).

Intensified exploitation and growing increases in inequality with respect to income and wealth distribution became necessary features of the post-Fordist, finance-led global economy (Harvey 2005: 19). Both guaranteed the continuous flow of large pools of cash towards the financial sectors and thus sustained their expansion and the accumulation process at large. Neoliberal policies of high interest rates and reduced government spending played a significant role in driving the productive sector further into stagnation. In the early-1980s the IMF and the World Bank emerged as the central international institutions in propelling and facilitating the deregulation of financial sectors within different national contexts and in favor of the interests of the U.S. government, financial institutions and transnational corporations (Arrighi 1993: 183; Gill 1993: 11; Gowan 1999: 31).

6. Argentina's post-Fordist, neoliberal financialization

a. Latin America's debt crisis

The collapse of Bretton Woods and the debt crisis in the early 1980s functioned as the two main catalysts for Latin America's transition from the mercantilist ISI approach towards market-oriented neoliberal policies (see Gill 1993: 10; Jäger/Köhler/Leubolt 2007; Colás 2005: 78; Kreye 1996; Duménil/Levy 2005: 17; Saad-Filho 2005a: 224). The flexibilization of exchange rates in 1971, a sharp decline of prices for raw materials and the oil shock in 1973/74 provided the global politico-economic context for the rise of the neoliberal orthodoxy in the region (Schwank 2007: 100; Lapavistas 2005: 33; Altvater 2008: 53ff).

During the 1970s military regimes had come to power in countries like Chile (1973) Uruguay (1975) and Argentina (1976), all of which blamed the previous import-substitution industrialization and the strength of the labor movements for

the socio-political and economic crises in their countries. By introducing harsh neo-liberal policies in the name of social security, the countries experienced a deindustrialization of their national economies and a forced reorientation away from the domestic market towards an export economy based predominately on primary sector production. The final outcome of this restructuring was the creation of a power bloc amalgam which encompassed the rural bourgeoisie, urban financial institutions and military bureaucracy (Holman 1993: 233).

The debt crisis in 1982 significantly deteriorated the Latin America's standing within the global political economy (Boris 2006: 6; Harvey 2005: 29). During the 1970s most of the countries in Latin America, in particular Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, had accumulated massive foreign debt burdens⁵⁹ (Küblböck/Staritz 2007: 167; Duménil/Levy 2005: 17). The real interest rates hike in the United States in 1979 on the one hand signified a dramatic increase of the debt burden for peripheral countries and provoked in turn an international transfer of wealth towards the North (Callinicos 2003: 12; Harvey 2005: 24; Grahl 2011: 38; Duménil/Levy 2005: 11). On the other hand it was a crucial cataclysmic event for the restoration of the supremacy of the U.S. dollar in the international financial and monetary order⁶⁰ (Panitch/Gindin 2008: 30f; Becker et al. 2003: 9; Becker et al. 2003: 9). The massive hike was taken as a measure in the fight against inflation, which had significantly increased throughout the 1970s.

⁵⁹ Up to the 1970s the issue of external debt had not been a serious problem for peripheral countries within the international system. In 1970 the total external debt held by the latter amounted to less than US\$ 70 billion and US\$ 167 in 1975. By 1981 the total external debt of peripheral countries had skyrocketed to US\$ 751 billion (Aldcroft 2003: 28). In 1982, 36% of the entire foreign debt of peripheral countries was held by Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela alone (Boris 1987: 15).

⁶⁰ Between 1979 and 1982 the variable real interest rates for loans to peripheral countries increased from 9.7% on average to 16.7% (Aldcroft 2003: 41).

The increase of interest rates by the Federal Reserve Bank strengthened the U.S. dollar in relation to other foreign currencies. Peripheral countries were forced to produce even higher export surpluses in order to meet the increase of interest payments in U.S. dollars. In particular, in Latin America this development led to the direct or indirect devaluation of national currencies and to an internal indebtedness of the state, which subsequently fuelled increasing inflation rates in the 1980s. Such a scenario put the national currencies under pressure of further devaluation and increased the incentives for capital flight (Becker et al. 2007: 49).

The introduction of higher real interest rates as a means to prevent the flight of foreign capital did not encourage productive investment but rather increased short-term speculative operations. In retrospect, the shift in U.S. monetary policy to high interest rates contributed to the consolidation of U.S. dominance and the creation of a debt dependency in the periphery. The idea was to force debtor countries to produce external trade surpluses necessary for the debt repayments in order to co-finance the annually growing U.S. budget and trade deficits. Foreign debt functioned as an instrument of imperial rule and discipline and as a means for the intensified extraction of surplus value from the periphery (Boris 1987: 25; Dos Santos 1996: 166).

Latin America's debt crisis also posed a serious risk to the Western banking system that was brought to the verge of financial collapse in the face of the countries' bankruptcies (Altvater 2007: 9). The liberalization of financial markets in the 1970s shifted the bulk of the debt burden held by the countries in the periphery onto the balance sheets of private financial institutions, most of which were located in the United States and Europe. In particular, U.S. international banks had massively granted cheap loans to peripheral countries during the mid-1970s as part of a strategy to recycle petro-dollars following the oil crisis of 1973-

74⁶¹ (see Hobsbawm 1996a: 423; Gill/Law 1993: 105; Halevi 2002; Altvater 2007: 8). Threatening them with invasion, the United States had obliged oil-producing states to recycle their petro-dollars through New York City investment banks. In the face of stagnating economies and low return rates in the industrialized capital countries due to accumulation, in the mid-1970s the banks turned to Third World countries, which were starved for funds (Harvey 2005: 27; Becker et al. 2003: 11). The loans were initially intended to offset the massive hike of oil prices. In many countries, however, the loans served the private enrichment of the political and economic elites, boosted artificial consumption, increased spending for military and repressive purposes and encouraged capital flight (Aldcroft 2003: 28).

Apart from the drastic surge in U.S. real interest rates, it was also the deterioration of the terms of trade⁶², the international recession and a new hike in oil prices, which at the beginning of the 1980s paved the way for peripheral countries straight into a debt trap (Küblböck/Staritz 2007: 168). The accumulation of debt in the 1970s on part of the countries in the periphery was accompanied by large and growing external trade deficits which originated from the long-term structural trend of deteriorating terms of trade and declining export revenues. World market prices of raw materials had constantly declined since WWII until the debt crisis in the early 1980s. During that period the purchasing power of raw material exports in relation to industrial goods had been nearly cut in half (Boris 1987: 22). In the 1970s that trend was accelerated by the economic crisis in the 1973/74 that provoked plummeting prices for raw materials, with the exception of fossils fuels.

⁶¹ Only 24 U.S. banks had provided 83% of all U.S. loans to peripheral countries (Boris 1987: 17).

⁶² The decline of prices for raw materials in the 1980s led to a 13-15% deterioration of Latin America's terms of trade in comparison to the preceding decade (Aldcroft 2003: 41).

b. Neoliberal hegemony and structural adjustment

The debt crisis turned out to be a major turning point in the history of the region, as it brought the countries in line with the hegemonic “neoliberal strategy of capitalist accumulation” (Morton 2003b: 632; see Kastner 2007; Felder 2008: 180f) Debt became “an instrument of neocolonialism and a drain of “surplus” from parts of the South” (Frank (1996: 34) towards the centre. Outstanding debt obligations required the peripheral countries to shift towards an export-oriented industrialization model. The revenues from the exports were meant to produce a balance of payments surplus, which in turn would be used for interest payments on the external debt (Altaver 2007: 10f/) Despite high budget surpluses, the allocation of a large share of the tax revenues to interest and debt repayments rendered it nearly impossible for governments to shift towards socio-economic policies, oriented towards the strengthening of the domestic market and full employment (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 35).

Between the late-1980s to the mid-1990s in most parts of Latin America, neoliberalism emerged as an ideological program and political project that managed to integrate the countries into the post-Fordist hegemonic world order. The strategy focused on the opening towards the world market, a retreat of the interventionist state and a comprehensive shift towards internal market regulation. With the rise of neoliberalism during the crisis of Fordism, the state had emerged as the main culprit for the stagnation in the 1970s (Engartner 2007: 97ff). Simultaneously, the market had become the primer mechanism for the allocation of resources and the generation of economic growth (Contreras 2003; Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 27).

The main beneficiaries of the economic liberalization were transnational finance capital and the domestic export-oriented, large-scale industrial and financial

elites. The removal of control mechanism and restrictions for foreign companies primarily played into the hands of transnational mobile capital, as it opened up new investments opportunities in the indebted countries (see Harvey 2005: 29; Boris 2007b; Saad-Filho 2005: 113f; Boris/Tittor 2008: 397ff). Latin America subsequently became the worldwide leader in the privatizations of public institutions such as universities, pension systems, public health care, etc. (Tittor 2005: 41). The deregulation of financial markets facilitated the repatriation of interests, dividends and profits from peripheral countries to the industrialized (Morazán 2004: 6; Hershberg 2002: 32).

Central to Latin America's neoliberal transformation was the strong ideological and material support of large parts of the populations, which minimized the governments' need to resort to repressive and coercive means. During the 1980s national elites successfully managed to construct ideological alliances with marginalized sectors at the bottom of the region's social pyramid. This was in part achieved through the successful taming of inflation following the region's debt crisis and the subsequent economic expansion. The creation of such a broad consensus allowed neoliberalism to become hegemonic in the region by the end of the 1980s. A key component of the consensus building was the transformation of political participation in social, community and relief work, which led to the increasing absorption of former state-administered areas by different actors within civil society, primarily non-governmental organizations (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 28).

A significant role in the neoliberal remodeling of Latin American was played by the Bretton Woods institutions, which became the patrons in the promotion of a liberal globalized economy during the 1980s (Zeller 2007: 9). Following the debt crisis, over sixty peripheral countries around the world were subjected by the IMF and the World Bank to 'structural adjustment programs' (SAPs), which included a reduction of the money supply and public loans to fight inflation; cutbacks in

public spending to reduce the budget deficit; an increase in prices for public services and eliminations of public subsidies to reduce the budget deficit; a devaluation of the national currency to boost exports and to decrease imports; the socialization of private debt; the conversion of short-term into long-term debt; the privatization or dismantlement of formerly state-run enterprises; the flexibilization of labor markets; the liberalization of foreign trade, which enhanced conditions for foreign direct investment and the free transfer of profits; an increase of interest rates; privatizations of public assets; and limitations or freezes on wages (see Callinicos 2003: 12; Svampa 2010: 15; Boris 1987: 32; Gowan 1999: 42; Jäger/Köhler/Leubolt 2007; Küblböck/Staritz 2007: 169f; Schwank 2003; Gill 1999: 5; Boris 1993; Rügemer 2008 263ff).

Structural adjustment programs increased the countries' integration into the established structures of the world market and deepened their vulnerability with regards to its mechanisms and fluctuations. They fundamentally transformed the power relations between classes and class fractions, both domestically and internationally. The programs proved to be essential components of the ideological and material architecture aimed at the creation and the subsequent perpetuation of the post-Fordist, hegemonic order (Tabb 2004: 201).

The devaluations of national currencies boosted the countries' export capacities, which in most cases led to drops in prices for raw materials and increased competition between peripheral countries. The main objective of structural adjustment was to provide the United States and other core countries with sufficient oil and other strategically relevant raw materials such as copper, tin, nickel and coltan in order to produce a steady over-supply and to hold down world market prices for raw materials. Worsening terms of trade were accompanied by specific conditionalities that blocked structural changes such as land reform and progressive income and property taxation (Panizza 2009: 31f).

First signs of a dwindling confidence in the neoliberal construct were ascertainable in the early to mid-1990s, as the promises of rising prosperity had not trickled down to large parts of the populations. It was during that time, when the severe socio-economic consequences of the neoliberal policies surfaced in the form of structural unemployment, increasing poverty, polarization of incomes and the reappearance of financial and currency crises (Becker et al 2003). The demise of neoliberal hegemony coincided with the emergence of different forms of social protests across the region. In the early-1990s popular resistance against neoliberalism in Latin America had still been fragmented, localized and restricted to some particular social sectors. Key events that had huge cataclysmic effects on social movements in other countries were the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the increasing militancy of Argentina's unemployed workers in their fight against the neoliberal restructuring in the mid-1990s (Svampa 2010: 14; Sitrin 2006: 2; Sader 2009: 172).

c. Argentina's neoliberal restructuring

Since the mid-1970s Argentina has experienced two waves of market liberalization: the first under the military government (1976-1983) and the second under the Menem presidencies (1989-1999). During the same period the country also bore witness to five major economic crises, three in the 1980s, one in the mid-1990s and the most severe in 2001/2002; a massive explosion of its foreign debt⁶³; rising rates of inflation;⁶⁴ stagnating incomes per capita and declining

⁶³ During the period 1974-2000 Argentina's total external debt incremented more than 19 times and eventually, in 2000, amounted to more than half of the country's Gross National Income in comparison to only 10% in the mid-1970s (O'Connell 2006: 291). Between 1976 and 1983 foreign debt increased by 364%, under Menem it grew by 123% (Uriona 2006: 88).

⁶⁴ Inflation increased from an annual 24% during 1950-1974 to 95 % between 1975 and 2000 (O'Connell 2006: 290).

standards of living⁶⁵; a decisive shift towards regressive income distribution⁶⁶; and a significant concentration of market power in the different sectors of the economy. In retrospect, Argentina's neoliberal restructuring resulted in a transition from an export-led development concept towards a model based on debt-financing (Schvarzer 2002).

i. The first wave under the military junta

Between 1976 and 1983 the military junta in alliance with international financial institutions engaged in a radical transformation of Argentina's socio-economic structures for the benefit of domestic and foreign financial and business elites. The military takeover represented the point of departure for the subordination of Argentina's productive sector to the demands of international financial markets, and the emergence of financial valorization as the driving force behind national capitalist accumulation (Geiger 2006: 92; Vilker 2003: 88ff).

The fight against armed insurgency movements served as a pretext to use force against the rest of the population. Violence became a legitimate means for enforcing the interests of the country's oligarchy, as it disciplined social movements and simultaneously allowed the restructuring of the economy and the expansion of financial capital. In particular, trade unionists became targets of the bloody repression, which provided "a political condition for a pattern of growth." (Cox (1976: 351) Apart from the political persecution and the violent oppression of dissidents, the seven years under Argentina's military junta resulted in the continuation of corporate institutions and practices, the concentration of capital

⁶⁵ By comparing the income per capita developments of the last two quarters of the 20th century, the numbers show a strikingly contrasting image: in the period 1950-1974 income per capita increased by two-thirds, while in the following quarter 1975-1999 income per capita practically stagnated (O'Connell 2006: 290).

⁶⁶ The ratio between the top and bottom ten percent of the income pyramid increased from 12.1 times in 1975 to 23.7 times in 1999 (O'Connell 2006: 291).

and income, a reversal of the post-war redistributive tendencies, high rates of inflation, the explosion of foreign debt and an increasing trend towards de-industrialization of the country's economy (Economistas de Izquierda 2004; Rock 2002: 62; Schvarzer 2002, 2002a).

Prior to the takeover by the military junta in the mid-1970s, Argentina's external debt was a rather insignificant issue. In the early 1950s the country had actually managed to repay nearly its entire foreign debt obligations that it had accumulated in the period predating World War II (Meinzer 2005). During the military dictatorship, Argentina's external debt increased from US\$ 9.7 billion in 1976 to US\$ 35.7 billion in 1981. The largest part of the debt was held by the private sector, while the public share had declined from 68% in 1976 to 56% in 1981. (Halevi 2002) In the early-1980s the military junta began to socialize Argentina's private external debt, a process that was thereafter continued by the Alfonsín administration (Halevi 2002; Vilker 2003: 90f). The effect of the debt socialization was the intensification of balance of payments crises and the permanent disruption of public finances, all of which paved the way towards hyperinflation in the years to come (Palermo 2002; Molina 1999).

ii. The second wave under the Menem administrations

Argentina's return to formal bourgeois democratic rule under Alfonsín in 1983 coincided with the setting in of skyrocketing inflation.⁶⁷ Different attempts by the government to combat the price increases were short-lived and eventually failed.⁶⁸ The 1980s were marked by economic stagnation, hyperinflation, macroeconomic

⁶⁷ In 1984 inflation jumped up from 627% to a dizzying 1000% in the year after. (Rock 2002; 63)

⁶⁸ The attempts by the Alfonsín government comprised of three emergency plans: the introduction of a new currency in the form of the 'peso argentino' in 1983; the Austral Plan in 1985 which encompassed a price and wage freeze, a set of conservative monetary policies and the replacement of the peso by the 'austral'; and the Priamavera Plan in 1988 which was supposed to stabilize the Austral by loosely linking it to the U.S. dollar. (Blustein 2005: 15)

instability, low foreign direct investment and deteriorating social services and consumer goods (Becker/Jäger 2005: 98; Boris/Tittor 2006: 19f). With the rise of neoliberal scholarship around the world, these conditions were largely blamed to the state's dominant role in the economy and protectionist policies. By the end of the decade, Argentina was again caught between capital flight, decreasing foreign reserves, an ailing economy and the constant threat of hyperinflation.⁶⁹

Under Menem (1989-1999) Argentina became one of the world's most liberalized countries. The country emerged as the poster child of transnational corporations and international financial investors, as it meticulously adopted a set of neoliberal policies prescribed and sanctioned by the IMF and the World Bank (Panizza 2009: 61f; Boris/Tittor 2006: 25ff).¹ The implemented 'reforms,' which comprised the introduction of the convertibility law and the establishment of a currency board regime, the restructuring of the country's debt⁷⁰, the independence of the central bank, massive privatizations of public assets, the opening of the economy to the world market through the removal of trade and financial barriers⁷¹, price liberalizations, the flexibilization of the labor market, the deregulation of the economy and the reduction of real wages amply outstripped the neoliberal policies passed under the military junta in both scope and radicalism (see Duménil/Lévy 2006: 4; Blustein 2005: 14; MacEwan 2002; Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 153; Boris/Malcher 2001; Becker/Jäger 2005: 99; Svampa 2008; Martínez/Ruggeri 2010; Petras/Veltmeyer 2002; Rebón/Saavedra 2006: 14f; Vilker 2003: 91ff).

⁶⁹ In the period 1981-1988 GDP declined by over 5% or 15% per capita. (Rock 2002: 63) In 1990 Argentina's GDP per capita was 25% below the level of 1975 and during the same period real wages within the country's industry were reduced by half. (Boris 2001: 471)

⁷⁰ The overall framework for Argentina's debt was provided by the Brady Plan, which aimed at the reduction of interest rates and the simultaneous increase of the consumer taxes (Boris 2001: 472ff)

⁷¹ Most non-tariff barriers were completely removed and average import duties were slashed across-the-board cut from 50% to 10% (Blustein 2005: 24).

The socio-economic and political consequences of the Menem era were many and varied. They included a significant decline in employment, in particular in the state sector; an simultaneous increase in poverty and informal and precarious labor; significant wage cuts; redistribution of wealth and income in favor of top sectors within society; a consolidation of economic power and an emergence of monopolies and oligopolies in different sectors of the economy; an exodus of parts of the professional workforce; the financialization of Argentina's economy; the partial dismantlement of the welfare state; the subordination to supranational financial institutions; a massive increase in the external debt burden; the creation of a neo-populist system of patronage and popular co-optation based on patron-client relations managed by local party officials at the community level; the decentralization of the power of the federal state; the promotion of the interests of U.S. and European financial institutions and corporations; personal enrichment of transnational and local financial and industrial elites as a consequence of the privatizations of public enterprises; the weakening and dismantling of different forms of organized labor; the proletarianization of large parts of Argentina's peasant population; and the impoverishment, marginalization and social exclusion of millions of Argentines (see Altimir et al. 2002; Boris/Malcher 2005: 131; Hershberg 2002: 33; Lucita 2005).

Argentina's radical transition to neoliberalism in the early-1990s coincided with a recession in the United States in 1991, which triggered an outflow of transnational capital to countries in the South.⁷² Privatizations and fiscal austerity provoked the inflow of foreign capital and expanded the domestic money supply. Investment banks such as Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, J.P. Morgan Chase, Merrill Lynch and Credit Suisse First Boston, were at the very forefront of investing heavily in Latin America's 'emerging markets' (Blustein 2005: 30).

⁷² The inflow of foreign funds increased in Argentina from US\$ 3.2 billion in 1991 to US\$ 10.7 billion in 1993 (Rock 2002: 65).

During the 1990s Argentina witnessed two phases of economic expansion, which were merely interrupted by the Mexican ‘tequila crisis’ of 1994/1995⁷³ (Sader 2009: 172). In 1998 the expansion came to a halt and the country entered into recession (Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 155). In detail, an initial period of strong growth (1990-94)⁷⁴ was first followed by a period of slower expansion (1995-98) and ended in period marked by recession and an ultimate financial collapse (1998-2001). Argentina’s strong economic growth in the 1990s largely originated from “an increasing accumulation of international obligations (...), fortuitous expansion of foreign markets for Argentine exports, and short-term injections of government revenues from the sale of state enterprises.” (MacEwan 2002) Simultaneously, the 1990s were marked by a massive explosion of Argentina’s external debt due to the servicing of existing debt obligations by taking out new loans.⁷⁵

(1) The convertibility law and the currency board system

The convertibility law passed by Congress in 1991 created on the one hand an independent central bank and on the other a currency board system, which fixed the country’s exchange rate to the U.S. dollar at a 1:1 ratio (Economistas de Izquierda 2004; Rock 2002: 72; Boris 2005: 137). Under this system Argentine pesos could only be printed against the backup of the equivalent amount of U.S. dollars (Geiger 2006: 92). This stifled the ability of Argentina’s central bank to

⁷³ Average growth in the 1990s amounted to 6% per year (Boris/Malcher 2001). Between 1990 and 1998 the income per capita jumped from US\$ 4500 to US\$ 9000 per year and industrial productivity increased by 70% (Boris 2001: 472f).

⁷⁴ Between 1991 and 1994 Argentina’s economy grew at an annual 7%; real income increased by 30% and thus significantly stimulated the domestic market; the investment rate rose from 13 to 19%. The government achieved a considerable budget surplus due to increased tax revenues, cut backs in expenditures and the proceeds from the privatizations and the increasing foreign investment, both FDI and portfolio (Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 155. In 1995 GDP declined by 4.6% and unemployment grew from 9.6% to 18.6% between mid-1994 and the end of 1995 (Boris 2001: 473). GDP per capita increased from US\$ 4.636 in 1991 to US\$ 7.501 in 1994. Between 1990 and 1994 poverty dropped from 41.4% to 21.6% (Blustein 2005: 25f; 35).

⁷⁵ Between 1991 and 2000 Argentina’s external debt increased from US\$ 65.4 billion to US\$ 146.3 billion (Boris 2004).

finance government deficits and to provide commercial banks with liquidity in the case of a financial crisis.

Following more than half a century of macroeconomic turbulences, the convertibility law in combination with cutbacks in public spending eventually managed to bring inflation under control (Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 152). Within two years the inflation rate dropped to a one-digit figure and thus significantly contributed to the construction of a broad consensus in favor of the fixed exchange rate among the different sectors of society⁷⁶ (Hershberg 2002: 33).

Furthermore, the increasing expansion of credit and consumer and corporate debt provided the peso-dollar convertibility with a strong base of support, as its abolition would have increased overall indebtedness and drastically reduced savings. In the event of a devaluation of the local currency, many firms would have suddenly gone bankrupt. As incomes were denominated in pesos and companies' debts held in U.S. dollars, a devaluation of the peso would have automatically increased the debt burden beyond the entire net worth of companies. This dollarization of loans not only affected private enterprises but was also spread throughout the entire banking system.

The dollar-peso parity primarily served the interests of transnational financial institutions, large foreign transnational corporations and Argentinean investors, as a stable currency and high interest rates provided a lucrative investment climate (Neuwirth 2003: 64). Through the introduction of the currency board system, the capacity of macroeconomic management was transferred into the hands of national and international financial markets and thereby shifted the power towards

⁷⁶ In 1992 Argentina's inflation rate stood at 17.5%, the year after it declined to 7.4%. In 1994 it dropped even further down to 4.2% and it remained at virtually zero for the rest of the decade (Blustein 2005: 21; Becker 2004).

transnational capital classes. In addition, the high rate of exchange helped overcome and converge conflicting interests between domestic and international capitalist classes (Dullien 2002).

Argentina's dollarization particularly provoked a sharp increase of foreign direct investment from the financial centers. In combination with the reduction of tariffs, it also led to an explosion of cheap industrial imports, financed by foreign capital flooding into the country. The increased imports had a substantial negative impact on Argentina's balance of trade and produced countless defaults of small and medium-sized enterprises, which in turn led to rising unemployment. The dollar peg also permitted local investors to purchase foreign assets under favorable conditions and to simultaneously ship funds out of the country. The result was a cyclical dynamic of capital streams: Argentina's paid interests on its external debt while massive foreign funds were entering the country via international financial markets (Wolff 2003).

(2) Market liberalization

The peso-dollar peg was accompanied by a full liberalization of the banking sector and unprecedented privatizations of public assets. The liberalization of trade and finance facilitated the takeover of large parts of the country's industry by foreign-owned transnational corporations (Molina 1999). It increased the involvement of foreign banks and thus Argentina's vulnerability to transnational capital flows. Simultaneously, the liberalization of Argentina's financial sector allowed local firms to look for cheaper funding on the international markets, as domestic loans were only short-term at high interest rates (O'Connell 2006: 298). The removals of restrictions on money flows in 1989 had potentially permitted transnational financial operators to rapidly withdraw funds in the event of a default. To prevent such a scenario from happening, Argentina's central bank

continuously had to raise interest rates, which rendered loans increasingly unaffordable for domestic private companies.

The privatizations primarily affected state owned companies, nationalized or established under Perón in the sectors of energy, transportation, tourism, communications, media, public services, banking and the pension system (O'Connell 2006: 292; Ranis 2010: 79). Argentina's privatizations under Menem were populist in the sense that they increased the regime's basis of popular support and thus helped neoliberalism to become hegemonic in the country during the 1990s (Tittor 2005: 47). Following the restoration of trade union power during the 1980s⁷⁷, union leaders, in particular of the CGT, became staunch supporters and first-hand beneficiaries of the government's privatizations.

Moves towards rationalization in the public as well as in the private sector, following the massive wave of privatizations in the early 1990s, and an increasingly uncompetitive national industry, however, led to a rapid increase of both unemployment and poverty (Geiger 2006: 93). The opening of Argentina's domestic market to foreign imports coupled with the lowering of tariffs on foreign goods, the suspension of public subsidies and the increasingly difficult access to credit on global financial markets, provoked a massive wave of bankruptcies that especially hit small and medium-sized enterprises (Pastor/Wise 1999: 486f; Geiger 2006: 92).

The bankruptcies further increased Argentina's dependency on foreign imports for the maintenance of its industry.⁷⁸ As the economy grew between 1990 and 1994, unemployment doubled during the same period in the face of the

⁷⁷ The split of the CGT in 1989 entailed the foundation of the Confederación de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) two years later (Petrás 2002).

⁷⁸ During the period 1991-1998 the value share of imported capital goods and spare parts for Argentina's machinery increased from 25% of overall imports in 1991 to 45% in 1998 (Halevi 2002).

flexibilization of the labor market and the cutting back of workers' rights (Boris/Malcher 2001). The flexibilization of labor and the lowering of wages of the country's working population were intended to offset Argentina's loss of international competitiveness on deregulated capital and commodity markets (Geiger 2006: 92).

A negative wage-price ratio during most of the 1990s signified a loss of purchasing power on part of the workers that in fact translated into a redistribution of the country's wealth in favor of property owners.⁷⁹ Argentina's deindustrialization during the 1990s was closely accompanied by an increased exploitation of the country's workforce.⁸⁰ In sum, the combination of privatizations, trade liberalization and the reductions in public sector employment propelled a long-term tendency within Argentina's industry to replace formal factory employment with precarious and informal work.⁸¹ Argentina's deindustrialization radically disintegrated the country's industrial workforce, which subsequently provoked a significant transformation of the social order with rising rates of social exclusion, marginalization, unemployment and poverty.

During the first boom between 1991 and 1994, the privatizations were largely responsible for attracting foreign investment. The revenues from the privatizations were primarily used for the reining in on the fiscal deficit and for the repayment of foreign debt (Boris/Malcher 2001). By the end of the decade Argentina had sold off about 90% of all public enterprises (Schmalz/Tittor 2005: 26f; Boris/Malcher: 2001). The outflow of interest and dividend payments in the wake of the privatizations deteriorated Argentina's current account deficit so that demand for foreign funds increased.

⁷⁹ Wages lagged prices between 1994 and 2000, as median incomes of private households declined at an annual rate of 4.3% (Boris/Malcher 2001).

⁸⁰ Between 1992 and 2002 labor productivity per hour rose by about 45%, while money wages remained constant and real wages declines. During the same period unused productive capacity had remained at 30% of Argentina's overall potential (Halevi 2002).

⁸¹ From 1990 to 1996 Argentina's informal sector grew from 47.5% to 53.6% (Altvater 2007: 19).

In particular, foreign business conglomerates and national elites benefited from the privatizations of public assets and the liberalization of the economy. Foreign corporations made available the necessary funds and technical expertise, while local investment groups such as Pérez Companc, Techint, Astra and Grupo Soldati acted as junior partners. The privatizations sharply reduced the number of workers employed, facilitated the concentration of power within the economy and accelerated Argentina's incorporation into the global financial order (Geiger 2006: 96; Rock 2005: 68; Partnoy 2002).

(3) The recession

Following four years of low U.S. interest rates in the aftermath of the recession in the early 1990s, a sharp hike in 1994 provoked a crash of the global bond market and subsequently forced Mexico to devalue its currency (Schweickert 2002). International investors compared Mexico's financial woes with those of Argentina and thus began to withdraw money and to clear bank accounts. (Becker et al. 2003: 11). Argentina's economy plunged into a recession; unemployed soared and so did the budget deficit, due to declining revenues and increasing debt repayments⁸² (Rock 2002: 78). The reduction of the available foreign exchange reserves of the central bank consequently led to an increase in interest rates in order to prevent money flight. As Argentina's debt burden increased and economic growth slacked, the IMF provided fresh loans primarily for the stabilization of the country's banking sector⁸³ (Morazán 2002).

⁸² In 1995 Argentina's GDP declined 2.8% and unemployment soared from 12 to 18%. The budget deficit expanded from US\$ 1.3 billion in 1995 to US\$ 5.6 billion the year after (Blustein 2005: 28; Halevi 2002).

⁸³ Between 1993 and 1998 Argentina's debt had increased from 29% to 41% of GDP (Blustein 2005: 50).

In the two following years Argentina's economy witnessed an unexpected recovery, due to financial stability funding granted by the IMF and other international and domestic creditors and a booming export sector. It was the appreciation of Brazil's currency that rescued and revived Argentina's economy, as it created a rising demand for the country's exports, in particular for low-value primary goods (Boris 2001: 474). As by 1996 revenues from privatizations were depleted and overseas investment was on the decline, the cost for serving the country's debt increased, due to further interest rate hikes in the United States.

The appreciation of the U.S. dollar in the same year provoked transnational mobile capital to invest in U.S. financial markets, which especially in relation to the Japanese yen, exacerbated Argentina's economic situation, as the peso also rose in value due to the 1:1 peg (Boris/Malcher 2001; Halevi 2002). Exports became more expensive, which further decreased the demand for the country's goods on international markets. In 1997 this trend was intensified by a new rise in U.S. interest rates and the financial crises in Southeast Asia,⁸⁴ which subsequently spread to other countries around the world, such as Russia, Turkey and Brazil (Neuwirth 2003: 69f; Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 15; Blustein 2005: 37; Geiger 2006: 93; Boris 2001: 474; Lewis 2002). Despite the temporary recovery following the Mexico crisis in August 1998, Argentina entered in a long-lasting recession provoked by a steep reduction of foreign capital flows, a drop of the domestic effective demand, lower prices for agrarian exports⁸⁵ on the world markets and a further increase of imported goods⁸⁶ (Boris/Malcher 2001).

As the economy began to contract in 1998, the influx of foreign funds significantly decreased and consequently obliged the currency board to limit the country's money supply. The declining revenues forced the government to raise

⁸⁴ See Gill (2008: 150ff).

⁸⁵ Commodity prices for Argentina's exports on the world markets declined by 20% in 1998 (Halevi 2002).

⁸⁶ In 1998 Argentina's trade deficit had reached US\$ 8 billion (Blustein 2005: 55).

taxes in an attempt to balance an increasingly unsustainable budget deficit and thus exacerbated an already critical situation.⁸⁷ When the country slipped into recession in 1998, the peso-dollar peg and the currency board system aggravated Argentina's economic problems. During the recession, the currency board system functioned as a "procyclical multiplier of external disequilibria" (Duménil/Lévy 2006: 7), as it prevented the Argentine government from using fiscal and monetary measures to stave off the adverse effects of the downturn. It deprived the central bank of its flexibility in monetary policy and undermined the government's potential to stimulate the economy by expanding the money supply (Boris/Malcher 2001).

The peso's structural over-valuation was another main reason for Argentina's lack of competitiveness on the global markets. Argentina's neoliberal remodeling of the economy had consolidated its traditional dependence on agrarian exports, mainly beef and wheat. The availability of foreign capital did not result in increased levels of production but rather in higher consumption. In particular, small and medium-sized companies were unable to increase their productivity levels and soon fell behind international standards.⁸⁸ Severe competition from low-wage countries in Asia made it increasingly more difficult for them to compete on the world market.

Even though increasing foreign competition was meant to stabilize internal prices, in retrospect, it significantly contributed to Argentina's deindustrialization and the bankruptcies of countless enterprises. During the period of convertibility, imports grew much faster than exports, while the increasing trade deficit was propped up by the import of foreign capital. This was achieved by the introduction of high

⁸⁷ In 1997 and 1998 Argentina's budget deficit amounted to 2.1%/GDP. The year after it doubled and reached 4.2%/GDP. Between 1993 and 1999 government social spending increased from 6.5% to 14.3% of GDP (Uriona 2006: 87).

⁸⁸ Following a 24%-contraction of its industry in the 1980s and a slight recovery at the beginning of the 1990s, in 1994 manufacturing jobs had reached only around 75% of the numbers of 1980 (Rock 2002: 72).

interest rates, which served the interests of both domestic and international investors.

The recession, which had ended in the socio-economic and political crash in December 2001, must be contributed to an interrelated and organically linked interplay of external and internal factors that cannot be analyzed separately (Boris 2001: 474). The high interest rates, which served the purpose of attracting foreign investment, began to push down profit rates. Wage cuts and the high levels of unemployment led to a decline in consumption and diminished both the profits of private companies and state revenues. This in turn complicated the servicing of Argentina's external debt obligations and eventually resulted in the downgrading of the country's credit rating by international rating agencies (Duménil/Lévy 2006: 5). As more and more enterprises went bankrupt, state revenues started to decline and the risk of the country's default increased in the face of a downgraded credit rating. Interest rates needed further upward adjustments, which in turn undermined the potential for an economic recovery (Boris/Malcher 2001; Uriona 2006: 87). By the end of the 1990s Argentina's economy had plunged into a prolonged deflation, "accompanied by overvaluation of the peso, a decline in real wage, a regressive income redistribution and a rapid increase in the number of people living below the poverty and food poverty lines."⁸⁹ (O'Connell 2006: 296)

In the aftermath of the crises in Southeast Asia, speculative attacks on a massive scale forced Brazil to devalue its currency in early 1999 (Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 154; Halevi 2002; Boris/Malcher 2001; Gowan 1999: 89ff; Schweickert 2002). As the devaluation boosted Brazilian exports to Argentina and simultaneously weakened the latter's export capacity to its neighbor, a growing trade deficit emerged between the two countries, which in turn increased the need for

⁸⁹ During the 1990s real wage stagnated at very low levels, and, in fact, remained 15% below the level during the 1980s (Duménil/Lévy 2006: 6; O'Connell 2006: 296.)

additional foreign capital.⁹⁰ Brazil's devaluation provoked a rapid deterioration of Argentina's external deficit, triggered primarily by increasing financial outflows in the form of interests, repatriated dividends and services (Flassbeck 2002; Halevi 2002; Geiger 2006: 93).

(4) The collapse

Following the Asian Crisis, foreign investors became increasingly cautious about doing business in 'emerging markets'. In the direct aftermath of Russia's default, interest rates on loans to the semi-periphery had become more expensive.⁹¹ The change in attitude forced Argentina to raise its interest rates even further in order to attract the necessary funds. Cheap foreign imports undermined the activities of domestic producers and propelled the stagnation of real wages and further contraction of the domestic market.⁹² The high exchange rate in combination with declining real wages eventually led to growing unemployment⁹³ (Onaran 2007). Argentina's productive sector increasingly failed to sustain the country's massive debt build-up and rising interest payments.

By early 2000 Argentina's current account deficit had swollen to an alarming extent.⁹⁴ The deficit was largely held by the private sector, which meant that the government was technically sustaining a massive private debt burden primarily provoked by foreign direct investment. At the same time, a significant amount of private sector capital was flowing out of the country. In the lead-up to the collapse

⁹⁰ In 1999 Argentina's exports to Brazil declined by 28%; exports to other countries also dropped by 10.5% in the same year (Blustein 2005: 59f).

⁹¹ Between September and October 2000 Argentina's government borrowed nearly US\$6 billion by selling dollar-denominated bonds at interest rates ranging from 11 3/8% to 12%. It borrowed another \$4 billion-plus by selling euro-denominated bonds, mostly to European retail investors, paying annual interest of 8 1/8% to 10 1/4% (Blustein 2005: 81).

⁹² Economic growth declined from 3.9% in 1998 to -3.1% the year after (Boris 2001: 474).

⁹³ In October 2000 Argentina's unemployment and underemployment rate reached 14.7% and 14.6% respectively (Uriona 2006: 86).

⁹⁴ By 2000 the current account deficit had swollen to US\$ 84.9 billion (O'Connell 2006: 297).

in 2001, the liberalization of the financial sector, which also included the removal of restrictions on money transactions, facilitated capital flight amounting to billions of US dollars (Uriona 2006: 88). The growing current account deficits and the private financial outflows contributed significantly to the country's foreign debt burden (Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 153).

Following a further downgrading of Argentina's credit rating in November 2000, the IMF released its first emergency package. The loan was partly funded by the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, domestic private banks and pension funds. Its principal purpose was to uphold the government's capability to service the country's debt obligations to the community of international creditors (MacEwan 2002). During that period, the IMF encouraged Argentina to uphold the fixed exchange rate and currency board system and to continue with the implementation of pro-market policies (Feldstein 2002: 13; Felder 2008: 190ff).

The loans were strictly tied to a set of conditions such as restrictive budgetary policies, a reform of the pension system, salary cuts of public sectors employees, a reduction of government's side payments to pensions, the privatization of the social security system, the increase of the retirement age for women to 65 years, a reduction of the state-guaranteed minimum pension, the liberalization of the health care system and a freeze of the subsidies allotted to the regions (IMF 2000; Boris 2001: 477f). The policy of domestic deflation is dictated by the IMF and the World Bank primarily for the purpose of sustaining a country's financial capacity to repay its external debt (Halevi 2002; Morazán 2002a). The emergency package had only an insignificant and relatively short-lived positive impact on Argentina's increasing socio-economic problems. It was primarily used for paying interests on existing loans and thus in effect exacerbated Argentina's overall debt burden.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ By 2001 Argentina's external debt burden had swollen to US\$142 billion. Private debt had increased about eleven times over the period 1991-2001, while public debt had grown by around 60% (Halevi 2002).

The emergency package did not represent the first meddling by the IMF in Argentina's internal affairs. Following the regional debt crisis in the early-1980s, the IMF had stepped in to provide Argentina with the necessary funds through series of loans. The latter had functioned as levers in pushing Argentina's government towards the privatization of state firms, the liberalization of foreign trade and investment and the determination of government fiscal and monetary policy during the 1980s and 1990s.

In early 2001 the spreads for the country's bonds increased once again with burdensome effects for the budget. The central bank witnessed a rapid decline of foreign exchange reserves, as more and more investors started to move money out of the country in the face of a growing trend among an increasing part of the population to convert bank accounts registered in pesos into U.S. dollars. In March 2001 the government agreed to a cut of transfer payments to the regions, a reduction of public funding for educational purposes and cutbacks in pensions and wages of public employees. In addition, the Argentine peso was pegged to a bundle of currencies based on euros and U.S. dollars. The basket would come into effect only, once the euro and the dollar traded at an equal level. This would make Argentina's exports cheaper and simultaneously imports more expensive (Boris/Malcher 2001).

In the same month a comprehensive emergency package was passed by Argentina's congress which comprised of different measures: 1) an increase of revenues through the introduction of a financial transaction tax of 0.6% and a special tax of 0.25% to increase competitiveness; 2) further cuts to government spending and 3) stimulus spending in those sectors of the country's economy that had been the hardest hit by the devaluation of the Brazilian real and a reinvigorated U.S. dollar. The stimulus measures included tax exemptions, preferential tariff concessions and favorable credits to businesses, an increase in

tariffs for consumer goods and an elimination of tariffs for investment goods (Boris 2001: 478f).

Having exhausted all options to lend on international markets, in April 2001 Argentina's government pressured some of the country's biggest banks to start buying government's bonds at unfavorable conditions below yield rates available in the market place. By the end of that same year loans to the public sector made by private banks would amount to 27% of the bank's assets. This implied the potential risk of a series of bank defaults, if those bonds suddenly lost their value, which in turn increased fears of mass withdrawals of the funds held by private depositors (Blustein 2005: 166).

In a further step to prevent an increasingly likely financial collapse, in June 2001 Argentina participated in a series of debt swaps with its international creditors. In essence, Argentina's debt was repackaged into new loans with longer terms and higher interests rates based on the prospects of an economic recovery and the resumption of strong growth. This, in effect however, signified a medium-term increase of Argentina's overall debt burden.

During the same month Argentina's government further stepped up its economic emergency measures by passing a 'zero-deficit law'. The law essentially included wage and pension cuts for public employees and public pensions of 13%, alongside reductions in social spending on health and public reform and transfer payments to the regions (Boris 2001: 481). The public wage cuts subsequently also triggered a reduction of wages in the private sector. Altogether the cuts deepened the recession and led to a further decline in consumption and state revenues. The implementation of fiscal austerity and the 'zero-deficit law' further drove the country into recession, as the reduced overall demand significantly increased the budget deficit. (Blustein 2005: 136ff). Furthermore, it provoked

increasing social polarization, capital flight⁹⁶ and escalating social protest, in particular organized by the piqueteros movement and radicalized trade unions.

In July 2001 the crisis intensified, as spreads on Argentina's bonds soared further to unprecedented levels.⁹⁷ The month after, the IMF granted Argentina a second emergency loan, intended to stave off the collapse of the country's banking system. In retrospect, the primary objective of the IMF's anti-crisis program for Argentina was to preserve the interests of the international financial markets by keeping the country's artificially alive through the injections of fresh funds. Tight budgets and discipline in public spending called for by the IMF additionally curtailed the potential of the Argentine government to eventually resort to expansionary Keynesian policies. Austerity ultimately increased the hardship of the population and institutionalized a neoliberal conception of statehood (Becker 2004).

In the face of increasing bank runs, Argentina's government imposed a general ban on further account withdrawals in December 2001.⁹⁸ The step was meant to prevent the central bank's full depletion of foreign exchange reserves, which would have forced a devaluation of the peso. The freeze on bank deposits was an "unmistakable instrument of expropriation" (Becerra et al. 2002; see Halevi 2002; Svampa 2008; Katz 2002), as it disproportionately affected Argentina's working population. In tandem with even harsher austerity measures pushed through by the government under the watchful eye of the IMF and the U.S. Treasury Department, and supply shortages, the ban of withdrawals intensified social protest. Popular grievances eventually culminated in the mass demonstrations of December 19 and 20, 2001 that led to the ousting of president De la Rúa (1999-2001) (see Blustein 2005: 175; Becker 2004; Situaciones Colectivo 2003; Halevi 2002; Boris/Malcher

⁹⁶ Capital flight amounted to an estimated US\$ 20 billion in 2001 and remained high in 2002 (Becerra et al. 2002; Blustein 2005: xix).

⁹⁷ In July 2001 Argentina's three-month treasury bills hiked from 9 to 14% (Halevi 2002).

⁹⁸ Between February and November 2001 bank deposits collapsed by 28% (O'Connell 2006: 305).

2005; Lewis 2002; González 2003). At the time of Argentina's default, the country's debt burden had become unsustainable; bankruptcies multiplied and poverty reached unprecedented levels.⁹⁹ The social protests that erupted in the wake of Argentina's collapse were based on a broader class consensus that during the 1990s. Sections of the middle class had joined the unemployed and underemployed and so contributed to the formation of a temporary class consensus (Sitrin 2006: 5; Petras 2004).

Argentina's collapse in late 2001 marked the endpoint of a longstanding vicious downward spiral driven by the dynamics of recession, public debt and high interest rates (Becerra et al. 2002). Ultimately, the breakdown of a system based on foreign debt repayments through the injection of increasingly more expensive new loans became inevitable. Following the default, in early 2002 Argentina was forced to reverse its neoliberal strategy of dollarization, to devalue its local currency and to partially cancel its public debt¹⁰⁰ (Becker 2004; Wolff 2003). In the first quarter of 2002 the economy contracted by 16.3%. The official poverty rate climbed to around 55% compared to 22% in 1994. Unemployment jumped to a record of 23-25% (Rock 2002: 55f; Levitsky/Murillo 2003: 155; Boris/Malcher 2005: 131; Hershberg 2002: 30; Lucita 2005; Sitrin 2006: 9). The recession and the crisis had led to a sharp decline in investment and to the destruction of thousands of small enterprises (Morazán 2004: 6).

⁹⁹ In December 2001 after four years of recession, Argentina's federal and provincial government debts amounted to US\$ 155 billion. 90% of the debt was in U.S. dollars and half was held by national creditors such as banks, pension funds and insurance companies (Economistas de Izquierda 2004; Boris/Malcher 2001). Per capital income had declined by 14% since 1998 (Macewan 2002). In November 2001, one month before the collapse, the poverty level had reached 14 million people of which 6 million lived in extreme poverty (Morazán 2004: 6). In October 2001 unemployment and underemployment had jumped to 18.3% and 16.3% and, following the country's economic collapse, both rates eventually climbed up to 21.5% and 18.6% (Uriona 2006: 86).

¹⁰⁰ The run on the banks and the devaluation of the peso had a catastrophic impact on Argentina's financial sector. Yet, at the same time it favorably stimulated output and employment, which both began to increase in early 2004.

The crisis scenario did not significantly differ from that of other countries in the region and around the world during the 1990s. In fact, it followed the same neoliberal pattern of other crises such as Mexico (1995), South East Asia (1997), Russia, Turkey and Brazil (1998). The liberalization of the financial sector increased the influx of foreign capital, which in turn boosted demand and economic expansion. Government revenues soared and prices remained stable. The abundance of foreign exchange and the overvalued exchange rate subsequently led to an increase in imports which in conjunction with decreasing exports provoked current account deficits and increased foreign debt obligations (Pastor/Wise 1999). Lower exchange rates on international markets discouraged Argentina's companies to fund themselves domestically. The liberalization of financial flows and the availability of cheap foreign exchange encouraged local investors to shift a significant share of their portfolio investment into foreign capital markets. Employment declined, as cheap capital goods imports substituted labor.

At that point, Argentina saw itself confronted with growing current account deficits and a ballooning external debt. As the situation increasingly became unsustainable, international financial markets started to call the country's credit ratings into question. Bond spreads spiked and foreign capital injections started to dry up rapidly. Increasing borrowing costs forced the country into recession, which in turn provoked a further decline in government revenues. At the same time, foreign debt obligations became unsustainable, as interest rates continued to rise and capital flows were further rationed. At this stage, the country was forced to implement a package of macroeconomic adjustment policies prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank in order to prevent an immediate debt default O'Connell (2003: 303).

The neoliberal economic model based on the constant inflow of foreign capital turned out to be illusionary, as unemployment did not decrease and high-value

exports failed to generate the necessary funds. This scenario deepened the government's deficits and ultimately rendered debt repayment unsustainable (Schvarzer 2002). In addition, the currency-board system and the convertibility law exacerbated the problems, as they stifled exports and prevented the government to resort to expansionary spending and exchange rate policies at the onset of the recession (Fanelli 2002). High exchange rates also provoked the import of foreign goods and simultaneously hampered the efforts of domestic exporters. Following the devaluation of the real, the overvaluation of the peso in combination with the reduced Brazilian demand for Argentinean products and the simultaneous increase of Brazilian exports; the fall of world market prices for Argentina's most important agricultural exports and the U.S. boom had significantly contributed to Argentina's recession in 1998.

Declining revenues reduced the state's ability to service the country's foreign debt which on the one hand impacted negatively on Argentina's credit rating on international financial markets and on the other increased the interests of old and new bonds. The pro-cyclical austerity measures further deepened the recession, which in turn diminished the incoming revenues. The government's strategy for overcoming the crisis by primarily focusing on austerity measures pushed onto the population and the continuation of foreign debt servicing through borrowing from international creditors¹⁰¹ (Boris 2001: 47M; Rock 2002).

¹⁰¹ In contrary, neoliberal scholars (Feldstein 2002: 12; Blustein 2005: 6) along with the IMF and the World Bank (IMF 2000) argued that an overvalued exchange rate and Argentina's massive foreign debt were at the root of the country's collapse. Government's fiscal mismanagement and a regulated and inflexible labor market had ultimately rendered the convertibility law ineffective. The system of fixed exchange rates had from the outset precluded any effort to increase competitiveness by the orthodox means of currency devaluation. Consequently, it was the unwillingness of trade unions to accept lower wages, which significantly contributed to Argentina's increasing uncompetitiveness and rising current-account deficits. In addition, it was "the disjunction between convertibility and the policies required to nurture and ensure its viability – in particular fiscal policy," (Blustein 2005: 196ff) that paved the way towards Argentina's disaster.

Argentina's collapse was a profound crisis of hegemony within the national context (Svampa 2006a). It radically called into question the hegemonic neoliberal consensus and brought to light the intimate links between domestic elites and transnational financial capital (Molina 1999). The default owed much "to the strategy adopted by ruling classes of this country to insert themselves favorably within the new global capitalist economy." (Duménil/Lévy 2006: 1; see Economistas de Izquierda 2004) While national and international investors emerged as usurers in the wake of Argentina's default, the IMF exercised a determining role as the debt collector in the sense that its main concern was the maintenance of the country's liquidity in order to satisfy the demands of international creditors (Economistas de Izquierda 2004; Gowan 1999: 31; Boris/Malcher 2001; Bieler/Morton 2004: 96).

Argentina's inherent structural contradictions were only deepened by the implementation of neoliberal policies during the Menem presidencies through the weakening of the industrial and technological-scientific foundation, which reduced future prospects of increasing export capacities; the emergence of private monopolies and oligopolies in relation to the wave of privatizations; the rise of productivity through increasing rationalization of production and the rise of structural employment associated with it; social polarization with regards to poverty levels, crime and suicide rates and emigration; and the currency board system that favored money and property owners and export/import capital and thus significantly weakened the potential of a more homogenous development of the country (Dullien 2002; Svampa 2008; Boris 2001: 483, Apertura Colectiva 2010: 13).

VI The emancipatory potential and the limitations of Argentina's recuperated workplaces

1. The emancipatory potential

The overall purpose of emancipation is the abolishment of all social conditions that reduce human beings to humiliated and enslaved creatures. Marx wrote;

Every emancipation is a *restoration* of the human world and of human relationships to man himself. Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as social powers so that he no longer separated his social power from himself as political power. (Marx/Engels 1978: 46)

In the struggle over human emancipation, Gramsci (1980: 115f) distinguished three phases: 1) the elemental-corporatist phase in which the resistance to capitalism ignites in factories, or more generally, in the workplace; 2) a frontal attack by the workers with the purpose to gain control over the means of production and 3) the struggle over the abolishment of capitalism and its replacement by a process of socialization. Critical here is the transition of the workers' struggle from the elemental-corporatist stage to the second phase focused on the takeover of the means of production. If such a transition fails then, the workers are likely to be incorporated and absorbed into the social power structure of the state. This is precisely what happened in Argentina during the Peronist era, in which large parts of the working population were integrated in the regime both through repression and cooptation.

Turning now back to Argentina's recuperated enterprises, despite all their differences, they share a common ground that is nurtured by solidarity among the workers and towards their broader social environment, democratic participation in decision making and the collective ownership of the recuperated plants. It is the practical application of these principles, where the emancipatory potential of Argentina's initiatives of workers' control needs to be identified (Bauni & Fajn, 2010: 19).

a. Solidarity and collective consciousness

In Argentina's recuperated enterprises, solidarity finds expression in egalitarian compensation schemas and the workers' support towards a wide range of community initiatives and social struggles. There exists a strong correlation between the intensity of the workers' struggle during the occupation and the recuperation and the subsequent solidarity-based, democratic and collective organization of production (Fajn 2004). A basic characteristic of Argentina's recuperated enterprises is that the latter obtain the resources necessary for the production of goods or the provision of services in the market place, yet it prioritizes the promotion of work over capital in the distribution of profits made.

In concrete terms of remuneration, the recuperated enterprises replaced traditional salaries by a collectively determined system of profit distribution, which reflects the workers' decision to either share the profits equally or to establish a specific payment scheme according to the workers' needs. (Geiger 2006: 97; Raimbeau 2005)- Certain expenses such as managerial wages, bonuses, consultant fees, travel costs, commissions etc. that in many cases had considerably contributed to the bankruptcy of companies have no longer become necessary under the new organizational structures of the worker-controlled enterprises. As by 2010, 56% of Argentina's recuperated enterprises had established schemes of egalitarian

distribution of profits between the workers. The principal criterion for the introduction of egalitarian salaries was the amount of working hours. In 2010, 56% of the recuperated enterprises had established their payment scheme on this very criterion. In more than half of enterprises that opted for discriminatory systems the ration between the highest and the lowest salaries was less than 25% (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 55f).

In many enterprises a discriminatory remuneration system gradually emerged, which incorporated particular aspects such as distinct functions, qualifications, experience, number of children, responsibility and seniority. However, Argentina's recuperated workplaces still distinguish themselves from traditional capitalist companies through the absence of stark stratifications between workers, as in many cases limits on maximum ratios between the lowest and the highest salaries were introduced (Bauni/Fajn 2010: 28; Rebón/Salgado 2010: 189; La Vaca Collective 2007: 381; Sekler 2009: 64).

In addition, through the implementation of flexible rotation schemes workers began to perform more tasks than during the time of traditional employment.¹⁰² This increased the workers' responsibilities over the different steps of the production process and simultaneously instilled a feeling of participation, ownership and freedom (Costa 2010: 119). The organizational changes within the recuperated workplaces also transformed the previously utilized mechanisms of control. Rather than by coercion and surveillance, the workers resorted to consensual forms of persuasion and dialogue once a disciplinary code of conduct had been collectively agreed upon (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 196).

¹⁰² Since the resumption of production, 53% of all recuperated enterprises have modified different aspect of their production process such as the introduction of new machinery and the reorganization of the workers' tasks and functions within the factory. As of 2010, 70% have implemented work rotations (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 54).

From the onset, solidarity between the different recuperated enterprises had been of major significance. Even though support was provided by a wide range of sociopolitical actors, it were primarily other recuperated enterprises (68.2%), which demonstrated active solidarity during the process of recuperation. Other actors included national, provincial and municipal governments (64.7%), local communities (41.2%), trade unions (34.1%) and political parties/social movements (20%). Universities, customers/suppliers (both 7.1%) and attorneys (2.4%) played a rather insignificant role. Interestingly, the amount of assistance provided by trade unions has increased considerably since 2005 (64.7%) (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 20f).

The workers have further taken a supportive stance towards society by extending the solidarity amongst themselves towards their communities for the help they had received from the latter against repression by the police, the judicial system and the former owners of the enterprises. 57% of the recuperated enterprises maintained to have engaged in different types of solidarity-based, educational and cultural activities, which included donations to local communities for the construction of schools, canteens, social centers; the establishment of radio stations¹⁰³, educational installations¹⁰⁴, cultural centers and archives¹⁰⁵ within the recuperated premises; and collaborations with different public universities (ibid: 79). In sum, the establishment of close relations to the proximate social environment, other recuperated workplaces and to different social movements has turned out to be absolutely essential for securing the survival of the recuperated enterprises.

¹⁰³ In particular, the workers of Zanón have been very active in running radio programs on the stations of Radio CALF and Radio Fm Alas. For details see:

<http://www.obrerosdezanon.com.ar/html/index1.html>

¹⁰⁴ In this context the Cooperativa de Educadores e Investigadores Populares (CEIP) has emerged as an important initiative in the provision of political-popular education based on the experiences and the struggle of the workers.

¹⁰⁵ The most distinguished archive which has been documenting the history of Argentina's recuperated workplaces is the *Centro de Documentación de Empresas Recuperadas del Programa Facultad Abierta, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)*, which has its office within the premises of the Chilavert cooperative in Buenos Aires.

b. Participatory democracy in the workplace

In Argentina's recuperated enterprises, democracy is primarily defined in terms of liberty and popular sovereignty. Liberty encompasses freedom of thought, expression and association and goes beyond the narrow concept of liberal freedom to make choices in the marketplace. Popular sovereignty is related to accountability of power and assures that the popular will is being expressed through different elected actors and institutions. It was the equal participation of workers in decisions concerning the enterprise, autonomous design and organization of the workplace and the creation of horizontal relationships with other recuperated, worker-run enterprises that further contributed to the growing appeal of the workplace recuperations (Boris 2005a: 280; Rebón/Salgado 2010: 189; Sitrin 2006: 3).

In concrete terms, workers' participation is firmly rooted in the idea of democratic and equal, i.e. one man/woman - one vote, decision-making. The overall objective is to create even distribution of power between workers and to establish democratic control within the enterprise (Apetura Colectiva 2010: 13; Auinger 2009; Costa 2010: 121). The removal of top management representing the interests of capital enabled the development of democratic processes within the sphere of production. All previously existing limits to workers' participation in terms of management, planning and organization were redefined in such a way that Argentina's recuperated enterprises became regarded as "bodies of direct democracy of workers" (Sanmatrino 2003; see Haipeter 2003; Demirovic 2007: 9ff). The disposition to participate in the decision making on part of the workers is highly dependent on their level of education, in particular, the personal knowledge and understanding of the historical evolution of social structures and the power relations therein (Hafner, 2009: 54).

For the practical realization of democratic participation the organizational structures of the recuperated enterprise needed to be rooted in regular assemblies and democratically elected and accountable intra-company organs. In almost all of Argentina's recuperated enterprises the assembly is the highest decision-making organ. It provides the workers with a space and opportunity to discuss relevant day-to-day issues such as legal and political tactics, financial and organizational matters or solidarity campaigns in favor of their local communities and other recuperated workplaces. The discussion among the workers becomes a mutual truth-seeking activity in which individual participation directly influences the future operations of the collective (Gramsci 1919).

Critical here, is the idea of abolishing asymmetries in the access and flow of information, which is required for the equal distribution of voting power. In contrast to capitalist enterprises the flow of information and instructions is being inverted, i.e. workers receive information from an elected operative body. Following a process of democratic decision-making amongst all the members specific targets are being defined and clear instructions are given for the implementation by the managing organs (Auinger 2009 11).

For timesaving purposes, however, many enterprises under workers' control witnessed the creation of democratically elected representative councils, operational committees or workers' delegations, which reduced the relevance and frequency of assembly meetings¹⁰⁶ (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 196). Councils, committees and delegations function as operative organs aimed at a more flexible and less time-consuming management of day-to-day organizational matters. The

¹⁰⁶ Nearly a third of Argentina's recuperated enterprises prioritize the general assembly over the administrative council in their decision making. A total of 88% convene a general assembly at least once a month, 44% get together even on a weekly basis (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 47f).

creation of such representative organs implies the potential risk of the formation of some sort of hierarchy of experts.

The rotation of duties and tasks among the workers, both at the management and production level, and the socialization of knowledge were implemented as widely effective antidotes (Harley 2005; Ginits et al. 2005; Auinger 2007: 22; Korol 2005: 23). In particular, educational programs, workshops and trainings have facilitated and offset arising tendencies of potentially unequal distribution of knowledge. The creation of job complexes is another effective way to counter the emergence of intra-enterprise hierarchy. By abolishing a strict division of the production process workers jointly and alternately take on a combination of different tasks and responsibilities and thus simultaneously and equally distribute operative and coordinative activities.

c. Collective ownership and new subjectivity

The workers' struggle over the control of the means of production is the struggle over the "ultimate resource on which political power rests." (Cox 1977: 387) With respect to the legal status of the recuperated workplaces, contradictions arise between property rights and the right to work and between individual and collective rights. By prioritizing the right to work over the right to private property, factory occupations and workers' self-management have radically questioned one of the fundamental pillars of the social relations under capitalism (Bierhoff 2008). Collective ownership and self-management of production and administration gave birth to a new form of workers' subjectivity in the sense that the autonomous and collective organization by the workers transcended post-Fordist production methods through its focus on self-experimentation and self-determination (Harman 2002a; Peter 2003; see Demirovic 2007: 169ff). It was the workers' attempt to reverse Taylorist methods of production, aimed at the

meticulous planning and the rigorous control of every movement and every moment of the working process. Workers' self-management demonstrated the potential to encourage the comprehensive utilization and integration of the worker's skills into the operations of the collectively run enterprise (Moldaschl/Weber 2009: 95; Sanmartino 2003).

2. Main obstacles and limitations

Following the recuperation of the premises, the majority of Argentina's worker-controlled enterprises were confronted with an adverse and obstacle-ridden environment that served as a rather unfavorable point of departure for the resumption of production. The main external obstacles workers had to deal with were the lack of available capital, the aggravated conditions of access to bank loans, the uncertain legal status, the absence of macroeconomic policies and significant legalization in favor of workplace recuperations and the competitive pressure from traditional capitalist enterprises within the marketplace (Ruggeri 2010; Programa Facultad Abierta 2010; Fajn 2004).

Internally, the principal challenges were antiquated, and in part, completely outdated machinery and technology, the unwieldiness of the decision-making process, the dynamics of group formation, the development of systems, which regulated the fair distribution of ownership and profits among the workers, the equitable differentiation of incomes and the hiring and incorporation of new workers¹⁰⁷ (Moldaschl/Weber 2009: 97f; Bauni/Fajn 2010: 24; Kabat 365f; Ruggeri 2009a: 50ff) The following analysis will discuss three centers of gravity

¹⁰⁷ In terms of the hiring of new employees the recuperated enterprises tend to prioritize workers' family members or former workers that had been laid off during Argentina's crisis (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 198).

towards which most obstacles and limitations of Argentina's recuperated workplaces can be linked.

a. The dilemma with the state

In relation to the state, workers' control is faced with a two fold dilemma. If the workers decided to opt for an autonomous struggle by completely ignoring the role of the state their actions are likely to remain limited to the local level. This involves the potential risk of either outright failure due to the lack of adequate legislation and the necessary funding or the incorporation of the workers' initiatives into the existing power structures. If the workers' struggle on the other hand is focused on the collaboration with the state, it will eventually see itself confronted with a similar threat of government cooptation aimed at undermining the potentialities of subordinate, antagonistic projects (Leubolt/Auinger 2006: 44).

Argentina's recuperated workplaces are consequently forced to determine the appropriate fix between a certain necessity of a strategic cooperation with the state in terms of legalization and fundraising and the permanent risk of the state's cooptation and the subsequent incorporation of the transformative potential into the established order. Given the existing need for legal and financial support, the workers have to assure that their strategic and inevitable cooperation with the state apparatus does not turn a transformation from below into a transformation from above. The strategy of the autonomous wing of the workers' movement is thus not oriented towards the overthrow of the capitalist state and the seizure of political power, but towards gaining autonomy from the state, trade unions, political parties, the church, etc. Its focus is ultimately the emancipation of society through the creation of parallel social structures and counter-hegemonic forms of organization (Sanmartino 2003; Lucita 2005).

From the outset, Argentina's government had demonstrated a general unwillingness to genuinely strengthen solidarity-based socio-economic models like the recuperated factories. In concrete terms, the enterprises have struggled with a variety of adverse obstacles in relation to the state, such as the overall legal framework for recuperated enterprises, i.e. the introduction of a federal law of expropriation in favor of the workers and a revised bankruptcy law¹⁰⁸; the public system of social security and technical assistance and macroeconomic policies (La Vaca Collective 2007: 36).

i. The legal framework

Practically from the outset, the recuperated enterprises were divided over the issue of their legal status. The debate centered on the question whether they should pursue a strategy of nationalization under worker's control or whether they should be turned into cooperatives. The call for nationalization under the control of the workers has largely fallen on deaf ears on the part of the state, which on the one hand is anxious to contain the radical elements of the movement and on the other to co-opt and to integrate the reformist segments in the pursuit of maintaining existing property relations.

For many recuperated enterprises the legal status as cooperatives served primarily as a pragmatic option, as it allowed them to operate and produce within a legal framework (Raimbeau 2005; Petras 2004; Kabat 2011: 366). It simultaneously permitted the workers to temporarily continue with production, to present themselves as plaintiffs in expropriation cases, to apply and receive public

¹⁰⁸ Argentina's bankruptcy law (Ley de Quiebras) dates back to 1995 and "puts workers at a severe disadvantage, their claims coming after the debts owned the banks and providers by the closed enterprise. A factory bankruptcy traditionally is tilted to favor the previous owners, the creditors, and the court-appointed trustees that seek to move toward bankruptcy in order to attain their healthy commissions." (Ranis 2010: 85)

subsidies and to legally engage in commercial activities. In 2004, 95.3% of the recuperated enterprises were officially registered as workers' cooperatives. This number has largely remained unchanged since then (Ruggeri 2010; Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 22).

The demands for the passing of a national law, which would permit the definite expropriation of the recuperated enterprises has thus far not received much of support from the federal and regional governments. By 2010, 63% of Argentina's recuperated enterprises were expropriated in favor of the workers, while 5% of all enterprises still remain under occupation. However, in only 19% of expropriation cases the decisions were definite. Again, the particular context in the immediate aftermath of the country's meltdown had a significant impact on expropriations, as almost half of all cases occurred during the period 2002-2004 (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 23).

Given the present legal situation, the recuperated enterprises are faced with the permanent legal insecurity in which the issuing of evictions orders could abruptly see the end of the plants following the expiry of the temporary handing over of the latter by local or federal authorities. Such a move would allow the selling or the auctioning off of the remaining means of production and thus satisfy the interests of the national and international creditors. The absence of federal expropriation and bankruptcy laws in favor of Argentina's workers considerably determined the outcome of the legal battles that were fought over the recuperated plants (Ranis 2010: 79). In many cases the former owners profited from the expropriation of the enterprises as the workers ended up paying more than the actual value of the property in the auctions (Geiger 2006: 99). The picture deteriorates further considering that in some cases the machinery was antiquated and, in part, defective.

ii. Social security

Under Argentine law, members of cooperatives are being classified as autonomous workers.¹⁰⁹ In terms of social security, the law forces the workers of recuperated enterprises to monthly, single-payer contributions.¹¹⁰ Under the current system, workers in cooperatives do not enjoy the same benefits as those employed in traditional capitalist companies. The former are only entitled to pension claims and community works, in particular public housing benefits. The single-payer system further denies access to family allowances for marriages, births, adoptions and annual school support and the universal system of child allowances. In addition, many workers of the recuperated plants, who are close to retirement do not count with the required years of insurance or were forced into lower categories of pension payments following their categorization as autonomous workers. This in turn obliges them to continue working beyond retirement age (Calderón et al. 2009; Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 66).

Moreover, it proved to be difficult for workers above the age of 65 to buy an affordable insurance policy for accidents at work. Under Argentina's law 24557, recuperated enterprises are not permitted to get collective insurance plans for occurring risks at work. It is the individual workers themselves who have to get insurance coverage, as the relationship between the workers and the cooperative is that of a loose association rather than of traditional employer-employee dependency. In fact, Argentina's 'Sistema de Riesgo de Trabajo' merely provides protection for such cases. If a worker falls ill, the individual insurance does not include the continuation of salary payments, which in turn forces the rest of the workers to redistribute the new workload in order not to risk a decline in the

¹⁰⁹ Law 20337/73 regulates the activities of cooperatives.

¹¹⁰ The rules for access of social security for workers of cooperatives are laid out in the regulations 18392 INAL, 784/92 ANSES and 619/99 AFIP.

overall productivity. As the single-payer system only provides basic medical services, workers are further obliged to pay into additional private health insurance plans (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 65ff).

iii. Subsidies, technical assistance and macroeconomic policies

As the case of Venezuela's workers' cooperatives demonstrated, financial support provided by the state played a vital role in ultimately determining the sustainability of enterprises under workers' control (Arps/Zelik 2006: 130). To the present day, Argentina's federal government has not come up with a coherent set of policy towards the increasing number of self-managed and worker-operated enterprises (Ruggeri 2009a: 82ff). Macroeconomic policies in favor of workers' control would provide a necessary framework for micro-economic initiatives based on solidarity and democratic participation (Alvater 2006: 14).

Even though 85% of Argentina's recuperated enterprises have received some form of public subsidy, primarily from the Ministry of Labor, INAES, the Ministry of Social Development and the government of Buenos Aires, the relationship between both the federal, provincial and municipal authorities and the recuperated enterprises is predominantly marked by fragmentation and contradiction (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 70ff). The inability on the part of the recuperated enterprises to fulfill the necessary requirements under the existing precarious legal framework is often taken as a pretext by the authorities at all administrative levels to justify the withholding of similar benefits granted to traditional enterprises, i.e. the facilitated access to credit, increased subsidies, etc. This strategy ultimately forces many recuperated factories into a deadlock state of mere subsistence.

b. The dilemma with the market

Two major potential risks to workers' self-management are the issues of the workers' auto-exploitation and the reproduction of the capitalist logical of production within the existing market economy (Gambina 2003; Kabat 2011: 365). In the past, workers often tried to offset their competitive technological and, in part, organizational disadvantage by increasing the overall workload. The dilemma of potential self-exploitation is aptly described by Luxemburg (1900) in the following central paragraph:

(...) In capitalist economy exchanges dominate production. As a result of competition, the complete domination of the process of production by the interests of capital – that is, pitiless exploitation – becomes a condition for the survival of each enterprise. The domination of capital over the process of production expresses itself in the following ways. Labour is intensified. The work day is lengthened or shortened, according to the situation of the market. And, depending on the requirements of the market, labour is either employed or thrown back into the street. In other words, use is made of all methods that enable an enterprise to stand up against its competitors in the market. The workers forming a co-operative in the field of production are thus faced with the contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur – a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production co-operatives which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving.

As in capitalism, production is determined by exchange and competition, the exploitation of the workers becomes a prerequisite for a company's survival and its viability in the marketplace. In the case of the recuperated enterprises, market forces obliged them to become capitalists themselves. The removal of their former bosses did not simultaneously free the workers from the coercion that is exercised by other competitors (Sanmartino 2003). To overcome the dominance of exchange over the sphere of production would require the recuperated companies

to artificially escape the claws of free competition. This can ultimately only be achieved through the successful establishment of a system of consumer-producer networks between different solidarity-based enterprises, i.e. the creation of a parallel market structure (Sekler 2009: 64). This, however, ties the fate of the producers to that of consumers, which in turn tends to limit production to the satisfaction of the most immediate social needs within a local context. Luxemburg (1900) thus concluded that “cooperatives in the field of production cannot be seriously considered as the instruments of a general social transformation.”

The average working day in Argentina’s recuperated enterprises in 2010 lasted 8.6 hours (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2010: 55). Such a figure would, in fact, contrast Luxemburg’s argument. However, the potential risk of self-exploitation as a result of the coercive market forces remains a ubiquitous threat; in particular, as many Argentina’s recuperated enterprises are still closely linked to traditional capital companies and thus remain deeply integrated in valorization chains.

Nearly half of all recuperated plants operate as subcontractors for other capitalist firms. While large companies (46.9%), small and medium-sized enterprises (45.7%) and monopolistic firms (33.3%) function as the main supplies to recuperated enterprises, similar worker-run initiatives play a rather minor role (16%). In terms of the clients, the picture presents itself quite similar. Large companies (39.5%) turn out to be the primary customers followed by the general public (38.3%) and small and medium-sized firms (37%). Only 13.6% of the total output is being directly sold to other recuperated enterprises (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 35ff). Another great obstacle related to the capitalist market is the recuperation of production. In 2010, 59% of all recuperated enterprises successfully recovered 20-60% of the original production levels. The main obstacles for increasing overall output turned out to be the difficulties entering the

market (52.2%), lack of capital (25.4%), antiquated and inadequate machinery (17.9%)¹¹¹ and lack of raw materials (16.4%) (ibid: 30f).

The capitalist market forces the recuperated enterprises to create certain administrative, commercial and organizational functions typically found in traditional capitalist companies that hamper the workers' endeavors to construct democratic structures within the enterprise. In terms of the organization of the labor process, i.e. the relationship between the worker and machinery, equipment, technology and other materials that enter the transformative process of production, the fragmentation of work steps and the repetition of particular identical operations, Argentina's recuperated enterprises actually differ very little from traditional capitalist companies (Bauni/Fajn 2010: 20; Rebón/Salgado 2010: 198). The use of certain technologies restricts the possibilities of the workers to reorganize the labor process in such way that it actually reflects essential organizational and social changes within the enterprise (Costa 2010: 118).

Following more than a decade of workers' struggle and the day-to-day experience in self-management in industrial sector within Argentina's economy, has hitherto experienced a significant shift towards the establishment of autonomous and solidarity-based structures. The majority of the worker-run companies have remained small- and medium-size enterprises of mainly local relevance and with a limited market share in their particular economic sector (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 189).

¹¹¹ Simultaneously, 70.8% of all recuperated enterprises maintained that their installations and machinery were in good conditions. Only 20% had received public subsidies for the purchase of new machinery (Programa Facultad Abierta 2010: 32).

c. Self-help myopia

Historically, the prime objective of worker self-management has not been the creation of democratic economic structures but rather the satisfaction of basic needs and the improvement of material protection on the part of the workers. (Ruggeri 2010; Flieger 2006: 57; Fajn 2004; Sekler 2009: 63; Voß 2008). In this respect, the Argentine case was no exception as the recuperated enterprises primarily emerged as a form “collective crisis-management” (Auinger 2009: 9). The actions of the workers should therefore not be equated with the aspirations of working class emancipation and the radical criticism of capitalism. In the majority of cases, Zanón is the most significant exception; the occupation of the premises and the subsequent appropriation of the means of production did not arise out of a particular anti-capitalist ideology or class consciousness shared by all the workers (Rebón 2004: 10; Petras 2004; Ranis 2010: 88f).

In the face of increasingly worsening socio-economic conditions, the prime objective of the occupation and the subsequent resumption of production was the protection of the means of production and the maintenance of the source of employment (Gambina 2003; Korol 2005: 34ff). In that sense, the actions taken by the unemployed workers such as the occupation of the workplaces, the resistance to repression and eviction orders and the subsequent resumption of production under their control, had from the outset a defensive character, as the workers were literally engaged in the physical struggle over the defense of their employment. Moreover;

From the standpoint of the subordinated and oppressed, the very existence of the state, an apparatus of class domination, is a fact of violence. (...) In this strict sense, the use of force by the oppressed against the ruling class and its state is always ultimately ‘defensive’. (...) From the radical-emancipatory perspective, one should turn it around: for the oppressed,

violence is always legitimate – since their very status is the result of violence. (Žižek 2010: 88f)

The actions were primarily self-help emergency measures taken against the backdrop of a deteriorating socio-economic context and a discredited political system that was widely perceived as corrupt and criminal. The breach of law that occurred with the occupation of the workplaces and the appropriation of the means of production during the height of Argentina's crisis was widely regarded by the workers themselves as a legitimate act¹¹² of self-defense (Fajn et al. 2003: 102; Altvater, 2007: 29).

The adoption of entrepreneurial and rent-seeking attitudes by the workers in the majority of recuperated factories, i.e. a form of “neoliberalism from below” (Altvater 2000; 2008a: 17), in many cases had a rather stabilizing effect on Argentina's post-crisis context (Lina 2007, Menezes 2007). By encouraging myopic self-help practices in a situation of crisis, most of the workers in a certain sense *ex-post* legitimized the dismantlement of the welfare state under the Menem administration and simultaneously, at least in part, undermined the potential of a more radical transformation of Argentina's society following the country's most severe economic downturn in its history (Schlosser/Zeuner 2006: 32).

On the other hand, it may be argued the considerable strength of social movements in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis played a vital role in the maintenance of the most needed social welfare programmes, the implementation of redistributive policies and the strengthening of Argentina's stance in the negotiations about debt restructuring with the IMF and the community of international creditors. Workers' control, however, undeniably bears some potential risk to replace public welfare services and state-run poverty

¹¹² 92% of the workers occupying the former workplaces only regarded their acts as legitimate in the face of the management's unwillingness to pay the outstanding wages (Rebón 2004: 10).

reduction programs and thus to prepare the ground for the further expansion of the finance-led capitalization and commodification of social life.

Self-help myopia, entrepreneurial attitudes and the lack of class consciousness are also at the core of Oppenheimer's 'law of transformation', which may potentially undermine the emancipatory characteristics of Argentina's recuperated enterprises. In 1896 Oppenheimer had claimed that, as economically successful enterprises under workers' self-management grow bigger, they would give up on their horizontal form of organization and their principles of democracy and solidarity and convert themselves into traditional capitalist enterprises. Unsuccessful cooperatives on the other hand would merely remain means of collective self-help and crisis management in the face of unemployment and economic hardship.

3. Prospects for future expansion

During Argentina's post-crisis era the number of self-controlled, recuperated companies increased from 161 in 2004 to 205 in 2010 (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2010: 7). The conditions that nurtured such a development were significantly marked by the lack of viable alternatives given Argentina's structural un- and underemployment¹¹³ stemming from increasing foreign competition and the general development of the productive forces. In addition, the workers' ten-year experience in their struggle coupled with the economic viability of most recuperated plants shaped public awareness and positively influenced other workplace recuperations.

¹¹³ Argentina's official unemployment rate dropped from 14% in 2004/1 to 7.5% in 2010/4. During the same period underemployment declined from 15.5 to 10% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de República de Argentina, 2011.)

The general prospects for a future expansion of workers' control in Argentina will on the one hand depend on a set of favorable socio-economic and political circumstances and on the other on the workers' capacity to continue and to advance their struggle, both in terms of its material-institutional foundation and an ideological-cultural formation. The structural limits, contradictions and the increasing tendency towards crisis formation inherent in the post-Fordist model of accumulation are likely to intensify popular resistance in the near future and to encourage the search for alternative forms of socio-economic and political praxis.

Deteriorating socio-economic conditions would most likely provoke a new wave of factory occupations, nationwide general strikes and intensified popular protest. Such a scenario might open up new possibilities for the construction of a participatory democratic society under workers' control. These sort of changes in the relations of industrial production and ownership seen in Argentina's recuperated enterprises need to be accompanied by other structural and comprehensive transformations of society and the political system: 1) an agricultural revolution which increases overall food production and reduces the dependency on foreign imports; 2) a policy of egalitarian incomes which results in the creation of a mass market of simple goods and food; 3) an industrial policy directed towards the production of necessary inputs for agriculture and simple manufactured goods to satisfy the mass demand; 4) regional cooperation between countries in the South; 5) a cultural revolution in consciousness and thinking (Cox 1979: 295).

Further progress in Argentina's socio-economic and political transformation will also heavily depend on the institutionalization of different initiatives that are critical of neoliberal orthodoxy and oriented towards the democratization of society and the construction of a viable counter-hegemonic project. One of the most important strategic tasks of the movement of worker-controlled enterprises will be to contribute to the construction of robust and durable solidarity blocs,

which unify a wide range of critical social forces in their efforts to radically transform the established configuration to power relations.

In that process, the eventual success and the growth of Argentina's recuperated enterprises under workers' control will largely be contingent upon their productive, commercial, financial integration and political, cultural and educational embeddedness within networks based on collaboration, solidarity and mutual support (Rebón/Salgado 2010: 206). In particular, the expansion of provincial and national networks between self-managed enterprises within Argentina, coupled with the concurrent regional and transnational integration of different national initiatives will be of major significance.¹¹⁴ Crucial for the propagation of alternative forms of production and organization and the general formation of a critical and liberating cultural vision is further the workers' collaboration with local communities, grassroots organizations, cultural institutions, social movement, educational entities, alternative media, etc. (Korol, 2005: 20).

A concrete counter-strategy to rebut Oppenheimer's 'law of transformation' and to counter market pressure is the creation of solidarity networks between Argentina's recuperated enterprises and cooperatives (Sitrin 2006: 17). The idea, as laid out by Luxemburg, is to construct a network of productive chains and a system of cooperation and support. A range of enterprises would jointly organize

¹¹⁴ Over the past years an increasing number of regional networks between enterprises under worker control have sprung up in Latin America. In October 2005 a first regional meeting of occupied enterprises was organized within the framework of ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas), which resulted in the creation of Empresur (Empresas del Sur), i.e. the future establishment of a solidarity-based market across the region (Geiger, 2006: 100; Ranis 2010: 95). Three international conferences were organized by the 'Programa Facultad Abierta' at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) on the issue of workers' control over the past years: 1) I Encuentro Internacional: La Economía de los Trabajadores. Autogestión y Distribución de la Riqueza, July 19-21, Buenos Aires, 2) II Encuentro Internacional: La Economía de los Trabajadores. Trabajo y Autogestión, July 30-August 1, 2009, Buenos Aires, 3) III Encuentro Internacional: La Economía de los Trabajadores. Pensar y Disputar una Nueva Economía desde los Trabajadores y la Autogestión, June 9-11, 2011, Mexico City. See also Ruggeri 2009; Ruggeri et al. 2009; Ruggeri 2009b; Müller-Plantenberg 2008.

the different production and distribution stages of a product and thus shelter themselves from the ubiquitous pressure of their capitalist competitors (Auinger 2009 13). The ultimate solution to the reproduction of capitalist production methods is the extension of workers' control and self-management towards bigger industrial production plants and the service sector (Sanmartino 2003).

Conclusions

This research has tried to demonstrate that the emergence of the workers' economy in different parts of the world since the 1990s cannot be merely explained by the neoliberal remodeling of societies that began in the 1970s. It is rather related to the profound crisis of the Fordist model of accumulation, the subsequent changes in the production relations, the rise of new social forces and the reorganization of the post-war world order. Examining the resurfacing of workers' control in Argentina, the dissertation applied the Coxian conceptual framework of 'historical structure', which captures the dynamic and reciprocal interrelationship between social relations of production, state-civil society complexes and world order.

With regards to the social relations of production, the thesis highlighted, first that the post-Fordist production model radically transformed capital-labor relations to the disfavor of the latter. Secondly, in terms of state-civil society complexes the dissertation shed light on the fact that neoliberal policies significantly contributed to the dismantlement of the post-war welfare state and to the weakening of organized labor movements. Finally, with respect to world order the thesis has shown that the reorganization of the post-war, U.S.-led world order through the rise of U.S.-dominated transnational finance capital notably increased the vulnerability and susceptibility of peripheral countries to crises. In summary, it were the different interrelated processes made up the radical reorganization of the post-war, hegemonic historical structure towards a post-Fordist, neoliberal finance-led regime of accumulation that considerably contributed to the reemergence of the workers' control in Argentina.

The crisis of Fordism had led to a profound remodeling and rearrangement in the organization of labor and production to a general precarization of work relations (Atzmüller 2011). Post-Fordism intensified the internationalization of financial, trading and industrial capital, abolished the traditional corporatist arrangements between trade unions and labor representations and diminished the possibilities of democratic control and popular participation (Dörre 2003; Demirovic 2009; Röttger 2003). Moreover, it nurtured the de-democratization of decision-making processes, strengthened authoritarian power, shifted political competences from the national to the sub- and supra-national levels, reinforced governance over government, and strengthened international and global regulatory regimes (Atznüller/Schwartz 2003; Bieling 2006: 391ff; Dörre/Röttger 2003; Cox 1977: 385; Bechtle/Sauer 2003).

The renaissance of workers' control within the global context of a post-Fordist, neoliberal, finance-driven regime of accumulation is a practical attempt to overcome the dominance of the market and to re-embed it within nature and society (Altvater 2006: 17). In the face of the increasing precarization and the de-skilling of masses of working people around the world, initiatives of factory recuperation and workers' self management have emerged as a pragmatic and, in part, radical responses by marginalized sectors within society. Contrary to the trend of workers' atomization under neoliberalism, workplace recuperations have nurtured processes of genuine democratization and encouraged solidarity among its members (Schlosser/Zeuner 2006: 33f; Altvater 2006: 17; Guerra 2005; Schneider 2010: 76).

In comparison to the rest of the social protest movements, which had emerged during the 1990s and in the aftermath of the economic collapse in 2001, Argentina's occupied and recuperated workplaces seem to have successfully consolidated their struggle. The piqueteros movement is internally fragmented and has in part been co-opted by the government; the garbage collectors have

remained within a structure of dependency and subordination; the neighborhood assemblies have been reduced to a negligible size and the swap shop initiatives must be regarded as failures.

All over Argentina there are currently over 200 worker-controlled enterprises, which employ close to 10,000 workers in the different sectors of the economy. Despite its quantitative insignificance with regards to Argentina's overall economy, the recuperated workplaces have a high symbolic value and far-reaching social, political and cultural effects that transcended the national and region contexts. In fact, it is this impact and the potential threat it poses to the capitalist logic and mode of production that has drawn a lot of national and international attention.

Ultimately, the struggle for participatory democracy needs to be fought, first and foremost, in the workplace, the community, the family and educational institutions, i.e. in the “apolitical” network of social relations.” (Žižek, 2010: 88; Le Blanc, 2010: 25; see Brie 2009: 29ff) Contrary to the liberal myth that claims human beings are self-interested, competitive, individualistic entities the heterogeneous experiences of Argentina's recuperated and worker-run enterprises have demonstrated for more than a decade that collective, conscious and creative work based on solidarity and direct democracy is indeed possible. The collectively-developed practices that resulted during the recuperation and resumption of the enterprises are still considered by the workers as ongoing laboratories of trial and error (Korol 2005: 20).

In the aftermath of Argentina's collapse in 2001 the majority of workplace recuperations successfully averted unemployment, impoverishment and marginalization. Their re-surfacing also had a positive effect on workers still employed in traditional capitalist enterprises as self-management, at least in part,

attenuated threats by employers to shut down plants, a tactic frequently used to enforce wage cuts and deteriorating working conditions (Boris, 2005: 180).

Critical academic research focusing on the heterogeneous experiences of Argentina's recuperated enterprises may enhance collaboration, organization and co-ordination between the latter. Moreover, it may facilitate the understanding and encourage reflection of anti-emancipatory aspects of workers' control such as auto-exploitation, the exploitation of others and the exploitation of nature. Despite their hybrid and, in part, contradictory character, the recuperated enterprises have allowed for the creation of a new space of critical theory, popular education and emancipatory, liberating and revolutionary projects (Gill 2009: 142; Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009; Sanmartino 2003; Mancuso 2002; Guerra 2008; Amin 2009; Brand 2005).

The workers' activism forms of practical criticism and capillary attempts to overcome the democratic deficits of capitalist production and hierarchical intra-company governance and simultaneously provide "a possible answer to marginalization, structural unemployment and unequal income distribution" (Auinger 2009, 8) related to post-Fordist accumulation. Organically interrelated with a host of actors, Argentina's workers' control, indeed, bears the emancipatory potential to contribute to the construction of collective, popular strategies of resistance in the pursuit of alternative forms of living and to serve as seeds for the re-thinking of societies that transcend the prevailing relations of power (Apertura Colectiva 2010: 13; Rebón/Salgado 2010: 194).

The aforementioned dynamics of an increasingly expanding transnational political economy stand in direct competition with a decentralized, localized, ecological and democratic economy in which the overall social welfare is based at the very centre (Nölting/Schäfer 2006: 137). Global competition and the operations of transnational financial capital undermine and threaten the socio-historical

achievements that have characterized the post-war welfare state. Simultaneously, they propel processes of social polarization, exclusion and environmental degradation (Birkhölzer 2006: 62; Altvater 2011; Foster 2011). The potential for counter-hegemonic and transformative initiatives such as Argentina's recuperated enterprises thus needs to be identified within the "diachronic dimensions" (Lacher 2008: 58), i.e. the contradictory and disintegrative potential that exist between the different levels of every specific fix of the current historical structure.

Considering the social, political, physical and environmental limits of infinite compound economic growth, which is crucial for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, the necessity of social control over the generated surplus emerges as the most significant factor in the struggle over the creation of an alternative world order. A radical and fundamental change of the established set of relations needs to be entirely comprehensive and all-embracing. In such a process, workers of profound social transformation around the world will have to play a key role, as success will heavily depend on the strength and the potential of a well-organized global workforce. Within the contemporary context of transnational capitalism organized labor is no longer the only unit of resistance. Labor movements must form a central building bloc within a broad alliance or coalition of heterogeneous social forces, which are characterized by their flexible internal organizational forms and interrelationships and the collective determination to bring about a significant shift in the existing configuration of power. The construction of counter-hegemony requires the creation of alternative institutions and intellectual resources within an established hegemonic order and the ability to resist "the pressure and temptation to relapse into pursuit of incremental gains for subaltern groups within the framework of bourgeois hegemony." (Cox 1983: 165; see Brand 2008: 323ff)

Strategies of alternative projects need to be directed beyond the mere national context towards the global level where the struggle over hegemony ultimately

unfolds. A coordination and co-operation needs to take place between radical counter-hegemonic forces in the industrialized capitalist countries and those in the periphery so that an effective potential that challenges the existing global order can emerge (Svampa 2006). Here the question emerges whether the transformation of hegemonic structures can be achieved through class antagonism and social forces or rather through the formulation of alternative hegemonic projects, which hold the potential to draw the attention of different social forces. Meaningful challenges to the status quo require an organic synergy between a wide range of political actors such as of progressive social movements, political parties, universities and other educational institutions, grassroots media, trade unions, etc. (De Angelis 2003; Deppe 2011: 58).

In this context, drawing on Gramsci's writings may open up a set of potential avenues to travel upon. The creation of new forms of social organization and new networks of popular institutions, so his belief, would need to be closely related to a dualist organizational structure: 1) workers' councils and other popular organs based on self-management and broad participation, and 2) a democratic revolutionary party organically connected to the grassroots level rather than to an authoritarian vanguard elite.¹¹⁵ Gramsci criticized liberal political parties and traditional trade unions for their reformist approach to capitalist domination and exploitation, their narrow political involvement and their overall commitment to the established social order.

From his first-hand experience of the factory councils in Turin between 1919 and 1920, Gramsci saw a great potential in the popular initiatives of workers' control (Ciolli 2009; Jones 2006: 32). Workers' councils, he argued, were the primary organizational entities within the struggle against hegemonic rule. They were a

¹¹⁵ Gramsci had a strong anti-elitist conception of political struggle. Contrary to Lenin, he believed that it was neither the vanguard party nor political elites but rather the oppressed and subordinated strata of society, which must rise up and occupy the leading role in reshaping the course of history.

sign of a psychological awakening and a first step towards the realization of freedom and the creation of history on part of the workers (Gramsci 1921). Despite the dialectical relationship between politics and economics, Gramsci believed in the primacy of economics in the sense that the workers' struggle over the control of the means of production would have to unfold prior to the struggle for political power (Boggs 1976: 95).

In the councils, workers would gain full responsibility and direct control over the means of production under a self-imposed, conscious discipline and voluntary commitment. The democratic and solidarity-based organizational setup of workers' council is an institutional representation of collectivity and a concrete expression of the dialectical unification between base and superstructure. With their permanent discussion, assembly meetings, educational and cultural circles, etc. workers' councils can provide a robust institutional basis for democratic participation on a small-scale. Genuine social transformation would hence emerge through self-conscious initiatives on a massive scale and the construction of democratic, solidarity-based structures at the grassroots level

The struggle for an alternative society is always an ideological process, which must focus on the profound criticism of political, emotional and cultural aspects of the status quo and their substitution by a new culture, new values and new forms of consciousness. In the immediate aftermath of Argentina's economic crisis the objective conditions for a fundamental social transformation almost undeniably existed. Yet, it was the absence of ideological alternatives and new popular consciousness that eventually facilitated the relatively rapid restoration of 'stability' and the maintenance of the pre-crisis power structures.

Gramsci dismissed the widely held conviction shared by many Marxists during his time that critical consciousness would emerge almost automatically from the contradictions that existed within the social sphere of capitalist production. In his

conception of the struggle for ideological hegemony and state power, Gramsci distinguished between an 'organic' and a 'conjunctual' dimension. While the former referred to a long-term process of challenging ideological hegemony, the latter pointed towards a period of crisis. Gramsci argued that the 'organic' had to precede the 'conjunctual' dimension for the success of social change and political struggle. He rejected the idea that a cataclysmic event such as a crisis could be a sufficient prerequisite for the formation of critical social awareness.

Different forms of consciousness such as ideas, feeling, believes, etc. are concrete political forces, which define the political struggle of the subordinated strata within a particular social order. With the increasing complexity within 'civil societies', in particular in the most advanced capitalist countries, the struggle over ideological and cultural hegemony will further gain in importance (Boggs 1976: 120). It is the sphere of 'civil society' where radical social change must ultimately originate (Brand/Sekler 2009: 56f). As in the case of Argentina's recuperated enterprises, the formation of revolutionary subjectivity on part of the workers would require a radical shift in consciousness from "corporate-economic", i.e. the mere economic self-interest of the workers, the focus on secure employment, etc. to the political in which the struggle is directed towards the transcendence of the overall capitalist system. In that process intellectuals and academic research play a leading role in raising critical awareness and in the dissemination of a popular, counter-hegemonic, ideological and moral framework for action.

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Appendix

Interviews¹¹⁶

Interview with Héctor Omar Villablanca (Secretary General of Sindicato de Obreros y empleados ceramistas de Neuquén (SOECN)¹¹⁷, Neuquén), Marcelo Morales and Zulma Morales (Workers at Zanón/FaSinPat¹¹⁸, Neuquén)

AT: ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva usted en la organización trabajando?

Marcelo Morales (MM): Yo trabajo aquí desde 1995, por tanto llevo alrededor de 15 años.

AT: ¿Tienen vínculos con los ceramistas de Cerámica del Valle?

MM: Sí, tenemos contacto. Después de las 14 estaremos allá, llevaremos unas cajas.

AT: ¿Tienen vínculos además de con empresas regionales, con empresas nacionales?

Héctor Omar Villablanca (HOV): No. En realidad nosotros no tenemos como una tarea tan tradicional. No lo tomamos como una cuestión sindical, como el sindicato tradicional que se ocupa de sus propias reivindicaciones y sus propios reclamos; en realidad tenemos y consideramos que tiene que haber una base de conjunto, de hecho, tenemos relación con otras fábricas recuperadas, pero con otro tipo de trabajadores; somos impulsores y convocantes de un encuentro nacional de base de trabajadores, con plenaria nacional trabajadores del valle. En ese lugar es donde participan alimentación, ferroviarios, estatales, son alrededor de 160 comisiones internas, con cuerpos de delegados, de sindicatos, que estamos en disciplinarios. He impulsado desde el otro sindicato, y luego se sumó (*no se entiende*) y se fueron sumando más, dando mayor fuerza y apoyo. De hecho, el 11, 12 y 14 de diciembre se hizo el cuarto plenario, y una de las actividades fue hacer un acto de cohibición donde surgió un problema con Mariano Ferreira. Se hizo un acto con alrededor de dos mil compañeros, se pegó un mural que fue realizado en la fábrica. Luego, asistimos a Villa Soldati, porque consideramos que es reclamo justo, que aparte por la declaración xenofóbica del gobierno de la ciudad, consideramos que ejercer allí, tal vez, no tiene que ver con la cuestión de ser boliviano, paraguayo, brasilero o chilenos; la situación que atraviesan nuestros compañeros del país y también a nivel internacional. Nosotros tenemos

¹¹⁶ Transcripts and corrections by: Alejandra León Rojas and Yesica Serrano Rojas.

¹¹⁷ SOECN represents the four main ceramic factories in the Neuquén province: Zanón, Cerámicas del Valle, Stefani and Cerámicas Neuquén. Except for the latter, all factories were recuperated and are now run and controlled by their workers.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.obrerosdezanon.com.ar/>

relación con nuestros compañeros de España, Francia, Estados Unidos y Latinoamérica, de muchas organizaciones. Por ejemplo, el autobús que está afuera, hace parte de una compañía que se impulsó en España, fue impulsado desde una sede española. Ellos empezaron a saber sobre la problemática de Zanón y fueron juntando euros y nos regalaron ese colectivo; Hemos tratado de internacionalizar el conflicto. Algo importante que se llama centenario, otra parte importante que se llaman auge, después hay compañeros de (*no se entiende*). En general, directamente, 450 puntos de trabajo de esta fábrica, pero indirectamente mueve una economía importante, con transporte, aserraderos, fábrica de carga, minería, siendo está última muy movida.

AT: ¿Por qué dejaron Zanón como nombre, por qué no dejaron FaSinPat?

HOV: En principio, porque pega más. Después, por una cuestión que nosotros discutimos desde la expropiación de la fábrica. La fábrica fue asignada el año pasado y dentro de ésta actividad, nosotros metimos la marca desde el apellido de la familia Zanón. Es decir, lo que expropiamos también fue el apellido, porque la marca tiene un.... como Coca Cola, nadie sabe el valor real de una marca, cualquiera puede comprar por poco dinero la marca, montar una fábrica y como es reconocida internacionalmente, la puede usar comercialmente. Entonces, la marca Zanón, en primer lugar, lleva una cuestión de orgullo, por haber podido expropiar hasta el apellido a este empresario. En segundo lugar, trae consigo todo un asunto comercial.

AT: ¿Cómo es la relación con Zanón? La fábrica tiene su nombre, prácticamente, pero los trabajadores con él no tienen ningún lazo, aún así, continúan con su nombre...

HOV: En realidad no sabemos. Obviamente como es la justicia en este país, nunca va a llegar a juicio y nunca lo van a condenar; Él está desaparecido hace muchos años. El directorio lo disolvieron, lo reemplazaron, hubo intervención de la sindicatura, cosa que nunca pudo hacer, nosotros lo impedimos. Siempre fuimos los trabajadores los que estuvimos al frente de la fábrica, en administración y las decisiones de la fábrica. En 5 oportunidades trataron de desalojarnos, no pudieron. Fue relación de fuerza, tuvo mucho consenso la fábrica, porque el movimiento se dio por muchos conflictos económicos y político que se dio por entonces. Por ejemplo, En 2001 era un país convulsionado, se cerraron más de dos mil fábricas, muy pocas, sólo un 10% se pudo reabrir, una fue la más grande, fue Zanón. Pero, eso tenía derecho de pelear por el trabajo en la comunidad. Hasta el día hay mucho apoyo por parte de la comunidad. Más allá del espacio físico, se pelea por el laburo.

AT: Como sabe, Zanón recibe mucha atención internacionalmente, tal vez, esto se deba a que es una de las empresas más grandes de la Argentina, pero ¿hay algo más allá de eso? ¿A qué atribuye que Zanón reciba tanta atención internacionalmente?

HOV: Hay algo más allá de lo grande de la fábrica. Nosotros entendimos que solos no la íbamos a salvar. Zanón terminó siendo un complejo para muchos compañeros, siempre con coordinación, tomar reclamos de varios sectores, con

una política clara. En el país hay varios movimientos, varias federaciones de fábricas, empresas recuperadas, y en realidad todas están peor que nosotros. Vivimos en un mundo capitalista, con gobiernos capitalistas, con políticas capitalistas donde nadie se va a poder elaborar su propio camino. Siempre va a ser históricamente, todo va a implicar lucha, todo se tendrá que ir a pelear. Nosotros lo vivimos en carne propia acá. Siempre tratamos de que no solamente sea un reclamo sectorial, sino tomar otro tipo de reclamos, el tema de levantar la cuestión de la bandera de la vivienda, son temas que caen muy bien en la sociedad, que son cosas que nosotros mismos las sufrimos. Temas como la salud, la educación pública, son temas que caen muy bien. El hecho de coordinar acciones con otros trabajadores y entender que la salida también es política, ha transformado a Zanón ahora, tiene una visión más amplia. Ha accedido a lo que es la fábrica. Yo creo que es una política que se piensa, que se discute en el sindicato, se trata de llevar a cabo con otros compañeros. De que te sirve a vos estar bien, trabajar, si a la vuelta de tu casa se muere el pibe de hambre o muere incendiado en una casa.

AT: Todo inició más o menos en los años noventa, con el proceso de la industrialización. Luego, vimos la crisis del 2001, 2002. A partir de esto ¿Cómo ve la situación actual, tanto en el contexto regional, aquí en Neuquén, como después de más de una década de lucha?

HOV: Nosotros lo vemos como un conflicto internacional. Es una crisis a la cual no le escapamos. Lo vemos en España, Francia y en Italia, en todas partes. Los mismos recortes que vimos en el 2001, los vimos en la década de los 90, despido de trabajadores, recorte presupuestario para los estudiantes. Aquí se ve mucho usar, por parte de los juzgados, los aportes de la Asociación Trabajadores del Estado (ATE) para subsidiar a grandes empresas, como el *General Motor* o los grandes monopolios. La industria ha caído, vivimos años de crisis y estamos ligados a la industria. Hay mucha inestabilidad y a eso se le suma una situación particular en Argentina. Esta situación es que se desprestigian las centrales sindicales ante la Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT)¹¹⁹ y la *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA)¹²⁰, que son pro-patronales, ambas centrales sindicales. Sin embargo, hay un movimiento de trabajador, un movimiento de 9 comisiones internas que surgen desde abajo y en eso trabajamos nosotros. Eso de alguna manera el gobierno lo tiene que frenar, empezaron el gobierno provincial, y ellos son reflejo de la política a nivel nacional, es decir, empezaron más de un año una política de persecución en sectores como los nuestros, judicializaron la protesta. Tenemos compañeros presos por renunciar a las políticas del gobierno nacional y en estos últimos meses, esta política se ha intensificado mucho mas, reprimir a las comunidades aborígenes de acá del país. Ayer reprimieron a Salta...nada más que hay un salto mediático enorme: no titubean en matar, a veces con la federal, a veces con la policía provincial o con las patotas de la burocracia sindical, como es el caso de los ferroviarios con Mariano Ferreira. También en Villa Sodati, cuando una parte la mató la federal y otra la mataron la

¹¹⁹ <http://www.cgtcolombia.org/>

¹²⁰ <http://www.cta.org.ar/>

patota. Ahora, esto es una política del gobierno nacional. Efectivamente, ahora sale más a la luz, pero se ha venido evidenciado esto. Pasó años atrás en la capital francesa, también los reprimió la patota, los trabajadores subterráneos también fueron reprimidos por las patotas sindicales. Estas son metodologías de este gobierno.

AT: Desde este contexto vemos las relaciones de los trabajadores con el gobierno capitalista, a partir de ello ¿cómo ve usted la relación con el estado, las autoridades locales, regionales y nacionales? ¿Cómo a futuro plantean dichas relaciones? es decir, ¿van en busca de aliarse con otras empresas recuperadas nacionales o internacionales a través de la lucha por toma o ven necesario también vincularse con el estado para recuperarse?

HOV: Por un lado, Nosotros al estado le exigimos. Exigimos respuestas a las demandas que tenemos de expropiación, condiciones para trabajar. Hay unas condiciones que se le ha dado a otras empresas, subsidio de.... compra de materiales y destinarlo a la obra pública. De todas formas al estado le exigimos, a veces, en una mesa de diálogo y a veces, en un cuarto de ruta o en una movilización. Al estado le exigimos, porque entendemos que es un estado capitalista y que no gobierna para necesidades nuestras. Con otros trabajadores a las centrales sindicales, también les exigimos. Entendemos que es difícil, porque también son parte del gobierno. De hecho, las centrales sindicales tienen sus diputados, tienen sus concejales y muchos de ellos gobiernan al lado de estos gobiernos. Con otros trabajadores, tejemos la seguridad, porque consideramos que la base tiene que ser en conjunto. Jamás va a pasar, de hecho, nunca pasó, o sea que si los trabajadores que luchan por planes de vivienda y ganan, nosotros ganamos, porque nosotros estamos ligados a la vivienda. Si los trabajadores que luchan por el incremento salarial ganan, nosotros ganamos, porque son esos trabajadores los que van a venir a comprar nuestros productos. Si entendemos que los trabajadores de la salud ganan, ganamos todos, porque son nuestros hijos los que van a estudiar. Si ganan los docentes. Por eso es que nosotros, nuestra visión es mucho más amplia. Nosotros no nos centralizamos solamente en coordinar o hacer acciones o mantener relaciones con fábricas recuperadas. Consideramos que hay una base más de conjunto.

AT: Si el estado está previendo los servicios públicos, el sistema de salud la educación y ¿ustedes están tratando también de hacer estos problemas de la comunidad?

HOV: Al final del camino entendemos que toda salida es política. A este estado, el estado capitalista, le exigimos y se lo peleamos. Es decir, acá arreglamos las exigencias y luego vamos y las peleamos y hemos tenido conflictos grandes. Ahora, entendemos que al final del camino la salida es política. Muchas veces, hacemos discusiones abiertas en muchas de las fábricas y tiene que ver en cómo te identificas claramente vos. Nos identificamos con compañeros de nuestra clase. Acá lamentablemente no hay conjunto de los trabajadores, porque dentro de la fábrica hay de todo. Son 450 acá y tenemos 600, 700 ceramistas, pero es una discusión abierta que tenemos. Nosotros consideramos que la lucha sindical tiene

un techo, que se debe romper y empezar con material político, buscar programas con identificación de clases.

AT: ¿Cuáles son las propuestas más difíciles? la decisión ha sido en principio, pragmática, tomar la fábrica y seguir con la corrupción, porque no ha habido empleo y luego, toda la transición a una lucha política consiente. Pero ¿cómo ven ustedes la transición, ahora que ya tiene la fábrica recuperada? ¿Está produciendo? ¿Cómo lo hace?

HOV: Tiene que ver, me parece, con la experiencia. Tomar la fábrica es lo más fácil. Viene después sostenerla. El problema fue el crecimiento en lo político, en lo ideológico de para qué quieres la fábrica; la quieres para enriquecerte a vos mismo?, para ser un “transa” como lo era Zanón? o para darle un sentido social, que sea una referencia política para trabajadores que de alguna manera quieren cambiar las cosas?.

AT: ¿Existen conflictos internos dentro de su organización?

HOV: Sí, hay discusiones.

AT: ¿De qué tipo? ¿Cuáles son las temáticas a discutir?

HOV: Porque hay compañeros que piensan que vos trabajas 8 horas por día dentro de la fábrica, tienes un buen salario. Creo que tiene que ver con una (*no se entiende*). Porque está bien, vos podes trabajar 8 horas, podes. Acá en Neuquén, una experiencia: las cámaras de empresarios cuando estaban discutiendo la expropiación a la sindicatura, ellos en compañía de la CGT, fueron a oponerse a que se expropie la fábrica, fueron directamente al parlamento a oponerse a que se expropie la fábrica.

AT: ¿Por qué?

HOV: Porque es una cuestión que ellos tienen clara, ellos se identifican con su propia clase, la clase burguesa. Ellos no quieren que 450 “negritos”, se quiebren su propio futuro y hagan política con una fábrica. La tarea no es solo sostenerla, es también incrementar la producción, incrementar los puestos de trabajo. Esto último no se da por sí solo. De hecho, una relación fue con los trabajadores desocupados acá en Neuquén y luego a nivel nacional; Porque entendemos que son trabajadores desocupados. Los primeros puestos de trabajo se destinaron a ellos, a esos compañeros que no tenían trabajo, compañeros desocupados de las organizaciones de la compañía Mapuche, compañeros discapacitados de trabajar en la fábrica. Entonces, también se destinaron a familiares y gente que ha trabajado acá. La cuestión no es sólo discutir de nuestros propios intereses, también contemplamos la situación de muchos compañeros.

AT: ¿Hacen programas educativos? ¿Por qué no crear un espacio de arte, esparcimiento y educación?

HOV: Tenemos nuestro espacio de debate. Tenemos la biblioteca que está llena de libros, lamentablemente poco transitable. Tenemos la primaria.

Zulma Morales (ZM): La paga el estado, es para adultos. No sólo Zanón sino otros compañeros de otras fábricas.

HOV: La secundaria abierta y tenemos otros espacios de discusión, reuniones de coordinadores. Cada sector está representado por un coordinador, donde

precisamente ahora están en una reunión de coordinadores, esto para identificar problemas. Tenemos asambleas y jornadas una vez donde preparamos la fábrica, donde nos juntamos los 450 y discutimos de los políticos, hasta el último detalle de la fábrica.

AT: ¿Cuáles siguen siendo los problemas más difíciles en cuanto a la organización y hasta la producción? Además, la manera en que se relacionan con el mercado capitalista, pues ustedes tienen otra forma, alterna de organización, de producción. No obstante, ustedes tienen que relacionarse, vender todas las cerámicas en un mercado que tiene sus reglas, enfrentarse con fábricas que no tienen su tipo de estructura ¿Cómo ven ustedes dicha situación?

HOV: El cerco con el mercado y con las relaciones del portón para afuera es como la de cualquier fábrica. Del portón para afuera hay una relación comercial que tenemos con los clientes; costó mucho, no es una cuestión natural, hubieron disputas.

AT: ¿Cómo resolvieron todos esos percances que surgieron en el proceso?

HOV: Generando confianza. Fueron pasando los años, 9 años no son poca cosa. Fueron pasando los años y se generó la confianza, se mostró mucha seriedad para trabajar, manteniendo la calidad, respondiente ante los reclamos e internamente los problemas más serios que tenemos tienen que ver con la renovación tecnológica. Una fábrica que ha quedado, de todas formas, todas las fábricas a través de créditos que dan los bancos, el estado mismo, han renovado su tecnología y nosotros nos hemos quedado atrás. Nosotros hemos hablado bastante sobre eso y la hemos peleado bastante sobre ese tema y ya hemos cerrado prácticamente un proyecto para empezar a renovar la tecnología.

AT: ¿Cuál es el papel de los bancos? ¿Quieren dar o renovar créditos?

HOV: Es complicado. Es complicado porque si bien la ley de expropiación se votó, todo el trámite expropiatorio no se ha finalizado. Entonces, hasta ahora seguimos con una cooperativa otorgada por una jueza, pero la expropiación de la fábrica no está finalizado el trámite. Esta es una cuestión que le corresponde al estado.

AT: Por el momento ¿cómo hacen para conseguir los créditos?

HOV: Mientras tanto, la exigencia sigue siendo el estado. De hecho, en Neuquén, los créditos que hemos estado solicitando, se lo dieron a la fábrica de aquí al lado. Ellos tienen tecnología nueva.

AT: Eso quiere decir que no han recibido ningún crédito?

HOV: Nosotros todavía no hemos recibido ningún crédito de parte del estado. También tiene que ver con una cuestión muy nueva para nosotros. Una vez cerrado lo de la expropiación, empezamos a encarar proyectos grandes como por ejemplo, invertir dentro de la fábrica. Se invierte todos los días, en mantenimiento. Pero, invertir en tecnología, no se ha logrado durante estos años. Ahora hay dos, tres posibilidades que se han trabajado para ir directamente con el proyecto y el dinero que necesitamos.

AT: ¿Qué tipo de remuneración tienen, es decir, reciben sueldos? ¿Cómo fue tomó la gente la transición?

HOV: No fue una cuestión fácil, empezó con una cuestión de necesidad que empezaba para pagar cierta cantidad de dinero. Después, se entendió que todos los trabajos dentro de la fábrica son necesarios, todos dependemos de todos. La cuestión se entendió fácil. Lo que si es que tenemos una diferencia en el salario; este está dividido en 3 partes: en lo que cobramos por venir a trabajar 8 horas, es igualitario para todos. Después, hay un reconocimiento a la antigüedad, porque hay compañeros de 30 años trabajando aquí. Y luego, hay regímenes de trabajo, es decir, compañeros que trabajamos de día para sacar la parte sindical. Horarios mañana, tarde y noche, entonces, tiene un plus trabajar en turno noche. Hay algunas diferencias, pero en realidad no es mucha.

AT: ¿Han tenido problemas con la remuneración con algunos trabajadores?

HOV: No. Zanón es magnífica sociedad, tienes de todo. Hay asambleas, la discusión es diaria. Zanón están todas las tendencias representadas dentro de la fábrica, desde la izquierda hasta... hay de todo, todo tiene que ver, Zanón es reflejo de lo que pasa afuera. Si afuera está convulsionado, al interior de Zanón también lo está y lo contrario, si afuera está tranquilo, aquí también lo está. Eso tiene que ver con el contexto en que nos movemos y más aún cuando nunca perdimos.

AT: ¿Se han trazado algún objetivo como Zanón?

HOV: Sí. Son varias discusiones abiertas. No solamente como Zanón, sino también entendiendo que tenemos 3 de las 4 fábricas bajo control obrero. Son varias cuestiones: primero, existe un lazo, relación política que tenemos con miles de trabajadores en el país. Segundo, la recuperación de centrales, nosotros tenemos la discusión abierta, cambiar el enrolamiento, la relación que tenemos con los trabajadores, con el afán de recuperar la central sindical. Después, entendiendo también, para qué trabajar, entendiendo que la salida es política y que hay una salida alternativa que mostrar a los trabajadores.

AT: ¿Le ven futuro a esto? Teniendo en cuenta que aún están bajo una gran presión, pues se encuentran en la crisis más fuerte, después de la gran depresión.

HOV: Estamos convencidos. De hecho, tuvo un movimiento en Francia y lo que hacían los trabajadores en la fábrica. Ellos en lugar de trabajo agarraban a los gerentes para cobrar su indemnización, en realidad no se pusieron a pensar de qué pasaría si hubiesen tomado la fábrica y la hubiesen puesto a producir. Lo que pasó en Argentina en la década del 90, está pasando ahora., en Italia, Portugal, España, entonces se ve como una alternativa el control obrero. En 2001 era una crisis que no se podía ocultar, los medios no podían ocultar algo que nos estaba desbordando por todos los lados. Lo de Zanón fue la experiencia más radicalizada, más avanzada dentro de un proceso donde se cerraban fábricas en todas partes. Hoy la crisis más profunda, está en Europa. Estados Unidos se logró mantener y en Argentina se trata de mantener, para que no termine de caer en la crisis que cubre ya distintos países. Pero Grecia está viviendo lo que vivió Argentina en 2001, España, lo mismo Francia.

AT: ¿La gente ha descubierto que en realidad esto es una lucha de clases?

HOV: En su momento ni nosotros, los que estamos acá, sabíamos lo que estaba sucediendo. Hay un viejo revolucionario que decía: “el motor de la historia es la lucha de clases”. Ese motor que mueve la historia es el enfrentamiento de clases, lo que vivimos acá Zanon. Muchos acá no tienen idea de qué es eso, sin embargo, si supieron hacer una experiencia contra una patronal, contra un estado, contra una policía. De ahí muchos maduramos y avanzamos un poco más. Esto está impulsado por el sector más consciente que es el sindicato. La verdad es que lo que provocó un golpe de conciencia en muchos compañeros, fue justamente confrontar con el mismo proceso de lucha de clases. Eso fue. Hubiésemos podido pensar que era un conflicto sindical, contra una patronal, donde el estado podía tener más o menos una responsabilidad, pero no, rompimos el cerco y aprendimos. No somos todos.

AT: ¿Qué podría pasar? ¿Esto podría ser una amenaza para el orden establecido?

HOV: Nosotros tenemos que prepararnos hasta que llegue el momento. Quizás muchos de nosotros ni veamos el momento. Pero, en realidad lamentablemente en el 2001 no se pudo canalizar toda la fuerza que había en la calle, ni el descontento con el gobierno y todo eso.

AT: ¿Cómo es el ambiente organizacional al interior de la fábrica?

Héctor Omar Villablanca (HOV): Por cómo se habla y lo vimos dentro de la fábrica, parece que hay una desubicación cuando se refieren a un compañero o un civil a un compañero. Los otros son compañeros que pueden haber cometido errores, nosotros no lo vamos a saber. Es una realidad que vivimos todos. Pero, no deja de ser compañero tanto Hilario como San Martín como el Vacho. Uno puede tener diferencias, pero son compañeros. Entonces, yo lo que pido es el respeto. Cuando nos dirigamos a algún compañero. El otro es un compañero, si el otro tiene un nombre y unos apellidos, tiene sentimientos, familia, tiene aciertos y tiene errores, como podemos tener todos. Lo único que yo piso para confirmar la asamblea es que a esos compañeros nos dirigamos con respeto.

Mauricio Morales (MM): yo estoy de acuerdo totalmente con vos, de que existe y me hiciste acordar, lo tenía pensado decirle a todos que los compañeros como dice Villa: respetar a los compañeros que estuvieron. Por ejemplo, en la fábrica han aparecido muchos carteles, muchos letreros que no son buenos para nadie. Acá somos compañeros más allá de lo que ha pasado, una cosa es la crítica y en lo que hicimos nadie se tiene que enojar. A nosotros nos critican todos los días y no por eso nos vamos a enojar, dejamos de venir o dejamos de trabajar. Compañero que tenga un apuro claro de algo está en el bolsillo de otro compañero, que lo denuncie. Nosotros somos serios en eso y tajantes. Preferimos pensar que no cagaron, porque no tenemos pruebas de que pasó otra cosa. Nunca lo vamos a saber. A diferencia de Zanon. En Zanon para recuperar parte de Zanetti; acá se avanzó muy rápido, tuvimos errores, porque quién sabía vender, quién sabía administrar una fábrica, llevar una contabilidad. Entonces, nosotros preferimos pensar que fue por error, inexperiencia. Nosotros pusimos el cuerpo, cada uno de nosotros de los que estamos acá, porque estábamos defendiendo nuestros propios intereses. Pero, en realidad hay agradecer a la comunidad y hacer una notita un

trabajito con los medios de acá, pues porque si ellos no hubiésemos llegado hasta acá. No nos olvidemos de lo que hemos pasado, no nos olvidemos que el espaldarazo fue de ellos. Esos 5000 vecinos que se acercaban e hicieron un esfuerzo para ayudarnos. Para nosotros es un orgullo pelear con compañeros como ustedes, pero si debemos pegarle una vueltita con la comunidad, con los medios. Tener en cuenta que muchos de nosotros, tienen necesidades y también que hay que darle trabajo, que hay gente que también lo necesita. Ustedes tienen la difícil tarea de enseñar al resto de compañeros y compañeras que todo lo que se propone, se puede lograr. Así que por otra parte, hoy estamos en una situación diferente a la que estuvimos el año pasado. Es reconfortante, esto lo lograron ustedes y nosotros los acompañamos. Así que compañeros, saludos a las familias, porque en esto la familia ha sido muy importante, acompañando.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Eugenio Flores (Worker at Cerámica del Valle, Neuquén)

AT: Hábleme de la historia de la cooperativa a la cual pertenece.

Eugenio Flores (EF): La historia es larga, este conflicto inició junto con el de Zanón, incluso cuando se dio el proceso de recuperar el sindicato, todos los compañeros de acá formaron parte de ello.

AT: ¿En qué año inició la cooperativa?

EF: A fines de 2008, en realidad llevamos entre 2009 y 2010

AT: ¿Tuvieron al igual que Zanón, un proceso de expropiación?

EF: No, porque esta fábrica es compleja, la maquinaria es viejísima, el sistema más que la maquinaria es en realidad es viejo. Nosotros pensar en pelear por la expropiación, es hacerlo por muy poco en las condiciones en las que está fábrica.

AT: ¿A qué se dedican ustedes, hacen ladrillos?

EF: Sí, a eso nos dedicamos.

AT: ¿En qué condición está la cooperativa, es decir, cuál su estatus legal?

EF: Formamos una cooperativa, y a su vez habíamos hecho un acuerdo con el que era el patrón, digamos un convenio en el que él nos estipulaba el alquiler de la fábrica, lo que sería el previo y la maquinaria, a cambio de que le cediéramos una parte del ladrillo, de la producción.

AT: ¿Cuál es la forma de pago al patrón?

EF: Bueno, en realidad era un monto de ladrillos, pero nunca se lo pagamos, pues la producción de esta fábrica no da para ello.

AT: Eso quiere decir que él no ha recibido nada ¿ha emprendido el patrón alguna lucha legal para reclamar su parte del acuerdo?

EF: En este momento llevamos un mes sin noticias de él, por ahí pasa eso, pasan dos y tres meses y es como si no existiera y después vuelve al ataque otra vez.

AT: ¿Cuándo se quebró la empresa?

EF: En el 2001, cuando fue el proceso de recuperación del sindicato y que se tomó Zanón, acá la patronal también despidió a todos, valiéndose de maniobras.

Primero, se selló la sede, los mandó a todos de vacaciones, cuando los compañeros volvieron, en realidad no volvieron, ellos estaban despedidos y se habían llevado la maquinaria.

AT: ¿Con cuánto personal contaba la fábrica, antes del suceso? ¿Con cuántos cuenta actualmente?

EF: Antes eran alrededor de 40, actualmente somos 17. Porque eso fue en el 2001, hicieron una ocupación de 6 años nuestros compañeros, 5, que se quedaron resistiendo.

AT: Después de la crisis, ¿cómo se juntaron?, es decir ¿que los inclinó a juntarse?

EF: en realidad hubo algo más de por medio, la patronal volvió en 2007, porque se disparó un boom de la construcción, y revivió la fábrica en 2007.

AT: ¿estaban (se incorporaron más personas a la entrevista) ustedes aquí trabajando cuando se reabrió la fábrica?

EF (*referring to one of his co-worker*): Bueno, nosotros no estábamos. Los cinco compañeros que aguantaron 6 años con la fábrica ocupada, pero parada, porque no había luz, ni gas, y contando también con que tampoco estaba la maquinaria, pues ésta fue desarmada. No se pudo arrancar

AT: Entre 2001 y 2007 no se hizo nada, ¿en qué consistían las actividades de los que se quedaron?

EF (*referring to one of his co-worker*): Nosotros lo que sabemos es por lo que nos han contado, actualmente los 5, ahora están justo en otras cosas, hicieron el intento de arrancar con la fábrica, del mismo modo que nosotros haciendo el convenio, pero las cosas dieron marcha atrás.

AT: ¿Cómo se dio apertura nuevamente a la fábrica? ¿Volvió el dueño con intención de reabrir?, ¿cómo les planteó el convenio?

EF: Volvió él, reabrió, como parte de la negociación, lo que se dijo fue: ¿vos quieres volver?, tienes que tomar a los cinco compañeros que estuvieron, más un grupo de compañeros que estuvieron haciéndole aguante. Porque había un grupo de desocupados acá en Neuquén que existía que era el Movimiento de trabajadores desocupados (MTD). De los cuales un grupo de la juventud de ese movimiento, ayudaban a cuidar pues esto es enorme, armaban los turnos, ayudaban entonces a cuidar la fábrica e incluso a hacer acciones políticas, salir y ayudar con la lucha, durante 6 años. Cuando se reabrió se luchó para que permanecieran los 5 compañeros que resistieron, más 5 compañeros más del MTD.

AT: ¿Sigue siendo el patrón el dueño de la fábrica?

EF: La historia de la fábrica es algo... No lo pienses como algo legal o totalmente legal. Siempre estamos entre el equilibrio entre no pasarnos totalmente a lo ilegal y tampoco es algo legal, si vamos al caso no hemos cumplido con el acuerdo.

Si fuera por la ley el patrón podría arremeter por el acuerdo firmado; a los 5 meses nos sacaban, ya llevamos 2 años. Tiene que ver más por una relación de fuerza, de lo que significa una fuente de trabajo en Neuquén y más en un barrio como este con fluencia, donde hay un déficit habitacional enorme, el 60% de las

familias que viven en este barrio, que es un barrio grande, no tienen casa propia. Vive en la casa del padre o en una toma o algo así. En ese sentido está fábrica tiene un peso grande, y también tiene un peso muy grande el sindicato ceramista, por eso es que nos mantenemos acá.

AT: ¿Ustedes no viven aquí? ¿Tienen casa propia?

EF and a co-worker: No vivimos aquí. Sí tenemos.

AT: Si ustedes están produciendo ¿Comparten las ganancias? ¿Cómo es la repartición o sistema de sueldos?

EF and a co-worker: Se hace parte, lo que se puede vender, se vende. Cuando llega un fin de semana se hace la repartición. Por ejemplo, este fin de semana tocan 300 pesos para cada uno, la próxima semana tocan 100 para cada uno, así somos.

AT: ¿De qué se encarga el dueño?

EF and a co-worker: El dueño no se encarga de nada, él está fuera. Nosotros hacemos de dueños.

AT: ¿Pero legalmente él sigue siendo el dueño?

EF and a co-worker: Sí, legalmente sí.

AT: Pero, ¿si vuelve el dueño, podría haber problema? ¿Podría él decidir cambiar el rubro de la fábrica, montar otra cosa?

EF and a co-worker: Nosotros en concreto, lo que nos sostiene y por lo que seguimos teniendo nuestra fuente trabajo, es por el peso social que tienen los ceramistas en el gremio. Por la lucha nuestra, por la lucha de Zanón; la de Zanón es la más grande y más conocida. Por la lucha artesana, cuando fue la lucha artesana, fue hace poco este año, el patrón de acá estaba apostando toda la ficha ahí, para que acaezca una derrota para que los ceramistas salgan derrotados.

AT: ¿Por qué hizo él tal cosa?

EF and a co-worker: Era una lucha entre los trabajadores y los patrones.

AT: ¿En qué consistió la lucha del patrón?

EF and a co-worker: Sacaron un comunicado firmado por la cámara empresarial de Neuquén, donde el dueño también estaba metido. Diciendo que el sindicato ceramista era una organización que pretendía quedarse con el negocio de la industria de la cerámica en todo Neuquén y presionar al estado, arremetiendo que éramos un grupo de matones. No sólo decían que hacíamos eso con Zanón, sino que también con Stefani y con Cerámica del Valle que es esta. Y que también teníamos pensado expandir a otras industrias como lo es la industria papelera. Comisiones internas que son anti-burocráticas, bueno nos incluían a todos. Coinciden con nosotros porque nos encontramos a pelear. Pero lo hacían en esos términos.

AT: Su lucha fue paralela con la lucha de Zanón ¿Ustedes se vincularon o se encontraron de alguna manera con Zanón?

EF and a co-worker: Empezó la relación con la recuperación del sindicato. El sindicato ceramista antes lo dirigió una burocracia que era la de los Hermanos Montes. Ellos mantenían una división, es decir, los trabajadores de estas cerámicas, no se juntaban con otros de otra cerámica.

AT: ¿Esto fue antes de la recuperación?

EF and a co-worker: Esto fue antes de la recuperación. Lo primero fue la recuperación de la comisión interna de Zanón, y de allí se recuperó el sindicato. Cuando se ganó el sindicato, se integraron todos los ceramistas de las 4 fábricas que hay en Neuquén y entraron a pelear juntos. Allí fue donde surgió el ataque de la patronal. Ante una crisis que había, primero, quiso reducir el personal, quiso reducir salarios y acá no se dejó, porque se había recuperado el sindicato.

AT: ¿Por qué se quebró la empresa en el 2001?

EF and a co-worker: Porque el patrón dijo: “hay una crisis económica”. Él para mantener su ganancia, hace lo que hacen todos: sacar gente y poner a trabajar a otros el doble y por menos plata. El sindicato ceramista no iba a aceptar eso nunca, porque ya no estaba la burocracia con los que los patronales estaban acostumbrados a tratar. Entonces, él dijo: “bajo esas condiciones, yo cierro”.

AT: ¿La razón fue la misma que Zanón?

EF and a co-worker: Sí. El problema es que acá no se pudo poner a andar la fábrica, porque no estaban las máquinas, los compañeros tampoco se quisieron ir de acá. Un grupo de 5 compañeros, resistieron entre 5 y 6 años.

AT: ¿El dueño sabe que ustedes pueden producir, sabiendo que no gana nada con eso? ¿Lo acepta?

EF and a co-worker: Porque no nos puede sacar. Por el peso que tenemos, tenemos hasta estas alturas, después de resistir tanto.

AT: Cuénteme de la represión en estos años.

EF and a co-worker: Acá, en esta fábrica quisieron hacer dos intentos de sacar a los compañeros con la policía y se resistió, a principio de 2000.

AT: ¿Los 5 que estaban?

EF and a co-worker: No. Eso fue con apoyo de los sectores desocupados, con comisiones que se armaban en Zanón.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Luis Piqueiras (Worker at Cerámica del Valle, Neuquén)

AT: ¿Nos puede contar sobre de el proceso de la recuperación del sindicato, por favor?

Luis Piqueiras (LP): El dice bueno, hicieron un convenio con la patronal. Nosotros tenemos ganado un peso social, que se ha construido a través de los años. Tiene que ver mucho con la primera parte, cuando se recuperó el sindicato, todo.

AT: ¿Cómo fue la época en que no pudieron producir, sumado a todo la presión policial, en las dos ocasiones en que los irrumpieron?

LP: El proceso nuestro arrancó justo con lo de Zanón. En ese momento nosotros quedamos 6 meses; Zanón logró mantenerse en lo que era la fábrica y después de tres meses entrar a producir. Nosotros estuvimos 6 meses en una carpa tratando de que esta fábrica no se cerrara.

AT: ¿Sacaron todas las máquinas?

LP: No. Estaban acá. Nosotros estuvimos haciendo nuestros reclamos afuera del portón con una carta. Estuvimos alrededor de 6 meses, siempre en guardia y manteniendo nuestras perspectivas de trabajo acá dentro.

AT: ¿En esa época tenían vínculos con Zanón?

LP: Ya teníamos un vínculo que lo logramos a través de una asamblea histórica que se hizo en Cutral-Có contra la burocracia, donde logramos recuperar el sindicato. En esa asamblea fue algo inicial donde las 4 fábricas no teníamos contacto, estábamos todos divididos.

AT: ¿Cómo era el sindicato antes?

LP: Se venían a negociar de la empresa, solos. No tenían representación de nada. Entonces, empezamos a mirar cómo nos poníamos en contacto con Zanón y se empezaron a hacer reuniones clandestinas, en un predio. Allí nos juntábamos los que estábamos inconformes con la burocracia y conformamos también una lista alternativa clasista en oposición a la burocracia.

AT: ¿El patrón volvió?

LP: Después de esos 6 meses, volvió el patrón, en 2001. Volvió porque tenía un stock importantísimo de material, donde no logró poner en marcha nuevamente las máquinas, sino que nos entraba a clasificar el material, pero nunca puso en marcha nuevamente la fábrica. Nos mandó de vacaciones, justo como ahora, nos mandaba de vacaciones y cuando volvimos de vacaciones ya no estaban las máquinas. No estaban las principales máquinas y ya no podíamos producir. Todo eso estuvimos acá 5 años aguantando. Los que habían quedado en el primer despido, que eran alrededor de 40, quedaron 23. De 23 se fueron yendo compañeros en el transcurso de la necesidad de tener una salida ya de entrada de dinero para la familia y demás.

AT: ¿De qué vivían?

LP: De eventos. Nuestros sindicatos se pusieron a la cabeza de nuestra situación. Hacían eventos, donde nosotros participamos. Hacíamos colectas, ventas de choripan.

AT: ¿Pero no producían nada?

LP: No producíamos todavía acá, porque muchas veces se discutió en el sindicato que la prioridad era Zanón. No podían existir dos focos de conflicto, porque se debía apuntar a uno solo.

AT: ¿Cómo ven la causa que defienden teniendo en cuenta, las promesas? ¿Las ven como vacías?

LP: Nosotros le decimos al gobierno que tenemos que hacer valer nuestro peso social. Nosotros podemos cerrar la provincia si queremos y la gente nos apoya en cualquier cosa. En cuanto al apoyo financiero, los bancos ¿sabes cuántos millones de euros le dieron?, una cantidad importante.

AT: ¿Al dueño de la empresa?

LP: Sí. El gerente de esa fábrica es el mismo presidente de la cámara empresarial; millones de euros, para la renovación de maquinaria. ¿Qué pasa? Hace unos meses atrás quieren presentar (...) es una fábrica q está exportando a Chile,

Venezuela, México y vender lo que es el producto ese, tal vez 4 veces más, ahora no le da para devolver los fondos que le dio provincia. A la vez estuvimos sentados con la gente de los bancos y todos dicen “ustedes como son gestión obrera, no tienen respaldo financiero de los bancos, no podemos confiar que nos van a apagar el gas por meses.”. A las empresas les subsidian el 80% del gas, les subsidian el insumo energético y con eso no tienes que compartir.

AT: ¿Cómo ve usted la situación nacional, en cuanto a las fábricas recuperadas?

LP: Lo que sé es que la única que se ha mantenido a pie de guerra y que por lo menos ha mantenido un salario digno y que ha seguido con la exigencia al estado sin cargarse toda la responsabilidad. No obstante, aunque las fábricas estén bajo control obrero, no significa que la responsabilidad recae sobre nosotros, pues de nosotros no depende la crisis que se arma afuera. La fábrica es Zanón, porque ha mantenido un método de trabajo.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Damian Videla (Worker at Stefani, Cutral-Có)

AT: ¿Cuál es su nombre?

Damián Videla (DV): Damián Videla, delegado.

AT: ¿Cómo van las cosas?

DV: Las cosas se van acomodando. Teníamos un poquito de problemas con la producción. Por ahí, un poquito de rotula, producto de una confusión que había con la tierra, con el material. Ahora ya están haciendo acopios distintos, porque hay distintos materiales que llegan con distinta tierra, así que ha mejorado increíblemente el material.

AT: ¿Por qué se quebró la fábrica? ¿Cuáles fueron los motores de dicho suceso?

DV: No, está fábrica no quebró. Salió el boom de la crisis financiera y todos los empresarios se colgaron de eso. Es difícil entrar en el sistema con una fábrica casi recuperada. Mucha gente los visita. Un italiano, un francés y unos venezolanos vinieron acá.

AT: ¿Qué querían?

DV: A recolectar información como usted. Trasladar también todo eso allá. Al margen, ellos están por allá en un proceso, que no es el mismo de acá. Han visto que las expropiaciones, todo eso. El gobierno chavista, de Chávez; ellos querían ver el panorama de acá. Para ver cómo entraba en la Argentina, esto en el sistema. En realidad, nosotros recién empezamos y han luchado muchísimo para entrar al sistema.

AT: ¿De dónde vinieron estas personas? ¿Europa? ¿Norteamérica? ¿Canadá?

DV: En realidad ha venido gente de todo el mundo. De Marruecos, de África. En estos días han venido de Venezuela, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brasil, de Colombia, no. Acá estuvieron también como 7 meses, aguantaron 3 meses. Luego, se normalizó. Un año antes, en 2008, bajo patrón hicieron una asamblea. Fuimos a hablar con el jefe. Un 42% ó 43 % pedimos aumento de salario. El dijo:

sí. Ni siquiera “si digo que no habrá conflicto”. El loco le dio pena negociar, porque que se le parará la producción. El problema que teníamos acá era que laborábamos de lunes a lunes; no había feriado, ni día de la madre, ni día del padre; era producir y vender, hacer horas extras, sino no las hacíamos.

AT: ¿Cómo fue la transición, si se supone que andaba bien la situación en la fábrica? y además, ¿cómo es que decidieron tomar la fábrica?

DV: Primero, empezó con un conflicto en junio de 2009. Donde estuvimos 60 días, porque querían pagar el aguinaldo en cómodas cuotas, y nosotros dijimos que no, que el aguinaldo lo queríamos ahí. En ese conflicto estuvimos 60 días. Sacamos el aumento salarial, que se pague el aguinaldo. En realidad, ese conflicto se ganó. Quedó un compromiso de otro sueldo, que se pagaba en dos cuotas y nos quedaba debiendo parte de la deuda que había quedado de los 60 días. Quedó sin pagarse. Ya después, se empezaron a atrasar con la quincena. En noviembre se atrasan con la quincena, se origina el conflicto con un paro, con recolección de tareas. El 9 de diciembre de 2009 dijimos hasta acá llegamos, paramos. Después, la gente se fue.

AT: ¿Quiénes se fueron? ¿El patrón? ¿La gente?

DV: Los encargados, los jefes, el gerente. El 28 de diciembre se retiraron de las oficinas. Nosotros bloqueamos todo, por miedo a que roben. Además, aún está bloqueado si vas a mirar.

AT: ¿Vino la policía?

DV: No. Sí, ellos hicieron una denuncia penal, pero no llegó a nada por falta de elementos probatorios, es decir, la jueza no tenía elementos como para llevar adelante la causa, procesar e imputar.

AT: ¿No se llevaron las máquinas tampoco?

DV: Todo, todo. Ellos se fueron, se fueron las personas, los echamos, esa es la verdad. Como forma de presión a fin de diciembre, de buscar una salida, no dejamos entrar a los encargados, ni al gerente, ni a nadie. Bloqueamos el portón y de ahí parte la denuncia. Nunca más entraron a la fábrica. La idea es o pagan lo que deben, se organiza la situación y, después entran. Nunca hicieron una propuesta concreta. Todas las propuestas llegaban de parte del gobierno; dinero para la patronal. La patronal iba rechazando todo lo que venía de gobierno municipal, del gobierno provincial. No hay intenciones de seguir. Los dueños de la fábrica son gente muy grande, no hay herederos. De hecho, la fábrica que tienen en Buenos Aires está en conflicto. Stefani debe como 7 quincenas. Tiene que ver con una dirección también. Todo lo que hicimos en Zanón, todo el proceso, el de la Cerámica del Valle, el de la Cerámica de Stefani, inclusive, las de Cerámicas Neuquén, dentro de la rama de cerámicas, es una de las que mejor salario tiene, de hecho, la mejor de todo el país. Todos los años se da una pelea salarial. Tiene que ver, primero, tuvo un proceso de recuperar el espacio que es de los trabajadores, de comisiones internas, cuerpo de delegados, sindicatos. De hecho, nosotros jamás podríamos permitir una patronal le deba a los compañeros 7 quincenas. 7 quincenas son 3 meses y medio de salario. Bueno, en Buenos Aires hay otras direcciones. Es más, la dirección del sindicato de Buenos Aires es

parte del directorio de la empresa. Por cada grupo económico hay un directorio, entonces los últimos somos la filial 21 del sindicato ceramista a nivel nacional. Todas las filiales estamos rodeados de una federación, gente de la federación son parte del directorio de Stefani, son patrones todos, los mismos que pasan el ferrocarril, es decir, los Pedrazas tiene empresas que son propias de él, que trabajan dentro del ferrocarril. Precarizan el trabajo, se llevan grandes ganancias y en realidad son gente que deberían defender, los que deben defenderte en realidad es tu patrón. Por eso, la importancia de Zanón, Zanón no podría haber sido sin otro tipo de dirección, si hubiesen estado en la burocracia sindical, otros dirigentes, hubiesen habido despidos, es decir, estarían bajo patrón y acá hubiese sido lo mismo. Robando salarios en cuotas. Es más, trataron de reunir a la gente sin informarles a los delegados y pedía algo de tres meses de adelanto, es decir, trabajaban 3 meses y... El proceso que te dice “El Villa” (Héctor Omar Villablanca), es que en cada fábrica hay una comisión interna. Cada fábrica tiene su dirección gremial.

AT: ¿Cuántas personas son en Zanón?

DV: Hoy no existe, porque no hay patrón. Está el sindicato que cumple o no un rol gremial. Salvo Neuquén, ellos cumplen un rol más político que gremial. En Zanón, el proceso fue recuperar. Inclusive, porque Zanón era una fábrica donde había mucha rotación de personal, es decir, despidos, ingresos, mucha precarización. De hecho, había dentro de la misma fábrica, había diferentes convenios. Una forma de dividir a los trabajadores. Como acá, en todas las fábricas se hace lo mismo. Los de la limpieza, se dividía. Los ceramistas no eran tantos y cada 5 por convenio, cada 50 trabajadores, hay un delegado o cada 30, cada 50. Cada 30 trabajadores, un delegado. Y nada, de hecho, en Zanón, antes los mismos delegados eran los que hacían sindicato. Eran prácticamente una familia. La comisión interna estaba dirigida por uno de los tres hermanos Montes. Dentro de Zanón, trabajaban 3, entre comillas. Uno era el encargado, el otro encabezaba la comisión directiva y el otro era secretario general del sindicato. Siempre eran ellos los que hacían los listados de compañeros, para que se despidan. En el 98 se logró con Raúl Godoy, Alejandro López y un grupo de compañeros, armaron una lista para presentarla a la comisión interna y ya del cansancio de la gente, los eligieron, votaron por ellos. Allí empezó un proceso dentro de Zanón, se empezaron a ganar la confianza. A parte de todo esto, entraron muchos compañeros nuevos, jóvenes. Yo en el 98 tenía 25 años y todos rondaban entre 20 y 25 años la gran mayoría. Hubo una reacción de los compañeros más jóvenes, pues los compañeros más viejos eran más retraídos, pero de alguna manera fueron ganando el respeto de los más viejos y eso llevó a hacer un trabajo en la fábrica y recuperar el sindicato en el 2000. Primero se recuperó la comisión interna de Zanón y luego se recuperó el sindicato. La primera comisión directiva del sindicato, era íntegra de Zanón. Sólo era de Zanón. En la segunda, subió Federico Vicente y Navarrete, delegado, acá. Pero la primera era íntegra.

AT: ¿Usted desde cuándo hace parte?

DV: Yo desde 2009

AT: Y antes ¿quién era?

DV: Antes era Alejandro López, y antes de él, era Raúl Godoy y ahora soy yo.

AT: Antes de incorporarse ¿qué hacía usted?

DV: Yo integré la comisión directiva anterior, en la que estaba Alejandro López y antes trabajaba dentro de la fábrica. Y Alejandro López, en todo el país, con los secretarios generales, que los secretarios juntos están 20, 30 años, como está....Yaqui como está, me entendés... En la misma federación del sindicato ceramista a nivel nacional, como dije, lleva más de 30 años. La federación es la que aglutina todas las filiales ceramistas, el secretario general de la Federación Obrera Ceramista de la República *Argentina* (FOCRA) , que es la federación, ya la fábrica donde él trabajaba no existe. Es decir, cerró hace muchos años, y él sigue estando ahí como secretario general.

AT: ¿Cómo es el vínculo del sindicato federalista de Neuquén aquí con el estado federal?

DV: No hay relación. No lo quieren ni ver. Ayer hablé con Ángel y dijo que el sindicato ceramista, aquí de Neuquén tiene un vínculo con el centro de la lucha de Alberto Ferrara, aquí en toda la Argentina. Él es el referente, se le toma como ejemplo, pero en realidad nosotros tenemos relación con las fábricas recuperadas. Lo que pasa es que tenemos diferencias políticas, pues para nosotros lo que plantea, el resto de las direcciones de las otras fábricas, no estamos de acuerdo.

AT: ¿Considera usted que la lucha de aquí, de las fábricas recuperadas de Neuquén es más avanzadas dentro del país?

DV: Sí. La diferencia política es esencial. El que recupere la fábrica, y pasa acá y tiene tendencia, por ejemplo, acá está la cooperativa del petróleo que se recuperó por los trabajadores, pero el presidente de la cooperativa que cobra más que los otros y acá no, acá todos cobran iguales. La diferencia, la salida, la solución para el problema de las fábricas recuperadas, es una ley nacional de expropiación sin pago y bajo control obrero. Lo que plantean otros compañeros, es modificar la ley de quiebra, de hecho, hay el movimiento nacional de empresas recuperadas, plantean la modificación de la ley de quiebra, para que los trabajadores puedan comprar las fábricas.

AT: ¿Y ustedes no pagaron nada?

DV: No pagamos nada, ni pensamos pagar. Imagínate los trabajadores que fueron estafados, de sus salarios, que les robaron sus aportes de obra social, sus aportes de jubilación, que pasaron meses peleando por la reapertura de la fábrica y que no han recibido un solo centavo, y que tienen que sacar una fábrica y encima pagarla, es una locura. Consideramos que hay que expropiarlas, sin pago, pues todas estafaron al pueblo. Hay cosas particulares, por ejemplo, con el agua. Ellos tenían una cisterna y vivía llena, o sea, que robaban el agua del pueblo para producir.

AT: ¿Quiénes?

DV: Los empresarios. Había un pozo y nosotros pusimos todo eso en marcha para no sacarle a la comunidad el agua. Pero ellos mediante (...) no pagaban

impuestos, no pagaban esto, ni lo otro; Ellos no pagaban. Tuvimos un tiempo de espacio muy largo, casi 7 meses. A 6 audiencias no fue, no se presentó. El gobierno sirvió de intermediario, pero a ellos también los cansó los empresarios, porque no querían ningún tipo de arreglo. Pero también el gobierno se abrió de gamba cuando nosotros arreglamos el proyecto. Nosotros considerábamos que la ganancia que se llevaba Stefani, se la tenía que llevar el pueblo. Allí sufrimos, llevamos un referendo impopular, donde logramos más legitimidad que el propio intendente de Cutral-Có, lo cual abrió el marco para que el intendente tenga que hacer una compra de materiales, que el gobierno provincial tenga que hacer una compra de materiales, lo cual no nos da legalidad, pero sí una legitimidad. Pero eso tuvo un proceso muy largo, nosotros estuvimos casi 8 meses luchando, hasta que no nos quedó de otra que tomar la decisión de poner a producir la fábrica. Tomamos la decisión de empezar a producir.

AT: ¿Sus objetivos son iguales a los de Zanón?

DV: Sí. Esa gente se ha enriquecido con la tierra, la cantera, se llevan nuestros recursos. Para el gobierno esto era un negocio en el sentido de la recaudación, ellos sólo tenían que manejar la fábrica, repartir los salarios y repartir las ganancias a la comunidad. La ganancia no se la lleva el empresario corrupto, sino que se la lleve el pueblo, esa es la política.

AT: ¿Cómo define el papel del pueblo?

DV: Nosotros tendríamos de patrón al estado. La fábrica la manejaríamos nosotros y todas las ganancias que salgan de acá, irían a parar a las comunas. Lo cual podría implementarse con esa ganancia que se genera, el gobierno municipal, construir vivienda, construir escuelas. Pero hoy estamos trabajando.

AT: ¿Qué dice el gobierno municipal?

DV: No, el gobierno municipal no la ve, porque no la ve. Dónde ves generalmente a los intendentes o los concejales que son empresarios, entonces, si pasa esto acá, pueden dejar un precedente histórico, que para ellos políticamente no sirve.

AT: ¿Les podría traer complicaciones?

DV: Lo que nosotros planteamos es que no hay que dejar precedentes, sino que le dicen al empresario que mientras este él bien, todo va estar bien. Ahora, el día que él se equivoque con su gente, tiene que pagar el costo. Si un empresario es bueno, te atiende bien, te paga ¿para qué tener problemas? Ahora, si él es prolijo, se roba la plata de tus aportes jubilatorios, entonces ellos se quedaban con esa plata y no aportaban.

AT: Es llamativo su compromiso con la comunidad y también la posibilidad en la vinculación del estado, siendo este capitalista y circulando en el mismo sistema ¿Cómo ven eso?

DV: Es estratégico nada más. Claro ejemplo lo que pasa en el mundo, mientras los índices de economía crecen, no hay ningún tipo de problema; produces, vendes, compras. Por otro lado, cuando hay una recesión o una crisis, es imposible sostenerlo entonces, la salida es política. ¿Por qué pelear por una estatificación de la fábrica? En 2008 nos dimos cuenta de que era necesario, en un momento de crisis quién debería garantizar los salarios, que las fábricas sigan produciendo,

que se sigan destinando los materiales para la obra pública, lo debería hacer el estado. Lo hace cuando la empresa está bajo patrón, en Europa han dado millones de euros para sostener la economía, para sostener el sistema. Acá en Argentina no fue la excepción, le metieron la mano a la caja jubilaria, la estatizaron y de esa caja sacaron para sostener a la empresa bajo patrón.

AT: ¿Las ganancias a quién son retribuidas, al estado federal o a la región?

DV: Las ganancias tienen que volver a través de planes, por ejemplo, unas de las problemáticas fundamentales de todo el mundo, que acá en Argentina no es la excepción, es la vivienda, la escuela, los hospitales. Cuando la plata vuelve al pueblo no quiere decir que se da como diezmo, es que no vuelve al bolsillo del político.

AT: ¿Eso se da a través de la municipalidad o de la provincia?

DV: De la provincia. Nos hemos presentado acá con lo del referendo.

AT: ¿Cuál fue la reacción del gobierno de la provincia?

DV: No, no quieren saber nada. Hay una tendencia de todo el estado. Acá hubo un proceso en la Argentina en la década del 90 de sacarse todas las empresas del estado. Los recursos naturales para cualquier estado, para cualquier país son recursos estratégicos, acá está todo privatizado.

AT: En el proceso de retomar la fábrica, de empezar el control obrero ¿cómo fue esa transición de extender todo lo que hacían al pueblo? ¿Cómo lo que ustedes hacen puede mejorar la situación para el pueblo?

DV: Tiene que ver con la dirección. Son 10 años, años de discusión. Todos los días no es fácil, hasta el día de hoy hay compañeros que no están de acuerdo. Hay que entender que hay una realidad del portón para afuera de la fábrica que te aplasta. Acá en Cutral-Có llegó un punto donde toda la comunidad, el tema más importante era en la radio, en los medios, con la gente, era Stefani. Stefani, fue un proceso con la gente de hacer parte la comunidad. Acá a Cutral-Có le dicen la comarca petrolera, supieron de la privatización producto del (*no se entiende*) a nadie le va a explicar a la gente de acá lo que significa estar desocupado, entonces hacer parte a la comunidad desde el aspecto de ser desocupado, de tener una fábrica que funciona y que luego que se cierre, es un crimen. Acá no se fábrica ni camisas, ni chaquetas, ni zapatos para empresarios, se fabrica ladrillos para vivienda. Llegar con un discurso muy simple para que la gente le llegue, brota y se logró acá, la gente lo entendió, que la desocupación para la fabricación de ladrillos es una cuestión que la gente atiende.

AT: ¿Cómo aprendiste todo esto?

DV: Trabajando en Zanón, recorriendo, preguntando a los compañeros.

AT: ¿Cómo es enfrentarse con sus ideas políticas en el proceso?

DV: Radical. Era radical.

AT: ¿Por qué?

DV: Por mi papá, es radical. (Partido político).

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Andrés Ruggeri (Programa Facultad Abierta¹²¹, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires)

AT: ¿Usted cómo ve la gestión obrera en el momento aquí en Argentina?

Andrés Ruggeri (AR): No idealizamos, nosotros estamos enamorados de la cuestión obrera, adoramos lo que hacemos. Ahora, no es fácil y más cuando hay una doble dirección. Dirigimos para una mayoría, no para el 100%. Debemos convencer a los demás con argumentos, por qué la salida es por ahí.

AT: ¿La asamblea es una mayoría normal, más de un 50% o cómo es?

AR: De 450 que somos, hay compañeros que no les queda fácil ir, porque les toca guardia, por su rango, o régimen de trabajo.

AT: ¿Y si se toma una decisión?

AR: Las decisiones de la asamblea las acatamos todos. Siempre gana la mayoría. Todo se puede rediscutir frente a la toma de decisiones, después de una votación y de puntos muy polarizados. Las cosas se rediscuten, no pasa nada, llega un momento en que dicen no más asamblea, para a veces es necesaria para discutir, informar, debatir. Es una solución natural del hombre, ir en contra de todo. Hay semanas que no se hace una asamblea.

AT: ¿Cada cuánto se programa una asamblea?

AR: Es una dinámica y una gimnasia.

AT: ¿Se proponen temáticas o cómo llegan a ellas?

AR: Sí. Están abiertas, el temario está abierto, se forman, se abre la discusión, pero no hay problema. Los militares sacaron a Sociología, lo llevaron a Derecho. Sacaron a Psicología, la llevaron a otro lado y Antropología la cerraron. Después, cuando volvió la democracia, Antropología se volvió a abrir al final de la dictadura; estuvo un par de años cerradas, no toda la dictadura. Se volvió a abrir Antropología y después Psicología apareció en otras carreras. De las carreras que quedaban, no las volvieron a meter en filosofía, sino que formaron esta facultad de sociales y Psicología se transformó en una facultad, sola, aparte.

AT: ¿Qué tipo de temas se proponen?

AR: Los mismos. Tienen un enfoque por ahí. La diferencia es que ellos son puramente investigadores. Nosotros no sólo somos investigación, sino que hacemos asesoramientos, apoyamos a los (*no se entiende*). Es un papel más activo, ellos son investigadores. Por eso organizamos eventos, actividades públicas y ellos tienen una revista digital que tienen algunos artículos interesantes. Búscala tiene varios números; 3 o 4 números que han publicado de manera digital, donde hay artículos con un enfoque más (*no se entiende*). Ellos sacan artículos clásicos, algunas cosas están buenas. Nosotros tenemos más vínculos con las empresas, conocemos más de adentro el tema, creo.

AT: ¿Otras personas no se dedican a esto, en otra parte de Argentina?

AR: Hay compañeros que eran de los nuestros, que estaban en otro equipo, que fueron a jugar en el interior. Con ellos, por ejemplo, hay un compañero que es

¹²¹ <http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/index.htm>

Carlos Martínez, que con él escribimos el artículo de 2004. Él está en Córdoba. Él sigue la misma línea de nosotros; no vas a encontrar algo muy distinto, pero conoce bastante. En Mendoza está Mónica Cuartas. Ella es una mujer que también hizo su tesis conmigo, pero vive en Mendoza. En Mendoza hay una mesa de empresas recuperadas, es de los pocos lugares donde hay una coordinación regional. Ellos están haciendo unas cosas parecidas a las que estamos haciendo nosotros, tener un centro de documentación dentro de una empresa recuperada. Igual, los textos que escribieron están en el mismo libro que sacamos en 2009, que podes ver en Chilavert. Encuentras todos los libros en Chilavert, tal vez te van a salir más barato.

AT: ¿Encuentro todos los libros?

AR: Encuentras los libros que sacamos nosotros. Los dos que sacamos. En Chilavert vas a encontrar información para consultar. Si los quieres comprar tenemos esos nada más. El que sacamos de las empresas recuperadas que se llama *La economía de los trabajadores*, que son una selección de trabajos y yo de ambos libros soy el compilador, el segundo, se llama *Las empresas recuperadas*.

AT: ¿Ambos libros los puedo comprar en Chilavert? ¿No hay más libros?

AR: No hay muchos libros sobre las empresas recuperadas. Un libro que sacó la Vaca, ya es bastante viejo, de 2004 que tiene una base en inglés. Después salen unos libros de Julián Rebón y Gabriel Fajo es e otro. El libro que sacó Gabriel Fajo es bastante viejo. No te voy a agregar demasiado ahora. Hay muchos artículos, tesis, las encuentras en internet. *La economía de los trabajadores*, porque era el título del primer encuentro internacional que hicimos en el 2007. Es una selección de trabajos en realidad; es un poco de todo, es un trabajo muy diverso. No todos hablan sobre las empresas recuperadas. Ahí escribió Hugo Trincherro, que es decano de la facultad nuestra, que participó en nuestro equipo en algún momento; es más que todo una crítica a la exclusión social. Después salió un artículo mío, es bastante viejo ya, es de 2006, después hay otras cosas de trabajo informal de unos mexicanos, hay uno de Graciela Monteagudo, una Argentina que vive en Estados Unidos, es un trabajo de campo global, una empresa recuperada. Después artículos sobre Cuba, que habla más que nada de cuestiones legales, el trabajo en Cuba. Son más o menos esas cosas.

AT: ¿En Chilavert sólo hay esos libros?

AR: Sí. Para comprar sí. Después de acá, es lo más actualizado que tenemos.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Francisco Navuelan (Worker at Stefani, Cutral-Có)

AT: ¿Cuál es su nombre?

Francisco Navuelan (FN): Mi nombre es Navuelan Francisco.

AT: ¿Trabaja usted aquí hace mucho tiempo?

FN: Sí, 25 años

AT: ¿Cómo ve las cosas?

FN: Se está revirtiendo bastante bien. Se está vendiendo mucho más que al principio. Costó un poco, pero con el esfuerzo que le estamos poniendo todo y las ganas está saliendo adelante.

AT: ¿Su lucha hace parte de un conocimiento histórico?

FN: Cuando se decía de una crisis en Zanón, se decía que miráramos los libros contables, para que se compruebe dicha situación. Esto es algo que hacían los obreros 70 años atrás, lo que pasa es que lo ha borrado la burguesía, los patronos han mantenido un hilo de continuidad, digamos de cómo explotarte. A nosotros nos han cortado la posibilidad de conocer las luchas de nuestros antepasados y de los que lucharon contra nuestros patronales antes. Hemos emprendido la tarea de recuperar, nosotros hemos recuperado una parte de eso. Algunas cosas nos saldrán en el camino pero otras las tomamos ahí.

AT: ¿Hace cuánto fue su última crisis?

FN: La última pero en realidad, la última hace un año. De hecho, el año pasado se paró la fábrica por que por falta de pago. Había mucho aplazo en los aportes obligatorios.

AT: ¿Quién era el patrón?

FN: Stefani, es así como Zanón, un grupo económico.

AT: ¿Es también de Italia?

FN: Sí, Stefani, son italianos también.

FN: Estuvimos varios meses, hicimos todo lo posible por reorganizar la situación, audiencias, reuniones con la patronal, el gobierno provincial y municipal. No se pudo llegar a ningún acuerdo.

AT: ¿Cuál es su situación actual?

FN: Trabajo control abierto, nosotros en junio, nos largamos porque habían cortado el gas, largamos el gas y nos pusimos en marcha. Se dio una pelea muy grande por varios meses y siempre de la metodología nuestra hace parte a la comunidad. De hecho presentamos un proyecto para expropiar la fábrica, después un referendo y más de 5.000 vecinos fueron a votar a favor del proyecto de ley. No alcanzó, pero dio el consenso para que los compañeros.

AT: ¿Cuántas personas trabajan aquí?

FN: 51 compañeros.

AT: De toda esa experiencia de la crisis, la recuperación y hasta la lucha ¿cuál ha sido la experiencia más importante para usted?

FN: Acá siempre fue una lucha de los compañeros. Si bien fue una prueba más grande, lamentablemente, ya el patrón nos abandonó. Sin embargo, tuvimos conflictos más, años atrás, grandes también. Tuvimos casi 2 meses fuera y (hubo un) arreglo que nos pagaron con cerámica. Todo lo que nos debían lo pagaron con cerámica. La experiencia fue mucha, porque todos juntos luchando acá, ir a la casa y no llevar nada, por ejemplo, el sueldo que yo empleaba a homologar era muy diferente. Pero si esto no lo luchábamos, se perdía todo. Gracias a la comunidad, al gremio que nos dieron una mano, nos dieron fuerza. La comunidad

fue algo fundamental para nosotros, de allí, salió la fuerza más que necesitábamos.

AT: ¿Cómo lo ha cambiado a usted dicha experiencia?

FN: Yo valoro lo que hice, aunque yo no soy, no me mezcló mucho en esto, en la política. No comparto la política, nunca la compartí. Nunca me metí con políticos, ni pedí nada. Es una lucha como obrero que soy, una experiencia muy grande. No solamente la vivimos nosotros los que vivimos acá, también nuestras familias. Tuvimos el apoyo de las familias, por ejemplo, la mía me daba ánimo. Yo soy albañil y salgo del trabajo ahora y hago trabajo afuera de construcción, en la tarde. Cuando estoy de tarde, en la mañana hago trabajo, siempre me defendía así. Pero nunca me entrometí un poco más acá, aunque siempre estuve apoyando, porque era mi lugar, debía estar acá y eran 25 años y no lo iba a tirar todo por la tierra. La experiencia buena no es mucho, sino mala, porque una fábrica que toda la vida dio producción, nunca tuvo déficit, es una lástima que abandonaran y que no estemos trabajando dignamente, como estábamos trabajando. Son 25 años en los que uno adquiere experiencia acá dentro, y sabe todo el movimiento de todo esto acá dentro; ya somos una familia. Por eso no me cabe en la cabeza, cómo los patrones....

AT: ¿Le gusta trabajar más así, es decir, con los compañeros, en corporativo, bajo control obrero o le gustaba más cuando había patrón?

FN: No, no. Cuando había patrón, porque cuesta, así como cooperativa cuesta.

AT: ¿Es difícil?

FN: Es difícil. Ahora es difícil porque no sabemos qué va a pasar acá. Nosotros estamos así, bajo una cooperativa transitoria, porque no sabemos nada de lo que va a pasar.

AT: Según usted ¿qué podría pasar?

FN: Qué decisión va a tomar la política o qué decisión va a tomar el empresario, la fuerza que le dio el pulso a la empresa, no sé, no sabemos nada. Así que, por mí y muchos de acá... el patrón, pero lamentablemente nos abandonó y aquí estamos.

AT: ¿Va a regresar el patrón o ustedes van a seguir así?

FN: Si el patrón no viene más, toca seguir trabajando. Por eso digo, ahora va a depender de la mano que den los políticos. Qué acción van a tomar ellos respecto a la fábrica. Si realmente la van a apropiar o no sé, si vamos a trabajar legal, como se debe trabajar. Nosotros todavía estamos esperando que venga el empresario, aunque ahora se expande mucho más la deuda. Arreglar, la empresa es de ellos. Se está trabajando bien, supongo cada día será un poco mejor.

AT: ¿Hay diferencia con los sueldos de ahora y los que tenían antes?

FN: Es muy diferente. Ahora es casi 70% menos.

AT: ¿Cuál pudo haber sido otra alternativa? ¿Buscar un trabajo mejor?

FN: Difícil. No hay mucho trabajo.

AT: ¿Es mejor tener un trabajo, así sea con menos salario?

FN: Es preferible llevarse menos plata, pero conservar la fuente de trabajo. Por eso decidimos esto. A parte, dónde no anduvimos, 25 reuniones casi. Podemos negociar, “la empresa es suya, páguenos y seguimos trabajando”.

AT: Al final ¿qué cree usted, podrán producir más, pueden emplear más gente o cómo ve el futuro si sigue así?

FN: Nosotros tenemos que mirar para adelante, que el trabajo siga produciendo bien. La otra, sí con expectativa, tomar gente, pero hijos de los trabajadores que están acá. Esa es la expectativa, porque hace falta gente.

AT: ¿Aún no pueden contratar?

FN: Sí.

AT: ¿Por qué no lo hacen?

FN: Porque se está tirando todo a asamblea. Se va dejar pasar este año, el otro año sí.

AT: ¿Cómo ha sido esta experiencia para su familia? ¿Qué dijeron?

FN: Ellos no querían que yo abandone.

AT: ¿Y el apoyo de la comunidad? ¿Qué les dijeron?

FN: La mayoría. En primer lugar, se visitó casa por casa. A toda la ciudad fuimos todos los obreros. La gente nos dijo que no podíamos perder nuestra fuente de trabajo. El pueblo estaba con nosotros. Que siguiéramos adelante, que cualquier cosa, que vinieran reprimir algo, el pueblo se iba a levantar. No se podía cerrar una fábrica que produce toda la vida.

AT: Potencialmente ¿el pueblo se podría levantar, por ejemplo, por una crisis como la de 2001?

FN: Claro, sí.

AT: ¿Cómo es la situación en general de Cutral-Có?

FN: Hubo mucho conflicto-

AT: ¿Conflicto de qué?

FN: De petroleros, los maestros, pero con la lucha y el apoyo de todos salió adelante, ha salido adelante. Se ha logrado que se arreglen los asuntos y que se siga trabajando normalmente. Como cooperativa es medio difícil, porque tienen...hay que trabajarla para que siga su curso.

AT: ¿Qué le parece lo que están haciendo los chicos de Zanón?

FN: Es una experiencia grande, linda. Si no hubiese sido que un grupo tomase la fábrica y la trabajase, sería una fábrica a la deriva. Tiene la última tecnología de América.

AT: ¿Tomaron ustedes a Zanón como inspiración?

FN: Sí. Ellos nos dieron la fuerza y el abogado nos dijo por dónde teníamos que ir.

AT: ¿Quién es el abogado?

FN: Pedrero. Lo conozco por Pedrero.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Federico Tonarelli and Eva María Lossada (Workers at Hotel Bauen, Buenos Aires)

AT: ¿Cómo ha sido la relación con el estado, en ese proceso de establecer la cooperativa? ¿Tienen apoyo del estado?

Eva María Lossada (EML): En realidad, el estado nacional siempre nos apoyó. Además, gracias a ellos nos armamos.

AT: ¿Cómo fue ese apoyo del estado? ¿Cómo se vincularon?

EML: Nosotros allá en la provincia fue con el municipio. El municipio nos llamó, nos inscribimos, nos unimos, nos formamos como cooperativa y después llegamos a la formación de las viviendas. Después, hubo 48 viviendas a través del convenio nacional-provincia-municipio.

AT: ¿Qué pasó con las empresas antes? ¿Se quebraron? ¿Qué pasó con los patrones?

EML: Nosotros no teníamos patrones.

AT: ¿Cómo ve la situación en el año 2011 frente a la situación de las empresas recuperas, después de una década de la crisis?

Federico Tonarelli (FT): Es un momento interesante. No sé si leyó o vio el informe que hicimos del requerimiento. A principio de este año terminamos un requerimiento general de las empresas recuperadas.

AT: ¿En qué año?

FT: 2009-2010. Empezó en finales del 2009 y terminamos el trabajo decampo en marzo de 2010. Publicamos el informe hace 2 ó 3 meses. Está en nuestra página y lo puedes mirar porque hay una serie de datos que te pueden ayudar.

AT: ¿Hubo una Teletón en 2004?

FT: Nosotros ahora estamos comparando esos resultados de 2004 con (*no se entiende*) y ahí lo tenemos, al menos un crecimiento numérico.

AT: ¿En cuanto a la fábrica o a los trabajadores?

FT: De ambos. De las dos cosas. Tanto de la fábrica como el número de los trabajadores. Por ejemplo, en 2004 había 160 trabajadores, ahora tenemos 205 que nosotros conocemos y estamos seguros que existían en marzo de este año, seguro hay uno más. De aproximadamente 7 mil trabajadores, ahora estamos llegando a los 10 mil y eso no sólo son las fábricas nuevas que se han incorporado, sino que se hay otra conversión. Después otra serie de datos estadísticos cuantitativos que no están, no solamente la consolidación de este fenómeno, sino un crecimiento. Un crecimiento tanto en lo económico como en la cantidad de trabajadores y cosas que se han ido logrando. Eso por ahí como un panorama que puede parecer sorprendente y no para alguno que esté metido el proceso, sino la gente por fuera, que está viendo a través de los medios o otros proceso históricos anteriores, donde había tomas y otros procesos muy radicalizados que prácticamente se terminaban, porque había una situación política que se estaba consolidando de alguna manera y se acababa toda la experiencia.

AT: ¿Y la de acá?

FT: Acá es otra cosa, al revés. Fue una crisis, un estallido final de un proceso económico, político y social que venía de unos años antes, pero permitió esto la existencia de otras experiencias y no fueron muy combativas desde el estado, todas fueron toleradas. Entonces, han ido, todo depende de la capacidad de los trabajadores de mantenerse económicamente. Otra cosa interesante, es que en todo este tiempo todos los conflictos importantes donde hubo posibilidad de cierre de empresas, de fábricas apareció la posibilidad de la empresa recuperada. Hacemos la cooperativa y nos quedamos con la empresa, es una herramienta de presión más. Hay un momento en que la recuperación económica, la recuperación del empleo, pone a los trabajadores en mejor situación para los conflictos. Entonces, dentro de esto se inscribe la propuesta de empresas recuperadas, porque se conviertan o no en empresas recuperadas, es una herramienta más que utilizan los trabajadores en su lucha, en su conflicto. Aunque después no lo usen, es también una incorporación de la empresa recuperada en la conciencia de los trabajadores. Algo más que es interesante, es que a lo largo de todo este tiempo, 9 años que llevan funcionando la gran mayoría, uno puede tener un periodo prudencial para dejar de examinar los conflictos y empezar a ver el funcionamiento, la lógica que se ve acá dentro. Por ejemplo, cómo se concilia una empresa colectiva con una lógica de mercado, cómo avanza, cómo se relaciona los problemas legales y prácticos.

AT: A partir de los años 70, 80 y 90 inclusive, la crisis de 2007 que fue muy fuerte en varios países del mundo como México, en Brasil, Turquía, Rusia, entre otros. Sin embargo, ¿a qué le atribuye usted el surgimiento de este fenómeno en el contexto argentino? Además, ¿a qué le atribuye que lleven cierta delantera frente a otros países en las mismas circunstancias?

FT: En Argentina la clase obrera ha sido bastante fuerte. Hay que analizar por qué acá sí y en otros lugares no. Hay dos cosas, una son las particularidades argentinas y otro, es empezar a ver el fenómeno, porque a medida que se empieza a investigar el tema, empieza a encontrar antecedentes similares a muchos otros países. Veamos una situación que en el capitalismo es recurrente, el cierre de las empresas que son puestas en funcionamiento por las cooperativas. Lo particular de acá, es que se dio en gran número y de forma simultánea y se ha logrado conformar como una especie de movimiento. No tanto el hecho particular de la empresa recuperada, porque esto se da en Brasil y antes de Argentina; hay en México, pero no le dicen empresas recuperadas. Hay en distintos lugares y no en todas partes se llama empresas recuperadas. Es un nombre que surge acá. Ahora, ¿por qué en Argentina se dio de esta manera? Yo creo porque esa historia que tiene el movimiento obrero argentino. No sé si esté acá más avanzado, lo que sé es que hay tradiciones y formas de organización que propenden a esto, es decir, que son determinaciones que adoptan los trabajadores en su memoria histórica. El otro componente es que los obreros no están tomando la fábrica para sacar el patrón, sino que buscan conservar su fuente de trabajo. Si bien tenemos 250 empresas recuperadas, hay miles de historias de fábricas cerradas que no fueron recuperadas. Hay como muchos atenuantes, pero también hay cosas para destacar.

Yo la verdad no te puedo dar una respuesta tajante acerca de esto. Acá se dio de esta forma y en otros lugares no. En otros lugares también hay, pero no con este nivel de masividad y temporalidad, en el mismo espacio de tiempo.

AT: ¿Qué exigen?

FT: Ellos quieren expropiación. Ellos quieren una ley de expropiación. En general, todas las empresas recuperadas andan transitando un camino en el que van solucionando problemas legales, problemas de la práctica. En el año 2002, hubo una especie de polémica por mí. Esa polémica fue por el camino de armar, formar cooperativas y luchar por leyes de expropiación, pero había un camino que decía no armar cooperativas y luchar por la expropiación bajo control obrero; eran como dos líneas polémicas. En la práctica, todas las empresas recuperadas, incluyendo a Zanón, optaron por el camino de montar la cooperativa e ir solucionando los problemas de la forma que les permitiera trabajar y, cuando no lo hicieron así, se enfrentaron con gravísimos problemas, porque siguen siendo empresa. Para poder trabajar la gente tiene que producir, comprar insumos, producir y transformarlos en mercancía y venderlas, no hay otra forma. La otra, es que el estado pague los sueldos y las convierta en empresa del estado, pero terminando allí con la empresa recuperada. En la práctica los trabajadores optaron por este camino, por formar su propia cooperativa y tratar de conseguir algún tipo de reconocimiento legal que les permitirá funcionar. Entonces, a veces las condiciones de trabajo de las empresas recuperadas no son tan ideales, tienen enormes dificultades y están esperando que el estado les ayude. El estado no tiene una clara política, es decir, no hay una clara ocupación del estado hacia las empresas recuperadas, ha habido indiferencia. Ha habido algunas declaraciones y hasta algunos discursos, algunos subsidios, alguna ayuda, pero no hay una política que obligue al gobierno actual. El gobierno actual no le interesa demasiado las empresas recuperadas, tampoco las enfrente, ni las hostiga, pero en la práctica tampoco le interesan. Económicamente no son un fenómeno importante; sin embargo, si todas se juntan en un conglomerado económico, sería otra cosa. No son un fenómeno económico importante, no se mueve mucho dinero. No obstante, podría serlo, pero están muy divididas.

AT: Me han comentado de situaciones en que los trabajadores están contentos por tener trabajo, pero no les interesa nada, en cuestiones políticas ¿Qué piensa usted de eso? Y ¿cómo ve el potencial político de este movimiento, puede funcionar este como modelo en otros países?

FT: Yo comparto eso, pero por eso mismo es importante entender qué es lo que realmente pasa. Ese potencial existe o por lo menos se tiene la esperanza que exista. Es necesario saber cuáles son los procesos reales, porque si no estaríamos hablando de un potencia imaginario. Nosotros no nos damos cuenta o por lo menos no entendemos por qué los trabajadores están allí y no todos están viviendo este capítulo, muchos otros sólo están trabajando.

AT: Uno no pretende que los trabajadores luego de casi terminar su primaria entiendan todas las cuestiones de fondo del capitalismo en el contexto global, son algo complejo. Pero para entender realmente de qué se tratan las cosas, sin

establecer el vínculo de otras experiencias en contextos de años anteriores, de otros países.

FT: Yo coincido plenamente en eso. Yo creo prefiero poner el acento en el proceso de la autogestión y no en la consigna política, ni poner un rotulo, ni indicar hacia dónde se tiene que ir, me parece que se tiene que ver hacia dónde se están yendo o si se pueden ir a otro lado. Que esto sirva a otros lugares y que esta experiencia se conozca, pero que no se conozca de forma idealizada. En realidad, lo que pasó acá no es simplemente eso, es muchísimo más complejo. Una cosa es el militante de izquierda que quiere la lucha, el que quiere la cosa; el trabajador no las quiere, él ve esto como una tragedia. Ellos tienen una idea de lo que va a ser su vida y de su lugar en la sociedad, piensa que hay cosas que nunca va a poder hacer, que está condenado a trabajar y que por lo menos esa condena al trabajo significa que va a vivir de eso y hace planes en una familia, compra esto, esa es la vida del trabajador y eso se dañó en la Argentina en el liberalismo, se destruyó. La gente entendió que esto se estaba acabando, hasta que no pasó eso, la gente no salió, no hubo piquete, no hubo nada. Empezó a surgir lo de la fábrica recuperada cuando se entendió lo que estaba pasando, se fueron años terribles. Habla con cualquiera, con el trabajador común, fue algo difícil, algunos lloran. Hay trabajadores que llevan años en la fábrica y siguen sin pensar en nada. Toman a los trabajadores que se comprometen más, los toman como patrón y se producen esas reacciones, es complicado el tema. Pero si no se toma así, es muy difícil que nos sirva.

AT: Hablando nuevamente de potencial, en el caso económico de las fábricas, se ha demostrado que si se puede y que se puede organizar de otra manera, se puede producir de otra manera y mucha gente no puede imaginar que se pueda. La gestión obrera ha contribuido en algo en el vacío de la organización de la fábrica.

FT: Yo creo que eso sí es un punto de partida. En este momento para mí, para los trabajadores, para los compañeros con quienes trabajaba ver lo que pasa en ese proceso y ver los problemas que hay en esta gestión, qué camia realmente, qué es posible cambiar, hay salida en el mercado capitalista, todo esto muestra que esta es una manera que sigue manejándose hacia el exterior, con las mismas normas de todos los demás y decir: “esto se puede hacer”. Hay una experiencia práctica que además, no tiene receta ni camino y como no existe ese camino existe mucha variabilidad. Hay algunos que están divididos en jerarquías, otros que mantiene el asambleísmo muy fuerte, a unos que les va bien económicamente, a otros, que les va mal. Hay de todo y hay un enorme potencial. Pero el trabajador si tiene incorporado esa alternativa de decir “si se va el patrón, seguimos nosotros”. Hay otras cosas que han cambiado y son las experiencias que los trabajadores han vivido a través de los cambios del mismo capitalismo, en la forma e idea del trabajo, por ejemplo. Entonces, por un lado están defendiendo su trabajo, van a seguir siendo trabajadores y al mismo tiempo lo hacen avanzando sobre otras formas de producción.

AT: ¿Cómo ve el papel de los sindicatos?

FT: Con los sindicatos hay una especie de doble lectura. Por un lado, nosotros quisimos meternos con el tema sindical, es interesante. Hay sindicatos que fueron importantes como el de Zanón, por ejemplo, en otros lugares los sindicatos no tuvieron ningún papel. En la actualidad los sindicatos están volviendo a ver el tema de las empresas recuperadas, porque en general los trabajadores no se están viendo como cooperativistas, ni miembros de un movimiento social, ni como gente de la economía social, sino como trabajadores. La organización de los trabajadores, por ahora, sigue siendo el sindicato, por eso hay una relación con el sindicato, a favor o en contra. Generalmente algo siempre van a decir, que el sindicato los traicionó, que el sindicato los apoyó, les ayudó, pero nada intermedio. En cambio si uno pregunta sobre otras cosas, por ejemplo, cómo ven la economía y esas cosas, muchos de los trabajadores no te van a decir nada, pero del tema del sindicato...

AT: ¿Usted ve la problemática con el estado como el problema central que tienen las fábricas? ¿Deben vincularse con el estado?

FT: El principal peligro no creo que sea. El principal peligro es la indefensión en el mercado. Todo el capitalismo no funciona libre, el estado interviene a favor y pone las reglas para que los grandes. El estado al no solucionar, al no crear algún marco legal específico para la empresa de autogestión, lo que hace es que se debilite sus condiciones en el mercado.

AT: ¿Cómo empezaron con la formación de la cooperativa?

FT: Empezamos con la cooperativa de la nada.

AT: ¿Cómo ve la situación ahora, en el año 2011, casi 10 años después de la crisis más profunda de la historia de Argentina, en relación con las empresas recuperadas y de la gestión obrera?

FT: Es algo por lo cual discutimos mucho. Nosotros lo que vemos es luego de cada crisis económica, producto de esta hiper etapa de concentración del capitalismo, más allá de una recuperación económica, nunca se reponen en realidad los puestos de trabajo que se destruyeron durante la crisis. Es allí donde nosotros aparecemos como un sujeto nuevo, político, social, económico y cultural, que llegó para quedarse. La gran discusión que tenemos nosotros era una salida temporaria a la crisis y en que esta crisis desapareciera, nosotros desaparecíamos.

FT: Justamente, para nosotros 10 años es una eternidad.

AT: ¿Ustedes empezaron en 2001?

FT: En realidad, los fundadores de esta cooperativa iniciaron en 2003

AT: ¿Antes quieran los dueños?

FT: Del Hotel Bauen. Era un grupo empresario poderoso que tuvo el hotel desde el año 78, después de la dictadura.

AT: ¿Qué le pasó? ¿Se quebró?

FT: Aparece en todo este proceso, nosotros los trabajadores nos organizamos para recuperar nuestras empresas y nos aglomeramos en organizaciones de segundo grado. Ahora, nosotros participamos junto a las compañeras de una confederación. Era un sector de la clase obrera que se organizó, esto es un fenómeno que llega y puede ser que tiene saltos a partir de nuevas crisis

económicas. Pero, lo que está no desaparece. Es un trabajo muy arduo y trabajamos para que compañeros que vengan después, tengan una base. Nosotros estamos aprendiendo, aunque la cooperativa vaya a cumplir 8 años en marzo.

AT: ¿Cuándo se quebró el hotel?

FT: La historia del hotel, más o menos rápida es así: el grupo económico estaba ligado a la dictadura militar Argentina. Consiguió un préstamo muy blando para construir el hotel, porque acá se hacía el mundial de 78 de fútbol y era ideal tener un hotel. Consiguieron el préstamo, construyeron el hotel. El hotel era de súper lujo. El hotel debía ser muy importante, cambió muchísimo, porque ahora no se le hizo nada. Lo que pasó es que los empresarios que pidieron el préstamo, nunca lo pagaron. Le iniciaron un juicio al estado, porque el estado les había dado el préstamo fuera de tiempo. En el año 97, 21 años después, ellos realizan una venta de esta parte, porque el hotel en realidad se comunica con otro Bauen que está sobre la calle corriente. En el 97 lo subdividen y el otro tiene apartamentos, el otro, habitaciones. Se lo venden a un grupo chileno. Lo que nosotros creemos hoy, es que los chilenos son los testaferros. La empresa que quiebra en 2001, es la empresa que había comprado el hotel en el 97. Nosotros estábamos convencidos de que todo era parte de la misma maniobra. Cuando la empresa quiebra, previamente, hacen una nueva venta a una nueva empresa, de ellos mismos, un familiar de ellos. Lo que nunca imaginaron es que iban a aparecer los trabajadores tomando el hotel y poniéndolo en marcha. Una maniobra fraudulenta para reabrir la empresa, con otro nombre. Allí aparecimos nosotros, hicimos el litigio legal. Después, tienen que decidir si el hotel es de la empresa que quebró o es de la nueva empresa que muestra el título. Se decide que el hotel es de la nueva empresa. Esto fue en el año 2007. Nosotros apelamos a la medida e hicimos una campaña pública.

AT: ¿Cuál fue esa campaña?

FT: Que todas las empresas que estaban ligadas entre sí, que después tenían que retribuir la propiedad del inmueble a algún alguien, se la tenían que restituir al estado. Si vamos a discutir, el hotel no es de ninguna de estas empresas y nosotros reclamamos que el estado, políticamente, intervenga, ejecute las deudas, se quede con la propiedad del hotel y después, nosotros lo discutimos con el estado.

AT: ¿Nunca ha pasado?

FT: No. Todavía no. Es un proyecto de ley que está en la cámara de diputados.

AT: ¿Los empresarios se quedaron con los sueldos de los trabajadores?

FT: Nunca se cobraron.

AT: ¿Cómo fue el proceso de creación de conciencia con los trabajadores?

FT: Fue distinto que Zanón. En Zanón había un proceso de vanguardia, porque ellos se habían ganado el sindicato ceramista y lego, se quedaron con la fábrica. En este caso, el hotel cerró y estuvo un año y medio cerrado.

AT: ¿Qué hicieron ustedes?

FT: Yo no estaba en ese momento. Los compañeros se pusieron en contacto con el movimiento que se estaba creando de recuperación de empresas y de fábricas y

plantearon el caso. Que hace un año habían cerrado y se trato de tener el chance de que con el movimiento se pudiera poner esto en práctica, y así fue.

AT: ¿Cómo entraron otra vez?

FT: Por la fuerza.

AT: ¿Estaba totalmente vacío?

FT: Sí. Lo que habían dejado acá, se lo robaron y lo llevaron al otro hotel. Televisores, mantas, colchones. Los empresarios habían vaciado el hotel.

El hotel cerró el 28 de diciembre de 2001 y acá se entró el 21 de marzo de 2003.

AT: ¿Cómo iniciaron? ¿Tenían el dinero para hacerlo?

FT: Préstamos y solidaridad de sindicatos de otras cooperativas.

AT: ¿Cuántas personas trabajan aquí?

FT: 150 personas.

AT: ¿Cómo arreglan los sueldos?

FT: Esto es una discusión. Lo que pasa es que tratamos de que el destino del hotel no caiga en un asambleísmo. Así no podemos prácticamente trabajar. Las cuestiones grandes, las grandes decisiones las toma la asamblea. Cada uno de nosotros tiene responsabilidades. En cuanto a los sueldos hay discusión, pero hay diferencias. Los que tienen más responsabilidades tiene una retribución mayor. La diferencia entre el que más gana y el que menos gana es: 600- 700 pesos.

AT: ¿Cómo ha sido la relación del estado en todo este proceso?

FT: Con el estado es contradictorio. Por el momento tienes buena relación, en otros momentos, no.

AT: ¿Tienen relación con Zanón?

FT: El Bauen con Zanón tiene una relación muy fuerte. Nos visitamos mutuamente. Diferimos de ellos en que para nosotros creemos que hay que organizarse en federaciones, confederaciones. Nosotros los invitamos a las confederaciones nuestras. Nosotros estamos en federados en una entidad llamada Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Trabajadores Autogestionados (FACTA)¹²² y esta a su vez con otras federaciones.

AT: ¿Cuál ha sido el problema más grande que han tenido?

FT: El problema es que aún no nos han resuelto la titularidad del hotel. Nosotros tenemos un problema dentro del marco legal capitalista convencional. Nosotros no tenemos un sueldo/ papel que acredite que la cooperativa pude funcionar en Neuquén.

AT: ¿Cuál es la situación legal ahora?

FT: Nosotros somos legitimidad pura. En Zanón se ganó la expropiación y hay una ley que dice que la fábrica es de los trabajadores, acá no hay nada. Imagínesse su ciudad, un grupo de trabajadores quiebra un hotel, se queda ocupando, lo gestiona durante siete años, con una empresa que existe, que paga impuestos, que paga servicios. Pero, sobre el hotel no tiene ningún papel que diga: ni que el hotel es de la cooperativa, ni que el hotel se lo han prestado a la cooperativa, ni la cooperativa lo alquila, nada. Sin embargo, no nos pueden sacar, pues es tal el grado de legitimidad que tiene la cooperativa, que nadie puede venir a desalojarlo.

¹²² <http://www.factaautogestion.com.ar/>

No obstante, es un hotel en pleno centro de Buenos Aires, en términos convencionales, es un hotel ocupado.

AT: ¿Cómo ven este proceso a futuro?

FT: Complicado, porque la relación de fuerza está en relación de empate.

AT: ¿Con el estado?

FT: Ahora es diferente frente a eso. Por eso, nosotros planteamos que el estado recupere la propiedad del hotel.

AT: ¿Ustedes cuentan con la misma estrategia de expropiación?

FT: No. Nosotros no queremos que se estatifique. Queremos que la empresa se expropie, pero que el manejo sea de la cooperativa y no sea parte de estado.

AT: ¿Por qué?

FT: Porque nos parece que el estado está todavía preso en disputas y grandes capitalistas. Una estatificación en estas condiciones implica tener un burócrata conduciendo. El control obrero es un escenario político, en un estado ganado por los capitalistas, es una expresión de deseo, no hay ningún tipo de control, no va a existir un burócrata acá que va a decidir por sobre los obreros. Nos parece que una experiencia cooperativa, sobre estas condiciones, es una experiencia de auto gestión genuina, un germen de socialización de medios de producción. Imagínese poner un gerente general impuesto por el estado, ¡vos estás pintado!

AT: ¿Cómo podría ser el vínculo con la comunidad, si bien la gente viene y paga el hotel?

FT: Nosotros lo que hacemos es una actividad pública del hotel. Nosotros solidariamente prestamos las instalaciones del hotel, damos habitaciones gratuitas. Todos los trabajadores que vengan a Buenos Aires con el motivo que fuese, lucha, tramites acá y necesita hospedarse, nosotros en la medida en que podemos, los hospedamos de manera gratuita. Tenemos en este momento una familia hospedada acá. Ellos tienen un nene enfermo internado en un hospital público de acá, porque no tienen medios para atenderlo, ni medios para hospedarse y viene acá. Nosotros no nos quedamos con el hotel para nosotros solos, lo abrimos para la sociedad. Pero, haciendo verdadera utilidad pública del hotel. Acá se reúnen cualquier tipo de organizaciones, de manera gratuita.

AT: ¿El hotel también tiene esa perspectiva más amplia políticamente, no sólo se trata de recuperar los puestos de trabajo?

FT: No. Nosotros estamos convencidos de que si logramos expropiar todas las empresas que están a mano de los trabajadores, en el país, que son alrededor de 2000 si se logran expropiar las 200 y se le da a los trabajadores, nos vamos a casa creyendo que cumplimos nuestra misión, estamos listos, pero la pelea es política, eso es claro. Lo que no pinta es embanderarse políticamente y que nuestras cooperativas pertenezcan a una corriente política en particular, eso no, porque aquí hay pluralidad.

AT: El día anterior me mostraron el listado de empresas recuperada para el año 2010, allí, se muestran en ascenso y es alentador en comparación del informe de 2004, que realmente se considera muy poco tiempo.

FT: La lucha contra el dogma, que existe siempre. Empresas recuperadas, sólo empresas recuperadas. Hay compañeros que arman cooperativas de trabajo, pues ellos deciden asociarse en cooperativas de trabajo y no nacen como una empresa que se recuperó, sino que nace conscientemente. Al principio eran sólo las recuperadas y ya hemos roto con estos prejuicios.

AT: ¿Cómo ve el potencial de la cuestión obrera, teniendo en cuenta la crisis estructural del capitalismo que continua?

FT: Hay que estudiar mucho y romper con las barreras de carácter cultural que nos hacen esperar a que nos digan lo que tenemos que hacer. Siete años o diez años es mucho en la vida nuestra, es muy poco para decir que este proceso auto gestionado argentino.

AT: Históricamente las cooperativas no han funcionado en muchos lugares, mirando un poco atrás como por ejemplo, el siglo IX, siglo XX y se preguntan: ¿por qué no le ha funcionado a esa gente y sí funcionará en este siglo XXI?

FT: Quizá en ese momento no estaban las condiciones tan objetivas de trabajo auto gestionado posible y las cooperativas sucumbían en una ambiente más hostil, porque había trabajo en relación de dependencia, es decir, bajo patrón, ahora no. Hay compañeros que han trabajado 20 años y están más próximos a tener que jubilarse, que a seguir trabajando. Pero, al que le falten 10 años, no encuentra trabajo, ya no pueden trabajar en nuestros propios proyectos, eso antes no existía, pues había más posibilidades dentro del mercado capitalista.

AT: En estos 10 años ¿Cuál ha sido la experiencia más importante?

FT: Habernos dado cuenta nosotros y que se den cuenta los demás, que es posible esto. Con todos los errores que cometemos y los problemas que tenemos, la empresa funciona. Funciona democráticamente, en nuestras manos y dentro de una asamblea que decide las grandes cosas, eso no implica que no discutamos, esto es un proceso muy complejo. Lo más importante es que esto no es un armado teórico que en la práctica no funcionó, funciona. Tiene miles de problemas, pero hay que trabajar para que estos problemas se reduzcan.

AT: ¿Al principio tenían muchas dudas?

FT: Para los dos lados. Algunos creían que esto no funcionaría y otros, pensaban que estábamos en las puertas del socialismo. Políticos hablaban de un proceso prerrevolucionario en Argentina, que no había condiciones. Lo que sí había era condiciones para este tipo de proyecto, que no es poco para un capitalismo, pues les preocupa.

AT: ¿Cómo ve el futuro? ¿Depende de la crisis?

FT: Hay que trabajar para fortalecer nuestras empresas hoy, para que le sirva a los nuevos compañeros que van llegando y si las futuras crisis destruyen miles de fuentes de trabajo, pues las podamos recuperar nosotros.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Patricia Paredes (Coordinator of ‘Proyecto Red del Sur Argentina’, representative of the organization FUNDEMOS¹²³ which closely collaborates with Universidad Nacional del Quilmes)

Patricia Paredes (PP): El otro tiene que ver con incidencia política, gobiernos locales y nacionales, sobre todo para complementación de la recomendación 193 de la Neuquén, o sea para que los estados adopten políticas cooperativas de trabajo, más otra trabajo que nos interesan, pero un movimiento cooperativo en general. Otros, que están ligados a poder financiar, el proyecto tiene un fondo de capital sumiso y el cuarto resultado es el armado político de la red del sur; el proyecto se llama red del sur como el espacio político que están llevando a cabo.

PP: Los vínculos, hacer un fortalecimiento económico de las cooperativas de trabajo.

AT: ¿Entre cuales países está provisto?

PP: Brasil, Paraguay, Argentina y Uruguay, esos 4 países. Estamos trabajando bien. El 21 de noviembre hicimos el segundo encuentro de la cooperativa del proyecto, justo acá en el Bravo en el marco de la (*no se entiende*), y que se hizo el encuentro de la alianza cooperativa internacional, acá en Buenos Aires. Se aprovechó ese espacio para poder hacer ese encuentro, a nivel de cooperativas de base. Nuestra idea es que le proyecto sirva para que se puedan intercambiar las cooperativas de base de forma directa.

AT: Explíqueme por favor los vínculos de las cooperativas y las federaciones.

PP: La organización son cooperativas de trabajo de base, que están asociadas en federaciones que serían la organización de segundo grado; Son a nivel nacional las federaciones. Después, esas federaciones están en una organización de tercer grado que sería la confederación internacional de cooperativas de trabajo, que es la unión de 27 federaciones de cooperativas de trabajo de todo el país. CNCT (*Confederación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo*)¹²⁴ es el tercer nivel y los nombres que ve allí, son federaciones de segundo nivel.

AT: ¿Hay asociaciones de este tipo más importantes?

PP: A nivel de cooperativismo, sí.

AT: ¿Qué nombre tiene?

PP: Cooperar de tercer nivel y FECOOTRA (Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina)¹²⁵ que integra la confederación nacional de cooperativas de trabajo. FECOOTRA es una federación histórica del cooperativismo, pero está integrada en una organización de tercer grado. Eso es lo interesante, porque hay acá organizaciones que son nuevas, que nacieron a partir de la crisis de la década del 90 y del 2000. Se fueron haciendo, se fueron

¹²³ <http://www.fundemos.org.ar/>

¹²⁴ <http://www.cnct.org.ar/>

¹²⁵ <http://www.fecootra.org.ar/>

fortaleciendo y después, hay otras que son históricas y convergen en esta organización de tercer grado.

AT: ¿De qué manera se vincula CGT con el movimiento nacional de empresas recuperadas?

PP: La integran organizaciones, pactan desde el movimiento de empresas recuperadas. Hay distintas organizaciones que son de empresas recuperadas. Inclusive, la organización a la cual pertenezco que se llama FUNDEMOS, es una fundación que trabaja con la universidad, que es una fundación de la unión obrera metalúrgica, del sindicato metalúrgico. Acompaño la recuperación de empresas en la región, no sólo del sector metalúrgico, sino que también de plásticos, químicos. Yo formo parte de esta organización, nosotros ofrecemos asistencia técnica y acompañamiento para el funcionamiento de las empresas, con la universidad, porque el sindicato tiene hace 15 años una extensión con la Universidad de Quilmes. Nosotros somos un equipo de profesionales que en el proceso de 2001, se acompañó en el proceso de recuperación de empresas. Allí está armada la red metalúrgica.

AT: ¿Dicta clases?

PP: Yo soy relacionista laboral, licenciada en relaciones de trabajo. Tengo toda la información que tiene que ver con el campo del trabajo. Yo hago formaciones, pero para el sindicato hago de formación sindical, para dirigentes sindicales.

AT: ¿Cuál es su nombre?

PP: Patricia Paredes.

AT: ¿Cuál es la prioridad ahora, en el año 2011, 10 años después de la crisis más profunda registrada hasta el momento?

PP: Yo soy muy optimista, porque creo que desde el punto que se partió, hoy en día tenemos un gobierno bastante favorable para los trabajadores. Eso generó un nuevo escenario de posibilidades. Durante la crisis lo que tuvo de positivo Argentina es que se generaron muchos movimientos sociales que permitieron que el país no entrara en una guerra civil. Si no hubiesen estado esos movimientos, nos hubiésemos ido a la desintegración. Esos movimientos sociales tuvieron diferentes características, algunos eran reivindicativos, otros, tenían programas sociales, otros, querían generar emprendimientos productivos y otros, recuperaban empresas. Nosotros siempre decimos que nunca el objetivo fue cuestionar las empresas, la mayoría fue preservar la fuente de trabajo. Hicimos un aprendizaje, de que la fábrica que se cerrara no se volvía a abrir y vos como trabajador o como trabajadora no conseguías más trabajo. Entonces había que resistir para que tu fábrica no se cierre. En esa resistencia se dio la gestión, pero no era la primera alternativa, no era la elección gestionar la empresa. Lo importantes es que no hubo mortandad de empresas recuperadas, todas las que se recuperaron hoy funcionan. Esto es importante, porque el capitalismo dice otra cosa, cosas de las empresas que se crean y de la mortandad que tienen en el primer año. Por otro lado, algunas de estas organizaciones se diluyeron y otras se consolidaron, siendo organizaciones que no sólo piensan en la inclusión de trabajo, sino también en una inserción con su comunidad, por un trabajo por su comunidad y un compromiso

por la comunidad donde están. Eso es distintivo, generalmente, las empresas no tienen ese compromiso comunitario y la responsabilidad social no está dada con que participe alguien del negocio, sino con financiar un comedor comunitario, ese tipo de cosas. Me parece que como el trabajo no se va a volver a crear masivamente, esas fábricas no van a ser así y la tecnología está en función del capital, nosotros decimos que para que exista otra economía, tiene que existir otra tecnología. Pero, quienes hoy deben asumir esto como un rol, son las universidades. Eso lo estamos discutiendo, porque quienes generan conocimiento son las universidades y quienes financian esa implementación son las empresas, entonces para lograr una economía más equitativa, más justa y generación de empleo más genuina, tiene que existir otra tecnología. Estamos trabajando en la idea de tener un programa de trabajo auto gestionado donde las personas, porque sin cada vez son más excluidos y la exclusión no sólo se da porque hay menos trabajos, sino porque la organización del trabajo te plantea el capitalismo y tiene que ver con sólo maximizar ganancias, sin otros factores. Nosotros decimos que para la convivencia de la sociedad y que no se rompan los vínculos sociales, necesitamos tener otra visión y cómo hacemos para incluir a los que no van a estar incluidos de alguna manera, porque el sistema vive y subsiste por la exclusión. Para eso nosotros pensamos que la auto gestión es una forma. Que trabajadores jóvenes cuando quieran insertarse al mundo laboral y ser incluidos, puedan imaginar un modelo auto gestivo de un sistema productivo.

AT: ¿Cómo podría ser ese sistema, en un contexto más grande, es decir, que no sea sólo en una provincia? ¿Dónde ve usted los problemas más grandes?

PP: Para que funcione este sistema tiene que existir una fuerza de conciencia entorno al desarrollo local, es decir, que cada comunidad desarrolle en el marco de sus potencialidades y la posibilidad de autoabastecerse.

AT: Para que la autogestión pueda crecer, pueda presentarse como alternativa, es necesario el capitalismo ¿Ve usted la necesidad de focalizar la economía y la producción a una pequeña comunidad?

PP: Chica y no tan chica. Porque, las características de Argentina son de una extensión territorial muy importante, con una variedad de climas, nosotros tenemos todos los climas que existen están en el territorio de la Argentina y tenemos además, una diversidad cultural y extensión territorial muy importante. Entonces, si nos fijamos en el marco de desarrollo local y en la posibilidad de autogestión es posible incluso en zonas que son más grandes. Hay un grado de irracionalidad en el grado de repartición de los recursos, en la forma de organización de los procesos productivos que lo que hacen es que al productor pequeño, que generalmente es cautivo de quien le vende las semillas, quien le da crédito, quien de alguna manera tiene el capital para que produzca, le paga costos a nivel de subsistencia, por un producto que hace necesario 20 centavos de pesos a un producto que vos en un supermercado lo conseguís a 10 pesos.

AT: ¿Dónde ve usted los obstáculos más grandes hacia el desarrollo de una economía?

PP: Primero, nada más ni nada menos que en la condición humana, porque no son tan espontáneos como a uno le gustaría. Después, una cuestión ideológica política de creer que esto es posible y luego, creer que las organizaciones sociales que nacieron en algunos casos con precariedad, pueden gestionar esto. Esto que discuto tan sencillamente es una discusión que yo tuve mucho tiempo, incluso fue con funcionarios del gobierno y una de las funciones como políticas del estado tiene que ver con esto: cómo la organización que nace precaria puede formar parte de un sistema productivo. Para mí es posible y hay muchos casos de logro. Si tienes una idea, tienes que mostrar que esa idea aconteció en algún lugar. Nosotros hemos tenido experiencias que han acontecido y han sido exitosas. Me parece que son varias las condiciones. Primero, la condición política, pues casi imposible hacer desarrollo local, sin acompañamiento de los líderes del gobierno. Falta organización social, falta organización política y después tener los recursos dirigidos a un proceso. Generalmente, la visión de los recursos del estado es de los programas del banco mundial, del banco de desarrollo y todos los bancos que se te ocurran, son fragmentados. Por ejemplo, comprar una máquina por una cooperativa, no soluciona los problemas productivos, sino atender a gestión de la unidad productiva, cuando tienen además, otros problemas. Muchas veces lo que nadie financia es la evaluación del acompañamiento técnico en la primera etapa, la compra de la máquina, pero la puesta en marcha y zafar costos para ver si es productivo. Hay una cantidad de otras que se necesitan para hacer una organización productiva asociativa auto gestionada, que hay todavía no está muy claro. Nosotros queremos tener no sólo un modelo de intervención, sino un equipo de trabajo que sea capaz de hacerlo y empezar a hacer esto para fortalecer a las federaciones que componen a la federación y que esas unidades productivas empiecen a trabajar en el territorio generando cadenas de valor. En el marco de Mercosur, en el caso de Uruguay, las cooperativas de Uruguay que tiene pocas industrias están importando una cantidad de insumos para su producción que tranquilamente podría ser cubierta por las cooperativas que hacen parte de este proyecto. Falta mucho intercambio de conocerse, para saber que potencialidades tenemos.

AT: ¿Cuál es el punto más fuerte que tienen otros países como Argentina en la práctica de estas temáticas?

PP: Son diferentes. En el caso de Brasil está trabajando en el proyecto Unicel que es una federación de cooperativas y de organización de la economía social vinculada con la (*no se entiende*). La central sindical asociada al gobierno de Lula y al sindicato metalúrgico también y es una organización muy fuerte. El gobierno de Lula los ayudó a la consolidación de ese espacio y por eso son bastante fuertes. Argentina tiene un año recién la confederación, conformado por federaciones históricas, creo que tienen fortalezas en el término territorial, pero también le falta fortaleza y visibilidad política. En el caso de FCPU (Federación de Cooperativas de Producción del Uruguay) que es la federación de Uruguay, es una federación más histórica, tiene 50 años consolidados. Pero, poblacionalmente Uruguay tiene 3 millones de habitantes. En Paraguay es muy incipiente y muy débil. De hecho,

Paraguay no tiene ley de cooperativa de trabajo. En todo el país hay 20 cooperativas de trabajo y pues vienen de una dictadura y están consolidando un proceso democrático con lo cual el trabajo cooperativa asociativo se relacionó con ideas de izquierda. Hasta ahora se están constituyendo.

AT: ¿Cuáles son los problemas más grandes que tiene la autogestión, la gestión obrera en Argentina?

PP: Por el momento, por un lado, es el tema la sociedad del cese al crédito y por el otro, la organización interna. Esto tiene que ver con las relaciones laborales, que como son grupos humanos, tienen conflictos. Por ejemplo, el tema de los liderazgos. Muchas veces, el líder que acompaña los procesos productivos, el que es carismático muchas no es el líder del proceso productivo.

AT: ¿Cómo ve la voluntad del estado? ¿En tónica de apoyo? ¿Va en aumento? Y todo esto tejido al fenómeno de crecimiento de las empresas recuerdas y los intereses del estado

PP: No tengo la visión de que el gobierno ha protestado. La mayor cantidad de empresas recuperadas se lograron en 2004 y se siguen recuperando. Avanzó tanto el gobierno en eso que hay un programa nacional de empresas auto gestionadas que funcionan en el ministerio. Una vez hablaba con un compañero sobre la recuperación italiana me decía: “¿Cómo tienen un programa de gestión financiera para personas que han violado la propiedad privada?”. Me parece que es bastante trascendente en términos políticos, que falta más, es cierto. Para el año que viene, por ejemplo, se está generando un saldo para poder comprar, que el estado le pague a los dueños, la expropiación de estas empresas. Que la propiedad privada también este en función de la cuestión social y productiva, porque también hay que tener en cuenta cómo fue el proceso de la expropiación de la Argentina de la tierra, es decir, institucional, político y de capital. Cuando se pobló la Patagonia, la forma en que se apropiaron de la tierra era matando a todas las personas de los pueblos originarios y diciendo “a partir de ahora, esto es mío”. El estado ha avanzado mucho, pero aún le falta mucho.

AT: ¿Usted ve el proceso de las empresas recuperadas en un nivel regional o a un nivel que pueda extenderse a toda América del sur y hasta toda América latina?

PP: Yo creo que sí. El sistema capitalista no lo vamos a cambiar en un abrir y cerrar de ojos. Que vos tengas producción local, no significa que no te puedas contactar con otros. Argentina puede producir todo lo que quiera, no sé el caso de otros países, tienen que ver a quién le compran si a Coca Cola o a otra empresa y la visión ideológica, sino se tiene, no se cambia. Aislados no es posible.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Diego Alejandro Ramirez (Worker at Ghelco, Buenos Aires)

Diego Alejandro Ramírez (DAR): Estábamos bastante bien, hasta que se empezaron a endeudar, hicieron una quiebra fraudulenta.

AT: ¿Cómo es eso? Explíquese

DAR: En realidad no lo sé, ellos contrataron una persona para que quebrara la empresa y después, al abrirla un pariente, un testaferro se dice.

AT: ¿Cuál es su nombre?

Diego Alejandro Ramírez

AT: Cuénteme un poco de la situación por la que ha atravesado en el proceso de las empresas recuperación.

DAR: La historia fue que quebró. Veníamos mucho tiempo sin cobrar. Por ejemplo, nos debían salarios, aguinaldos, hasta que llegó un día y nos suspendieron un mes.

AT: ¿En qué año fue eso?

DAR: En el 2001 más o menos. Ya veníamos quitando colaboración, porque no nos pagaban. Nos parábamos con bombo y les gritábamos a los dueños que nos pagaran. No daban los sueldos, ni aguinaldos, ni para navidad. Por ejemplo, en la navidad del 2000 nos dieron 20 patacones. Llegó un momento en que nos paramos acá con bombos, redoblantes y les gritábamos a los dueños cuando salían, que nos pagaran, de todo. Luego, a nuestras casas nos mandaron un telegrama y nos suspenden un mes. Esta situación se repite un mes más y se declara la quiebra. Todos quedábamos en la calle. Llegó un compañero que por un conocido de él, tuvimos una primera reunión. Esta persona es Luis Caro. Él nos iba diciendo que teníamos qué hacer. Hicimos un piquete al juez que tenía la causa; esto duro 6 meses, y luego, se decretó que podíamos trabajar en alquiler. De a poco fuimos avanzando. Los primeros pedidos que hicimos, salíamos corriendo a comprar dos bolsas de azúcar, una bolsa de leche en polvo, para hacer lo poco. No se vendía nada. La gente sabía que Ghelco había quebrado. Hasta que ahora ya se compran equipos enteros de azúcar, de leche se compran 4 mil kilos.

AT: ¿Cómo empezaron a producir?

DAR: De a poquito. Un pedido y salíamos corriendo a comprar 50 kilos de azúcar, 100 de kilos azúcar, 25 kilos de leche. Íbamos comprando lo mínimo, porque no teníamos ingresos. Vendimos cartón que había acá en la empresa. Empezamos así, bien de a poquito. Vendíamos, buscábamos y no nos quedaba nada de dinero. No me acuerdo mucho, pero fueron bastantes meses. Hacíamos limpiezas y hasta hubo gente que nos ofrecía plata para arrancar. Ahora ya vamos para 8 años de cooperativa.

AT: ¿Cómo fue ese proceso? ¿Había proceso de expropiación?

DAR: El gobierno la expropia y se la da a los trabajadores.

AT: Entonces ¿es el gobierno argentino, dueño de la fábrica o son ustedes?

DAR: En realidad, los trabajadores vendrían a ser los dueños. Pero, cuando se termine de pagar el edificio, nosotros por cuotas semestrales, tenemos que pagarle al gobierno.

AT: ¿El gobierno le pagará al dueño?

DAR: El dueño la quebró, quiebra fraudulenta. O sea no es una quiebra que la empresa quebró porque le iba mal, le iba muy bien. La empresa tenía el 90% del mercado. La iba a quebrar para no pagarle a los acreedores, entre esos acreedores

estábamos nosotros también, que nos debían bastante; había 100 personas trabajando acá.

AT: ¿Quiénes eran los dueños antes de Ghelco?

DAR: Había varios.

AT: ¿Es bastante grande?

DAR: Varios accionistas. Primero, el padre con los dos hijos que eran los Bonfili, estaba Medina y dos o tres dueños más.

AT: ¿Qué pasó con ellos? ¿Los metieron presos?

DAR: No. Ellos ahora armaron otra empresa de lo mismo, pero no les va tan bien. La gente les dejó de tener confianza, porque esto quebró justo en la mitad de temporada de las heladerías. Ghelco atendía el 90% de las heladerías; el heladero se encontró sin mercadería para fabricar.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Luis Caro (Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores (MNFRT)¹²⁶), Buenos Aires)

AT: ¿Podría presentarse brevemente?

Luis Caro (LC): Me llamo Luis Adolfo Caro, soy abogado. Mi función fue desde el inicio acompañar el principio de los trabajadores. Un grupo de trabajadores que fueron abandonados por los dueños. El trabajador cuando la empresa está por cerrar, va a quebrar o el dueño ya se fue, piensa que han perdido todo. El grupo de trabajadores no son los que organizan la empresa o pagan los sueldos, ellos siempre, justamente, la palabra misma lo dice: trabajador dependiente, hacen relación de dependencia. Él nunca pensó la posibilidad de tener recursos tener dinero o capital para poder pagar la energía, los impuesto, la materia prima y la posibilidad de pagarse el mismo.

AT: ¿Usted qué está haciendo con los trabajadores?

LC: Mi función concreta es la siguiente: acudo donde están ellos, trato de reunirme con ellos en la fábrica o afuera de esta y los organizo. La primera misión, es levantarle la autoestima ello, pues quedan muy deprimidos, porque pierden el trabajo y piensan que han perdido todo. Además, trato de decirles que se den cuenta que tienen una nueva etapa y que cuentan con cosas que desconocen. Pero, mi función es decir: “lo que vos hacías antes lo podes hacer ahora”, “esa producción que hagas te va a servir a vos “. ¿Cómo se inicia ese proceso? Se tiene que pasar por funciones puntuales, punto de vista económico. Todos creen que se necesita mucha cantidad de dinero para poder marchar las fabricas, de hecho, se necesitan capital para poderlas manejar a través de los obreros, teniendo así una ventaja enorme por cualquier otro adversario. Por ejemplo, se empezó por tres bolsas de azúcar y hoy en día compran 500 o 600 bolsas semanales, entonces hay que explicarles que no van a tener un costo inicial de inversión para una planta, porque eso ya lo tienen, ya están las maquinas, van

¹²⁶ <http://www.fabricasrecuperadas.org.ar/>

a pedir la autorización al juzgado de la quiebra para poder utilizar el establecimiento. Lo que pedimos es poder ejercer un derecho de la constitución nacional que está en el artículo 14, este dice que todo argentino tiene derecho a trabajar y a ejercer; son los primeros derechos básicos. La fábrica va a estar desocupada o sin nadie adentro, decimos que los trabajaron de 20 a 30 años, les den la posibilidad de comenzar a trabajar, esa la primera función. Les explicamos que desde el punto de vista jurídico es posible y desde el punto de vista económico también. Ellos me preguntan normalmente ¿de qué depende la posibilidad? por ejemplo, los trabajadores del grupo y ellos piensan que dependen de otro, del sistemas políticos o del juez en gran medida. Yo les digo que depende de los mismos obreros, que como te dije antes, es el derecho a la libertad. Muchas personas creyeron que eran esclavos por muchos años, pero realmente eran libres hasta que se trajeron los derechos del hombre, en Francia en 1789, con la toma de la bastilla, de ahí quedó constituido en la norma que en la parte normativa. Con los obreros hago eso. Después de todo lo que ellos necesitan; no solamente de fábrica, por ejemplo, para conectar la luz necesitan recursos de seguridad, al inicio no era así, hay muchas otras fábricas que se recuperaron y que solidariamente ayudan a los obreros para comenzar esa etapa, para comprar las primeras materias primas, para comenzar la producción. También, el punto de vista técnico con ingenieros o técnicos. De hecho, abogados y ellos han sentidos que nosotros no tenemos un objetivo económico, es un sentido que quiero que ello les funcione, esa es la base de sustentación del movimiento. Cada fábrica tiene autonomía, deciden ellos lo que van haciendo. Lo que tenemos son criterios generales de que los obreros tienen que estar informados de las cosas que pasan a cada fábrica, qué se compra, cómo se compra, cómo se vende, la ganancia eso es muy importante; el derecho de información. Hay una asamblea, porque todos los obreros quieren saber. Esta es otra tarea que vamos haciendo, hasta que ellos van entendiendo. Cómo le van dando estructura de costos, cómo sacan costos, lo hacemos hasta manualmente, mucho de estos no conocen computación, entonces, yo digo la computación es un instrumento como el martillo, clavar un clavo en la pared; si no tienes martillo te queda difícil hacerlo con la mano. La computación es eso, si no lo tienen lo hacemos le explicamos, se trata de un elemento que ellos conocen en los productos, la materia prima, los porcentajes, los códigos, todo eso lo saben muy bien, por eso es muy fácil hablar con ellos de un costo. Nada más que uno le va poniendo las formulas, que ellos no saben pero lo van a aprender. Vas a ver qué trabajadores que antes no sabían nada, en poco tiempo empiezan a hablar que en cuánto cuesta hacer un producto. Hoy estamos hablando de los pollos, cuánto cuesta procesar los pollos en una planta grande o alas mañanas. Una planta de ladrillos. Los trabajadores saben cuánto de tierra, cuánto de gas para cocinarlo, eso es el conocimiento que vamos adquiriendo. Uno lo tiene y se lo vamos transmitiendo y los mismos obreros se lo van transmitiendo entre ellos.

AT: ¿Más o menos cuáles han sido los problemas más graves o cuáles siguen siendo los problemas más difíciles?

LC: Fueron y siguen siendo los mismos. Para mí, uno de los temas fundamentales son los obreros es la actitud que tienen ante un problema, la pérdida de empleo, porque no tiene patrón, no tienen empleador, el que conducía, ya no lo tienen. El sindicato, los que supuestamente tiene que ayudarlo, dicen nosotros no nos oponemos a eso porque nos parece mejor que los obreros continúen esta etapa. El estado desconoce abiertamente ese proceso.

AT: ¿Cuál ha sido o cómo ve el papel del estado frente a estos procesos?

LC: los estados, como otras instituciones, por ejemplo, las universidades, han tomado este fenómeno como un fenómeno de tipo pasajero, que no iba a perdurar en el tiempo. La primera conclusión que se da, es que si no tenían una ayuda del mismo estado, no iba a continuar. Eso decían los análisis de las universidades argentinas, que lo tomaban del estado. También nosotros partimos de la base que, las fábricas o las cooperativas que pensaron en defender el estado en alguno u otro momento, con subsidios o créditos o de alguna y otra forma le quedó muy poco tiempo, por eso hay muchas que han quebrado y que han desaparecido. Las únicas que siguieron adelante y que además crecieron, obviamente con orientación. Nosotros siempre tuvimos que aliarnos del estado sin desconocerlo. El estado quiere ayudar mejor, el estado ha tenido una actitud ausente con el 22 por ciento de ocupación. Como profesional del estudio de las ciencias. Pero, al recuperar una fábrica, se debe hablar de otro ámbito. Uno puede hablar de haber participado en casi 100 establecimientos, y en todo el país y en diferentes circunstancias. Hay una forma de ver el proceso de las fábricas recuperadas. Por eso, Andrés Ruggieri se puso a opinar sobre otras cosas. Debió haber evaluado puntualmente como una universidad, cuál es la cuestión de tipo científica, más que el hecho concreto de cómo se recupera, esas cosas. Se orientó al pensamiento y a la decisión de los sectores políticos de la Argentina. A mí me tocó intervenir directamente en el caso más grave, tal vez, que fue el de Brukman. Hay una película de un canadiense, no es “La toma”, hay otra. Sin embargo, tenemos una opinión muy crítica sobre “La toma” que puede chequear en nuestra página, pues para nosotros “La toma”, no refleja la realidad de las fábricas recuperadas.

AT: ¿Por qué le parece que no la refleja la situación de las fábricas recuperadas? Yo vi “La toma”¹²⁷ y además, un documental sobre Zanón.

LC: Lo de “La Toma” es porque primero, nosotros no estamos de acuerdo con tomar... ocupar, resistir y producir. Tomar algo, apropiarse algo, realmente es legal; no es correcto desde el punto jurídico y eso es un error. El obrero tiene derecho a utilizar el establecimiento, tiene derecho a ejercer el trabajo, pero tiene que apropiarse legítimamente de algo, porque hay una normativa en Argentina y en casi todo el mundo. Esta normativa habla de la propiedad, lamentablemente, pero es así. Yo no puedo negar el derecho, aunque éste se utilice en contra de los más pobres, de los más débiles. “La toma” habla del sistema de gobierno, de Menem, de kisner. Eso no tiene nada que ver con las fábricas recuperadas. Por

¹²⁷ “La toma” (2004) (engl. “The Take”) is a Canadian documentary by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis about a recuperated auto plant in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

ejemplo, nosotros hablamos de Venezuela. En Venezuela hablan de la congestión, propiamente, la expropiación, la estratificación del obrero por parte del estado, los establecimientos. Eso a mediano o largo plazo fracasa.

AT: ¿Qué diferencia hay entre su propuesta y la de Zanón?

LC: Concretamente, es muy grande la diferencia. Como propuesta teórica es muy parecida a la de Zanón. Zanón está ejecutando actualmente lo que es una fábrica recuperada, aunque no lo digan. Ellos tienen una cooperativa que se llama FaSinPa; ellos estaban en contra de las cooperativas y luego, tuvieron que aceptarla.

AT: ¿Por qué?

Porque vieron el éxito que producían en nosotros, sin decir que copiaron, lo han hecho. Zanón quebró y ¿quién estuvo en la quiebra de Zanón? Yo como abogado, pero por otra planta del grupo Zanón y los benefició. Ellos se opusieron, el abogado Mariano Pedrero y demás y Raúl Godoy, se oponían a que quiebre. La quiebra iban a estar a expensas del alargue del remate, les dije que no, porque vamos a hacer la ley de expropiación y va a quedar para los trabajadores. Al final, ellos hicieron la ley de expropiación, no en la...por control obrero, sino que la expropiación y después de la da el estado a los trabajadores. La ley de expropiación que inicialmente me tocó hacer, no es que el estado se la queda, sino que en el artículo primero, expropia, el estado ejerce el poder expropiatorio y en el segundo artículo se la da a los trabajadores, no se la queda.

LC: En Venezuela, hay un estado de tiro dirigista, al estilo soviético. No es todo, porque tienen que pasar por elecciones. Eso hace que las empresas se vuelvan ineficientes. La historia de la humanidad, ha nivel de lo que es la incitativa privada, desde Adam Smith, en adelante, Ricardo, han evaluado y valorado la iniciativa privada. El problema es que la iniciativa privada sea usada con amplio egoísmo, amplia ambición de medida y se apropie ilegalmente de todos los bienes que se producen.

AT: Usted ve que se puede transformar la sociedad, sin matar la iniciativa privada. Tiene que valorar también, el mercado y la competencia, amplíe un poco más, por favor.

LC: Exactamente. Es que es valorable. Nosotros no le tenemos miedo al mercado, desde las fábricas recuperadas combatimos el mercado y nos instalamos. Muchas veces las fábricas recuperadas, conducen el mercado, con criterios diferentes. La rentabilidad que necesita una fábrica administrada por los obreros, es un renta mucho menor a la que necesita el empresario o el grupo de empresarios. Además, el factor que lleva adelante una fábrica es la intención del trabajo, como prioridad. El empresario tiene como prioridad la renta, lo que el gane y el grupo de inversores que están con él, el trabajo es un accesorio. los trabajadores presentan iniciativas enormes, en diferentes lugares. Acá han hecho productos nuevos. En el sistema venezolano es un problema, porque la estructura de poder de las personas autoritaria, piensan que si ellos no manejan el poder, no puede funcionar la cosa, las relaciones. Nosotros creemos todo lo contrario, que la división del poder de los obreros, en las fabricas recuperadas hace la permanencia del sistema.

AT: ¿Usted se encarga sólo de recuperar o hace cooperativas también?

LC: Solamente de fábricas recuperadas. No defiendo otros empresarios, sólo obreros. Me pregunta cómo me mantengo; una vez que la fábrica trabaja, me consideran una mensualidad de lo que ellos quieren o pueden, no porque los obligue, es una postura solidaria de los obreros. Con ello puedo mantener a mi familia y puedo actuar todo el tiempo en servicio de los trabajadores. Por eso, tenemos autonomía económica. Trabajo como abogado, asesoramiento económico, ellos me dan lo que pueden y quieren.

AT: ¿Cómo definiría su condición política?

LC: Yo nací en una unidad básica, judicialista, me crié en ese ambiente. Pude estudiar, soy cristiano, creo profundamente en la organización de los seres humanos, no creo en el caos. Políticamente, no tengo una visión estratégica, soy anti- capitalista seguro, anti imperialista y lucho por la (*no se entiende*) Políticamente estoy entre Carlos Marx y Adam Smith. Porque me parece que tiene cosas importantes, ambos. La historia de la humanidad ha llevado a que esas personas, que escribieron tratados importantes de la historia, han llevado a la organización económica. No sólo fue una idea y que luego se impuso a la población. Han rescatados de las razones económicas y luego, han escrito. Como Carlos Marx, es real la lucha de clases, existe. Para mí la solución no es la lucha de clases a la diferencia de clases, sino que la defensa, la gente debe tener lo necesario para vivir. Hay que eliminar la opulencia de algunos pocos y distribuir la riqueza. Estoy de acuerdo que eso no se va a dar como buenas personas, los trabajadores tienen que ganárselo.

AT: Si todo el proceso sigue, estas circunstancias van a cambiar en todo el mundo. Podemos hacer algo más equitativo. Esto es impactante.

LC: Como vos viniste, también personas de España, de Italia, porque les interesa mucho esta posibilidad. Esto antes de descartaba en todo el mundo, que los obreros podían sacar adelante una fábrica. Pero, nuestra experiencia es clara, con los elementos que le decía.

AT: ¿Por qué precisamente aquí, se desató tan fuerte este proceso?

LC: Modestia aparte. Nosotros creamos el sistema, junto con los obreros. Yo lo tuve en mi mente en el inicio y lo puse en práctica. Hay un elemento, yo soy profesional como abogado, pero tengo conocimiento de las ciencias económicas y además, soy oficial de marina mercante, así que conozco de la mecánica. Además, me crié en lugares muy pobres. Entonces, vengo de procedencia de los trabajadores. Esto me ayudó a tener una interrelación. Hay una dificultad de Zanón y que les ha acarreado problemas económicos, les tuvieron que dar un subsidio de un millón de pesos para el gas. Ellos no ejecutan tal cual lo de las fábricas recuperadas, porque ellos han incorporado a la Universidad del Comahue, quienes hacen el aspecto económico. Ellos no conocen de la parte productiva, tiene pérdida en la producción. Eso es un problema grave, porque en una empresa de alta producción.

AT: No comprendo la situación con la Universidad del Comahue, lo que tenía entendido es que se encargan de hacer el trayecto económico.

LC: Ellos hacen un análisis económico de la empresa, después, la venta del producto, hay revendedores del producto. Entonces, si yo quiero comprar porcelanato, o cualquier otro cerámico preservador, no voy directamente a Zanón, sino que acudo a un distribuidor. Esa es la mala experiencia de la recuperación de la fábrica, porque la ganancia se lo lleva el que revende, no el que produce. Nosotros no recuperamos fábricas para eso, nosotros las ganamos para que las ganancias lleguen a los obreros y ellos tienen que vender el producto, y eso es muy importante.

AT: ¿Por qué no lo hacen así los chicos de Zanón?

LC: Porque han entregado eso, tal vez, consciente o inconscientemente la venta, la comercialización de los productos a otros, exactamente a los de la Universidad.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Natalia Polti (Centro de Documentación de Empresas Recuperadas¹²⁸, Buenos Aires)

AT: ¿Desde hace cuánto tiempo trabaja aquí?

Natalia Polti (NP): Yo me sumo a trabajar en 2004. Yo recibo a la gente que viene de Chilavert. Soy coordinadora del programa facultad abierta, responsable de este espacio, de ofrecer documentación de empresas recuperadas.

AT: ¿Cuál es su profesión?

NP: Yo soy antropóloga.

AT: ¿Cómo fue la vinculación con la uva, Chilavert y los trabajadores?

NP: Me sumo al programa por un cartel que había en el pasillo de la facultad, donde se pedían voluntarios para hacer un relevamiento. Me sumo a participar en el segundo relevamiento que hace el programa de facultad abierta a nivel nacional en 2004. Me tocó trabajar en Coliguana, vivo allá, Avellaneda, y tuve la fortuna de trabajar en el Rosario. Cuando inicié, no tenía ni idea de lo que era una empresa recuperada, entonces tuve que empezar a conocer un poco más. Me fascinó y me quedé.

AT: ¿Por qué le gustó?

NP: Porque era una experiencia muy particular, además de una experiencia muy difícil de definir. Por ejemplo, los casos que me tocó trabajar en Avellaneda, eran bastante similares, eran empresas metalúrgicas, que por todo el proceso de desindustrialización en Argentina, dejaron de ser competitivas. En muchos casos hubo lanzamiento patronal, a veces, simplemente los patrones se fueron, y los trabajadores comenzaron a auto realizarse para producir. Eran empresas casi todas del mismo rubro, o trabajaban en cosas parecidas, pero la manera en que contaban su historia, la manera en que habían vivido este proceso y la manera en que empezaron a hacer vinculaciones políticas, fueron muy difíciles. Y cuando conozco Rosario, vi muchos casos más raros aún, conocimos un bar recuperado, una cristalería que llevaba más de tres años cerradas. Fábricas de pastas, un

¹²⁸ <http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/Centrodocus.htm>

supermercado que nunca se recompuso, sino que se armó como centro cultural y como un comedor para la universidad. Como que las estrategias que se ponían en juego eran distintas, todos tenían esta necesidad y ponían en juego todos sus recursos para ver como lo lograban. Esto me maravilló, esta capacidad de imaginación, de construcción, de poner el cuerpo, de jugársela sin importar lo que pueda venir detrás y cómo a cada lo que significaba desde sus propias experiencias y cómo cada colectivo iba encontrando maneras distintas de contarse. Hasta ese entonces llevaba la mitad de la carrera. Empecé mi trabajo de campo en una metalurgia en San Martín, me enamoré, esto es de toda gente muy grande con situaciones de vida muy complejas, con historias fuertes que necesitaban contar. Me vi armando redes de apoyo por todos lados. Como primera experiencia, fue hermosa. Y llegué a Chilavert “cuando se llega aquí es difícil irse” “es como un camino de ida”, tiene un grupo de trabajo muy particular, un compromiso, una gran familia, donde se espera que hagamos mucho. No es un tema que se agote, cada caso es similar a otro, pero cada colectivo le imprime características propias, haciéndolo distinto.

AT: ¿Cuál es la novedad que le encuentras?

NP: Es nuevo no porque no existan experiencias históricas que acompañen esto. De hecho, en Argentina existieron experiencias similares, para mí lo nuevo de esto es la imaginación. No es lo mismo organizar una cooperativa de cero, con capital inicial, con ciertos recursos, donde uno define que hacer y demás, que tener que con la gente que está, con las máquinas que ya estaban, en el mismo lugar donde estaban, ver cómo hacen para recuperar y mantener la fuente de trabajo. Es novedoso frente a otras estrategias de la clase obrera, en lo que fue el liberalismo, en los 80 y los cierres de fábrica de los 90. La iniciativa viene de los trabajadores que fueron encontrando estrategias de conservar su fuente de trabajo, jugando con muchas cosas que tienen que ver con los propios recorridos de la clase obrera argentina. Estrategias de lucha que ha realizado la toma de fábricas, es una estrategia sindical que se hizo siempre, allí lo novedoso después de esa toma se plantea el empezar a auto gestionar la producción, por parte de los trabajadores y hacer esto sin el afán de pensar en la transformación del estado, no en el marco de una cosmovisión política. Si uno analiza los casos, estamos hablando de Argentina atravesando una gran crisis, todo un proceso de la última década, un nivel de desempleo altísimo, esta experiencia ganada de una forma tan terrible, después de muchas anteriores se capitaliza en decir: “yo defiende esto como sea”. No salió esto de burbujas, acá no hay una organización política que esté pensando en una revolución, aquí se piensa compartir y apropiarse de experiencias para ayudar a otros, pelear la ley de expropiación, por ejemplo.

AT: ¿Cómo ve el potencial de la empresa recuperadas?

NP: Están pensando otra forma de manifestación del trabajo. Sigue siendo un proceso nuevo. Estas experiencias en Argentina vienen de mediados de la década del 90, que para poder analizar a nivel productivo, es muy reciente. Recién en este tercer (*no se entiende*), pudimos hacer preguntas que tenían que ver con la transformación de la gestión, la producción, si es que las hubo o no. Es en ese sentido

nuevo, no porque no existiesen experiencias previas, sino que las experiencias existentes ahora, que se hicieron en este contexto político económico son muy positivas en cómo crecen y perduran en el tiempo. La potencialidad está en ver cómo en cada problema a enfrentar, se ponen en juego ciertas estrategias, para resolver dificultades.

AT: ¿Cuál debería ser la estrategia de las empresas recuperadas frente a la relación con el estado? Por ejemplo, los chicos de Zanón quieren trabajar por la empresa, dicen que la empresa es del estado, ellos trabajan para el estado.

NP: ¿Vos piensas que Zanón es el único caso de empresas recuperadas? Yo creo que lo que tienen que hacer es encontrar la manera de seguir construyendo vinculaciones. De hecho, con el estado hay muchas vinculaciones, en distintos niveles. El problema es que no hay desde el estado una política seria, fueron saliendo cosas.

AT: ¿Ve usted ilegítima la participación del estado?

NP: yo digo que fue variando en los diferentes momentos. En realidad, es una vinculación, que ilegítima no sería la palabra. Tal vez, es como la cosa de dejar hacer. Hasta el 2004 todas las expropiaciones fueron expropiaciones temporarias, por lo cual, jamás ha existido el pago por la indemnización de la expropiación. Salvo un caso, en un lugar en que se armó un programa, que era un área vinculada, exactamente de empresas recuperadas. Después, era como que se veía directamente en la economía social, entonces, se les asumía como cualquier otro tipo de cooperativa. O se les ponía en el plano de Pymes y como no cumplían con los requisitos, tampoco tenían accesos. Lo que falta es que exista un área del estado que piense en las empresas recuperadas, como empresas recuperadas y que entonces exista estrategias que den cuenta de las necesidades que tiene el sector. Un poco de se vio cuando se armó el área de trabajo auto gestionado, del ministerio de trabajo, que es un área a nivel nacional, estuvo un poco con eso. Pero, trabajo auto gestionado, no es lo mismo que empresas recuperadas. Lo que falta es una política seria y unificada, que tenga en cuenta las problemáticas específicas.

AT: ¿Cuáles son las problemáticas específicas a las que se refiere?

NP: Una es el crédito. El acceso de la gente al crédito para poder hacer una renovación tecnológica. Otra, la situación legal. Por último, tiene que ver con la seguridad social de los trabajadores. Para la ley Argentina no hay nada que contemple al trabajador como un trabajador colectivo. Eres trabajador que tiene una dependencia, porque tienes un patrón o sos un trabajador autónomo. Los trabajadores que se organizan en cooperativa, como no tienen un patrón son trabajadores autónomos. Sin embargo, la situación del trabajador autónomo es lamentable. Se desdibuja como trabajador autónomo y se incluye en una figura legal que se llama tributo, donde vos facturas al estado por servicios prestados. Si vos formas los tributistas, no tienes para riesgos de trabajo y el resto de coberturas, que tendría una seguridad social, no las tienes.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Interview with Ernesto Gonzalez (Worker at Chilavert, Buenos Aires)

AT: ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva trabajando acá en Chilavert?

Ernesto González (EG): Yo entré a trabajar en este lugar en el año 91, hace 19 años ya. Recuperamos la imprenta en el año 2002.

AT: ¿Por qué se quebró la fábrica?

EG: La empresa estaba en medio de la crisis dentro de la empresa y en medio de una crisis económica de Argentina. Era una empresa familiar, el dueño era Horacio Galeano, y así se llamaba la empresa. La crisis arrancó más o menos en 2001. Cuando estaba a punto de quebrar la empresa el dueño quiso llevarse las máquinas. Pero, nosotros no se lo permitimos, porque no había pagado sueldos, ni nada.

AT: ¿Cómo fue el proceso de resistencia? ¿Cómo se dio la idea de resistir?

EG: Al principio había una situación de agitación social. Fue después de la jornada de diciembre de 2001; había asambleas barriales, no éramos los únicos. Había otras empresas que estaban tomadas. La decisión de tomar la empresa, fue motivada para evitar que el patrón se llevara las máquinas. La empresa estaba en convocatorias de los acreedores en estancias previas a la quiebra, y en esa circunstancia no es posible venderla, por tanto nosotros lo denunciábamos. La situación nos obligó a empezar una ocupación. Nos llevó a ejecutar la idea de poner a producir la fábrica, para que no cerrase. Todo fue paso a paso: en principio, solo queríamos evitar que se robaran la maquinaria, pues el patrón no nos había pagado. Luego la idea fue empujada por la necesidad que teníamos de comer. Dejando así el control de la empresa, fuimos probando, haciendo nuestros trabajos y cobrando de manera provisoria. La hicimos producir provisoriamente y así pues si lo estabas logrando ¿por qué no podríamos permanecer? Entonces nos fue llevando a la idea de poner la a producir. En el entorno habían más empresas en la misma condición, mutuamente nos estábamos animando. Esto era incluso bien visto por la población. Los ciudadanos lo veían en los diarios, en la televisión y era visto bien, lo que hacíamos. Esto fue animando.

AT: ¿En qué año empezaron con la cooperativa?

EG: En el 2002. En realidad la formamos al saber que de esta manera podíamos reclamar o negociar alguna salida.

AT: ¿Cómo llegan las reglas de la organización? es decir ¿cómo determinaron que se tomaban decisiones a través de la asamblea?

EG: Las decisiones las tomamos en asamblea.

AG: ¿Cuántos son actualmente?

EG: Éramos 8 y ahora somos 12

AT: ¿Cómo es la repartición del sueldo?

EG: En principio, era muy poca plata. Nos dividimos exactamente la misma cantidad, es decir igual para todos. Aunque se deben tener o evaluar ciertos aspectos mutuamente. Como por ejemplo, aspectos como la antigüedad y el

número de hijos. La experiencia es muy valiosa, tratamos de evitar que compañeros más calificados se vayan a trabajar en empresas.

AT: ¿Cuál ha sido la experiencia más valiosa que ha tenido?

EG: En 10 años que llevo acá. Esto sucedió en mayo de 2002, los vecinos nos defendieron del desalojo. Estábamos haciendo un libro, pero no lo podíamos sacar, estábamos siendo custodiados por un ejército de policías. El vecino nos propuso romper la pared y por ahí sacamos la producción, luego tapamos el orificio con un cuadro. Si lo sacábamos por el techo nos iban a ver, lo sacamos entonces por la pared que daba a la casa de un vecino y entregamos los libros. Así estuvimos unos meses. Luego, llegó la orden de desalojo que sustentó que podíamos custodiar el recinto, permanecer pero no trabajar. La única manera que teníamos, era producir de manera que no nos vieran. Estuvimos así hasta que saliera la ley de expropiación, emitida en la ciudad de Buenos Aires y por la legislatura del mismo lugar, donde se decía que se podía expropiar el edificio y la maquinaria. Bajo este amparo legal estamos trabajando.

AT: ¿Qué problemas enfrentan en la actualidad?

EG: Bueno, pues económicas. Al no poder hacer grandes inversiones, se retrasa la tecnología y al no tener un capital de giro. En realidad las máquinas no son tan viejas todavía. Todo lo vamos haciendo a medida que va resultando trabajo. No podemos acumular grandes cantidades.

AT: ¿Cómo ven la situación, pasados ya casi 10 años de la crisis?

EG: Esto es una forma de lucha, no es un ideal. Despierta la idea de que es posible una nueva forma de producción sin patrón. Estamos bajo la presión de convertimos en una empresa capitalista más. Nuevamente grupos toman el control y tenemos la precipitación de volvernos empresarios. El sistema nos convierte nuevamente. Estamos regidos por él.

AT: ¿Y la postura del estado Argentino frente a la negociación.

EG: La primera política fue de represión abierta. Luego, fue una política de negociación y contención. Por eso se votaron leyes de expropiación, siempre con muchas condiciones.

AT: ¿Cómo explica usted dichas posturas por parte del estado?

EG: Porque ya no lo podían... en una aceptación social muy grande. En ese momento, en particular, era muy difícil llevar a cabo una política abierta de represión solamente. Entonces, combinar un poco esa represión, era una forma de contener un poco el movimiento e incluso, de integrarlo. Ahora, no hay mucha política. El proceso es convertirlo en algo que no asuste mucho, pues esto produjo mucho temor entre los empresarios, pues posiblemente puede transformarse en contagio.

AT: ¿Qué objetivos tienen ustedes para Chilavert?

EG: Nosotros queremos que se consolide la experiencia y no transformarnos en una empresa, que no nos cambien de filtro, pues es la presión del sistema.

AT: ¡Muchas gracias por la entrevista!

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Seit Mitte der 1990er Jahre, und dann verstärkt als unmittelbare Folge des wirtschaftlichen, politischen und sozialen Zusammenbruchs im Dezember 2001, hatten sich in Argentinien eine Vielzahl von sozialen Protestbewegungen formiert. Während die meisten dieser Initiativen im Zuge des wirtschaftlichen Aufschwungs ab 2003 rasch wieder in die Bedeutungslosigkeit versanken, erwiesen sich die heterogenen Praxen von besetzten und von den ArbeiterInnen selbstverwalteten Betrieben als die erfolgreichste und nachhaltigste Form des sozialen Protests. Der Kampf der argentinischen ArbeiterInnen um die Aneignung bzw. die Wiedereingangssetzung der Produktionsmittel veränderte teilweise auf radikale Weise bestehende Formen politischer Repräsentation und demokratischer Partizipation am Arbeitsplatz.

Die Dissertation zeigt, dass die Formation von den oben genannten selbstorganisierten und besetzten Betrieben in Argentinien auf engste Weise 1) mit der strukturellen Krise des fordistischen Akkumulationsmodells in den 1970er Jahren und den darauf folgenden tiefgreifenden Veränderungen der Produktionsbeziehungen, 2) der neoliberalen Restrukturierung von Staatlichkeit und gesellschaftlichen Macht- und Herrschaftsverhältnissen, 3) und einer grundlegenden Reorganisation von Weltordnung verbunden ist. Theoretisch stützt sich die Arbeit in erste Linie auf das Coxsche Gerüst der „historischen Strukturen“, mit Hilfe dessen sich die dynamischen und reziproken Verstrickungen von sozialen Produktionsbeziehungen, Staat-Gesellschaftskomplexe und Weltordnungen untersuchen und einfangen lassen.

Hinsichtlich der sozialen Produktionsbeziehungen wird argumentiert, dass das post-fordistische Produktions- und Akkumulationsmodell bestehende Arbeitsverhältnisse radikal zu Ungunsten der Lohnabhängigen verändert hat.

Weiters zeigt die Dissertation, dass neoliberale Politik entscheidend zu einer Transformation des keynesianischen Wohlfahrtsstaats und zur Schwächung von organisierten ArbeiterInnenbündnissen beigetragen hat. Schließlich wird erläutert, wie die vorhergenannten Transformationsprozesse einhergingen mit einer Reorganisation U.S. amerikanischer Hegemonie durch den Aufstieg von U.S. dominiertem, transnationalen Finanzkapital- eine Entwicklung, die wiederum die Krisenanfälligkeit und Krisenverwundbarkeit von Ländern in der Peripherie, wie der Fall Argentinien(s) demonstrierte, signifikant erhöht hat.

Curriculum Vitae

Higher Education

Mar 2006 – Jan 2012

University of Vienna, Austria

PhD Program in Political Science

Thesis: Argentina's recuperated and worker-controlled enterprises: A neo-Gramscian analysis of transnational hegemony and historical change within the global political economy

Main focus: Global governance, international political economy, social movements in Latin America (in particular: Argentina, Peru and Colombia)

Sep 2006 – Aug 2007

European University Centre for Peace Studies (EPU), Stadtschlaining, Austria

Master in Peace and Conflict Studies

Thesis: Neoliberalism in Latin America: A Treatise on Hegemony and the Global Order

Main focus: Global governance, international political economy, social movements in Latin America

*Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Studies
(summa cum laude)*

Oct 1996 – Jan 2006

University of Vienna, Austria

Courses in Philosophy, Political Sciences, History, Communications and English

Thesis: Tibetan Buddhism / Zen-Buddhism: A cultural-philosophical comparison

Main focus: Intercultural Philosophy, International Affairs, Peace and Conflict Studies

Master's Degree (Master of Philosophy)

Work Experience

Jan 2010 – present

Universidad EAFIT, Medellin, Colombia

Department of International Business

Name of employer: Ms. Maria Alejandra Gonzalez Perez

Position: Lecturer (full-time)

Courses (graduate and post-graduate): International relations, European integration, International negotiations, International conflicts

Aug 2009

Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, Thailand

Institute of International Studies

Name of employer: Piboon Puriveth

Position: Visiting professor (full-time)

Course: Approaches to Political Science

Feb 2008 – Feb 2009

Markham College, Lima, Peru

Upper School

Name of employer: Mr. Trevor McKinley

Position: History and Theory of Knowledge Teacher (full-time)

- Middle School, IGSCE, IB Programme
- Supervisor of Extended Essays and Historical Investigation
- Tutor
- Debating/ Yoga activity

Sep – Dec 2007

Institute for Integrative Conflict Transformation and Peace building (IICP), Vienna, Austria

Name of employer: Mr. Wilfried Graf

Position: Intern (part-time)

- Carry out research for the Master Thesis on “Neo-liberalism in Latin America: A Treatise on Hegemony and the Global Order”

Aug 2007

**United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), UN Volunteers, Pristine, Kosovo/a
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)**

Name of employer: Mr. Steffen Friedrich

Position: Civil Affairs Officer (full-time)

- Monitoring of education policies
- Conduction of field visits for first-hand information
- Monitoring of the implementation of educational standards
- Drafting of special and regular reports
- Assistance in capacity building
- Research for memoranda, recommendations, etc.

Feb – June 2007

European University Centre for Peace Studies (EPU), Stadtschlaining, Austria

Name of employer: Mr. Ronald Tuschl

Position: Research Assistant (part-time)

- Assistance in the development of research projects
- Organisation and supervision of research meetings

Apr – Jun 2006

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna, Austria

Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs – Independent Evaluation Unit

Name of employer: Mr. Backson Sibanda

Position: Intern (full-time)

- Evaluation of technical assistance projects and other UNODC programme activities
- Implementation of the results-based management frameworks for UNODC
- Development of a database for best organisational practices
- Development of evaluation methodologies and tools

Sep – Oct 2005

Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR), Vienna, Austria

Name of employer: Mr. Thomas Roithner

Position: Intern(full-time)

- Review and analysis of scientific articles for publication
- Assessment of ongoing research projects focusing on war and the private sector

Feb 1999 – Feb 2000

**Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict
Resolution (ASPR),**

Stadtschlaining, Austria

Name of employer: Mr. Arno Truger

Position: Civil servant (full-time)

- Co-ordination of science projects
- Organization and administration of EPU activities
- Preparation of research symposium (“State of Peace” Conference 2000)