REMAKING ARGENTINA:
LABOR, LAW, AND CITIZENSHIP DURING THE *PROCESO DE REORGANIZACIÓN NACIONAL*

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Edward Brudney

REMAKING ARGENTINA: LABOR, LAW, AND CITIZENSHIP DURING THE *PROCESO DE REORGANIZACIÓN NACIONAL*

This dissertation examines the creation, enactment, and application of labor legislation during Argentina's most recent military dictatorship, the self-styled *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganization, PRN) (1976-1983). Scholarship on the PRN has long overlooked the regime's legalistic impulses while emphasizing extralegal repression, but I argue that the law remained a critical site of contestation for workers, trade unionists, corporations, and state actors. The dictatorship's policies were more than a mask for state violence. Rather, I read this legislation as an integral part of a larger discursive effort to "reorganize" the nation through the articulation of a new national subject—a different version of the "worker-citizen." Part I of the dissertation explores the inner workings of the PRN, first as a whole and then specifically within the Ministry of Labor. Part II uses three case studies to analyze workers' responses to the regime's political project in distinct worksites across Argentina (urban center, suburban township, and rural interior). This combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches provides a unique complement to the existing literature on labor and citizenship during the dictatorship. I challenge portrayals of workers as either revolutionary heroes or passive victims, instead highlighting how sectors of the labor movement defended and reconstituted organizational practices in the face of severe repression. My research draws on understudied and recently discovered documentary sources, together with federal, provincial, municipal, and private archives, and dozens of hours of first-person testimony. Even as the PRN attempted to redefine the inclusion/exclusion binary of citizenship, internal dissent between factions of the Armed Forces and entrenched practices on the

shop floor complicated this effort. However, I argue that engaging the intentions behind this project is critical to understanding both how authoritarian politics function and what legacies the PRN left behind.

Daniel James, Ph.D.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

"It is from work that men are rich in flocks and wealthy, and a working man is much dearer to the immortals. Work is no disgrace; it is idleness which is a disgrace."
- Hesiod, *Works and Days*

During a July 1977 interview, former Undersecretary of Labor Héctor Villaveirán addressed the military dictatorship's ongoing effort to reform the *Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales* (Law of Professional Associations), the legal cornerstone of labor relations in Argentina. Villaveirán explained that the Law of Professional Associations was merely one part of a legislative "tripod" that included the *Ley de Obras Sociales* (Law of Social Welfare Programs) and the *Ley de Contrato de Trabajo* (Law of Labor Contracts). Together, these laws constituted the "rules of the game" that governed relationships between the different forces composing the country's "social spectrum."[1] A July 25 article in the national newspaper *Clarín* quoted Villaveirán and noted that, more than a year after the Armed Forces seized power on March 24, 1976, the time had come to define the criteria by which these new "rules of the game" would be established.[2] Against a backdrop of extralegal violence, state interventions of trade unions, and a new legislative

[1] Claudio Polosecki, "Renovación de gremios," *Clarín* (July 25, 1977).
[2] Polosecki, "Renovación de gremios."

corpus, the self-proclaimed *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganization, or PRN) envisioned the Law of Professional Associations as a major achievement within its reorganizational push.

Beginning on March 24, 1976, when the Armed Forces seized power in a coup d'état, the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* attempted to execute an exceptionally ambitious transformation of nearly every aspect of Argentina's political, social, economic, and even cultural life. As General Jorge Rafael Videla stated in his address to the nation on March 24, the new regime "marked the closing of one historical cycle, and the opening of another."[3] Yet Villaveirán's comments, published some fifteen months after the coup and in response to ongoing efforts to realize the military's national reorganization, offer a different vantage point. Villaveirán approached the question as a political issue, highlighting in his analysis the existing legislative infrastructure that governed Argentine labor relations and implicitly relating the regime's project to how labor law had functioned to that point. Even his reference to the "rules of the game" distinguished these remarks from the more sweeping proclamations of complete overhaul that typified the days after March 24, 1976. By July 1977, Villaveirán was suggesting that the "game" would continue—at stake was how those involved might play it.

This dissertation picks up the thread that Villaveirán indicated in his comments in 1977. What was this game? What were its rules? How did they change, and who changed them? How did people react to these changes? And, perhaps just as importantly, how and where did the rules remain the same? Argentina's military deposed sitting president María Estela Martínez de Perón, known as Isabel, before dawn on March 24, 1976. Over the next seven years, the PRN oversaw

[3] "30 de marzo: Discurso pronunciado al asumir la Primera Magistratura de la República Argentina, exponiendo al Pueblo de la Nación los fundamentos del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional emprendido el 24 de marzo de 1976," *Mensajes Presidenciales, Proceso de Reorganización Nacional 24 de marzo de 1976*, Tomo 1 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Congreso de la Nación, 1977), 7-8.

the most violent period in modern Argentine history. Against a backdrop of state terror, the regime attempted to fundamentally transform the national reality, aspiring to "restore" Argentina to the virtuous path that it had been on at the end of the nineteenth century, when it was among the wealthiest nations in the world, but that it had somehow lost over the first decades of the twentieth century.[4] During the dictatorship, state security forces arrested, tortured, executed, and/or disappeared tens of thousands of Argentine citizens.[5] This repression reached its high point between 1976 and 1978, with as many as 22,000 people imprisoned, killed, and/or disappeared.[6] These actions routinely exceeded the parameters of legality, and frequently swept up people who were only tangentially involve—or even uninvolved—in so-called "subversion," creating a climate of terror and uncertainty. This campaign of repression profoundly affected the national psyche in the 1970s and 1980s, with consequences that have continued to reverberate into the present.[7] No study of Argentina during this period can or should overlook the reality of this violence and its legacies.

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[4] This myth of the "frustrated destiny" of Argentina is so pervasive in both national imaginary and scholarship that it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that it is the single most important trope in the country's history. See, among many others, *Frustrated Colossus—From Perón to Present*, Documentary: Landmark Educational Media (1985); D.C.M. Platt and Guido di Tella, eds., *Argentina, Australia, and Canada: Studies in Comparative Development, 1870-1965* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985); Nicholas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Alan Beattie, *False Economy: A Surprising Economic History of the World* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2009), esp. Chapter 1. For work that analyzes this "frustrated destiny" as myth, see, among others, Mercedes Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana, eds., *National Identities and Socio-Political Changes in Latin America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), esp. Chapter 11; Ariel Armony and Victor Armony, "Indictments, Myths, and Citizen Mobilizations in Argentina: A Discourse Analysis," *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Winter 2005).

[5] The total number of casualties remains fiercely debated. See, among others, Alison Brysk, "The Politics of Measurement: The Contested Count of the Disappeared in Argentina," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1994); Antonius Robben, "Silence, Denial, and Confession about State Terror by the Argentine Military," in *Violence Expressed: An Anthropological Approach*, Maria Six-Hohenbalken and Nerina Weiss, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011). In 2016/17, President Mauricio Macri reignited this controversy by suggesting that the figure of 30,000 was inflated. See María Esperanza Casullo, "Argentina Turns Right Again," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2016).

[6] This figure comes from a report produced by Argentine military intelligence for counterparts in the Chilean Armed Forces. It was reproduced in John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2004). It is also available online through the National Security Archive. See https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB185/full [Report on Argentina disappeared].pdf.

[7] For work on the psychological elements of state terror during Argentina's most recent military dictatorship, see, among others, Marcelo Suárez-Orosco, "The Heritage of Enduring a 'Dirty War': Psychosocial Aspects of Terror in

However, returning to Villaveirán's comments, made at arguably the apogee of the Armed Forces' use of repression, to reduce the PRN to simply a mechanism for state violence would also be to overlook much of the political, economic, and social reality of this period. Indeed, the very name that the civic-military alliance which seized power on March 24 gave to their project—the Process of National Reorganization—suggests several critical questions that demand attention. First, by labeling it a "Process," the new regime underscored that this effort was not a moment in time, but rather an ongoing endeavor. What, then, did this "Process" ultimately look like? Second, that this project was "National" meant that its effects would touch the entirety of the national territory and, presumably, all those who dwelt within that territory. How did the PRN understand the nation, and specifically who would be included within that vision? Finally, the "Reorganization" of that Nation (and its inhabitants) implied profound structural and ideological changes that would give shape to Argentina's future. What were those imagined changes and how did the regime attempt to implement them? Through these questions, the political project of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* begins to take shape. Taking seriously the name introduces a series of critical problems that must be analyzed in order to understand Argentina's most recent dictatorship as more than simply repression. This dissertation contributes to that effort.

Authoritarian Exceptionalism

At least five years before the return of democracy in 1983, violence already defined the dominant narrative around the PRN. The 1978 World Cup, which Argentina hosted, gave the

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Argentina, 1976-1988," *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1991); Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism In Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); María Soledad Cataggio, "The Last Military Dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983): the Mechanism of State Terror," *SciencesPo* (July 5, 2010); Sebastián Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence, and Memory in the Seventies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

dictatorship an opportunity to refute growing international concern about its human rights record. Although individual players expressed reservations—and some decided not to attend—no teams boycotted the event, and FIFA never truly wavered in its determination to allow the regime to proceed. Argentina's triumph, combined with overall success of the event, gave the Armed Forces valuable ammunition to push back against what the de facto president, General Jorge Rafael Videla, cited as a concerted "anti-Argentine campaign" from abroad.[8] Within a year, the arrival of the International Commission on Human Rights (CIDH, Comisión Internacional de Derechos Humanos) gave rise to one of the most infamous marketing slogans of all time, "Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos" ("We Argentines are right and human"), a macabre play on words that mocked the justification for the CIDH's visit.[9] Simultaneously, the first testimonies from survivors of the dictatorship's clandestine detention centers began to appear outside of Argentina. Perhaps the most famous was newspaper owner Jacobo Timmerman's account, which created enough media stir that the regime was forced to release him in 1978.[10] In the years that followed, and especially after 1983, the traumas of the dictatorship gave rise to an entire genre of testimonial literature and prompted the rapid expansion of "memory studies" as a distinct academic field.[11]

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[8] Marina Franco, "Derechos humanos, política y fútbol (o de las pasiones argentinas y francesas)," *Entrepasados*, Vol. 14, No. 28 (2005); "Mundial de 1978: las oscuras historias de la Copa con las que Videla quiso "blanquear" la dictadura," *La Tercera* (May 17, 2013); Daniel Gutman, *Somos derechos y humanos. La batalla de la la dictadura y los medios contra el mundo y la reacción internacional frente a los desaparecidos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2015).

[9] Gutman, *Somos derechos y humanos*.

[10] Jacobo Timmerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, trans. Tony Talbot (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

[11] See, among many others, Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press, 1986); Andrew Graham-Yooll, *A State of Fear: Memories of Argentina's Nightmare* (London: Eland, 1986); Antonius Robben, "How Traumatized Societies Remember: The Aftermath of the Dirty War," *Cultural Critique*, No. 59 (Winter 2005); Barbara Sutton, *Surviving State Terror: Women's Testimonies of Repression and Resistance in Argentina* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018). Adriana Spahr, "Uncovering the Truth through Testimony: The Argentinean Dirty War," in *Disgust and Desire: The Paradox of the Monster* (Boston, MA: Brill Publishers, 2018). For analyses of the memory boom, see Beatriz Sarlo, *Tiempo pasado: Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005); Jordana Blejmar, *Playful Memories: The Autofictional Turn in Post-Dictatorship Argentina* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

A quick scan of scholarship on the dictatorship over the past two decades confirms that this focus on repression extends beyond questions related to testimony to determine the general tone of research across multiple disciplines and subfields. Titles like *A Lexicon of Terror* (Marguerite Feitlowitz, 1998), *Guerrillas and Generals: The Dirty War in Argentina* (Paul Lewis, 2001), *Consent of the Damned* (David Sheinin, 2012), and *Argentina's Missing Bones* (James Brennan, 2018) highlight the centrality of violence and violent imagery as organizational concepts for understanding the PRN.[12] Given the scale of state terror in Argentina from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, this focus is hardly surprising, and noting it here does not imply that these works lack value. On the contrary, this emphasis has allowed for a far deeper understanding of the historical, political, and psychological motivations for and consequences of this repression. However, foregrounding violence to such an extent has also contributed to a broader pattern of what I term "authoritarian exceptionalism," in which the dictatorship is considered outside of or apart from the larger trajectory of Argentine history. To quote Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo's work on the *Proceso*, "[t]he coup of 1976 is not simply another link in the chain of interventions that began in 1930. The crisis that framed [the coup] gave rise to a unprecedented messianic regime that attempted to produce irreversible changes in the economy, the institutional system, education, culture, and the social, political party, and union structures."[13] Yet, as this dissertation will suggest, the dictatorship's attempt to produce irreversible change did not automatically equate to change—and even where changes occurred, they were not always what the PRN intended.

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[12] Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Paul Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The Dirty War in Argentina* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); David Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentinians in the Dirty War* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2012); James Brennan, *Argentina's Missing Bones: Revisiting the History of the Dirty War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

[13] Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983: Del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2003), 19.

The need to recognize and reconsider this tendency toward authoritarian exceptionalism builds from Timothy Mason's analysis of social policy in Nazi Germany, and specifically his attempt to take seriously "'normal' politics (albeit under the constraints of abnormal conditions)."[14] Mason argued that "[t]he causes of great historical changes are never the same as the intentions of the actors, however powerful they may have been."[15] This is a difficult endeavor to undertake, as it requires evaluating the political and social aspects of a regime that is simultaneously recognized as morally and ethically compromised. The coexistence of extreme repression and seemingly mundane policy decisions can be jarring. To move past violence and take seriously the objectives, practices, and beliefs of a dictatorship illuminates understudied aspects of authoritarian governance, generally, and Argentina's most recent civic-military regime, specifically. Indeed, one potentially fruitful approach has been to consider the two—politics and repression—alongside one another as separate but parallel projects.[16] Along these lines, the push against authoritarian exceptionalism also responds, in part, to historian Tulio Halperín Donghi's observation that while we must not lose sight of the narrative of horror recounted by sources like the *Nunca Más* report, "it is at the same time necessary that we do not see that narrative as the *entire* history of the *Proceso*."[17] Since the mid-2000s, this call has generated increasing engagement with Argentina's most recent dictatorship as a government. Recent scholarship has tackled the inner workings of the PRN, its educational policy, its social welfare program, its

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[14] Timothy Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the National Community*, trans. John Broadwin (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993). This quote is from Ursula Vogel's introduction to the text. See pg. x.
[15] Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich*, 4.
[16] See Ricardo Sidicaro, "El régimen autoritario de 1976: Refundación frustrada y contrarrevolución exitosa," in *A veinte años del golpe: Con memoria democrática*, ed. Hugo Quiroga and César Tcach (Rosario: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 1996).
[17] Tulio Halperín Donghi, "A modo de presentación," in Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*, 12. Emphasis in original.

economic platform, its cultural ambitions, and, to some extent, its labor laws.[18] This literature offers new insight into how different areas of the dictatorship functioned and has begun to break down the notion of the *Proceso* as monolithic and/or irrational in its actions and ideologies.

As a corollary to the emphasis on repression, scholarship on the PRN has reinforced its exceptionality by tending to establish rigid chronological boundaries around the PRN period. The claim that March 24, 1976 marked a rupture point—a moment of before and after—characterized much of the scholarship on the dictatorship from the 1980s into the 2000s.[19] I suggest that this claim reflected, in part, a collective need to create both distance between the post-1983 restoration of democracy and the horror of the military era and separation between the third Peronist government and the dictatorship. While understandable, this impulse has also reified certain dates—most notably March 24—as rigid historical breaks and thus affirmed the distinctive and almost ahistorical quality of Argentina's most recent military government.[20] Increasingly, research

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[18] See, among others, Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*; Paula Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto: La interna militar de Videla a Bignone* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2008); Paula Canelo, "Los desarrollistas de la 'dictadura liberal'. La experiencia del Ministerio de Planeamiento durante el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional en la Argentina," *Anos 90*, Vol. 19, No. 35 (2012); Mariana Gudelevicius, "La política educativa implementada durante el primer año del 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional': contradicciones y límites," *Trabajos y comunicaciones*, 2nda Epoca, No. 38 (2012); Florencia Osuna, "El Ministerio de Bienestar Social entre el Onganiato y la última dictadura (1966-1983)," *Estudios sociales del estado*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (2017); Bruno Nápoli, M. Celeste Perosino, and Walter Bosisio. *La dictadura del capital financiero: El golpe militar corporativo y la trama bursátil* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Continente, 2014); Natalia Milanesio, "Sex and Democracy: The Meanings of *Destape* in Postdictatorial Argentina," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol 99, No. 1 (February 2019); Luciana Zorzoli, "La normativa sindical entre la dictadura y el alfonsinismo, propuesta de sistematización," in *Clase obrera, sindicatos y Estado, Argentina 1955-2010*, ed. Alejandro Schneider and Pablo Ghigliani (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015); Luciana Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar (1976-1983)," *Revista Millars*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2016).

[19] See, among others, Álvaro Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar. 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984); Paul Drake, *Labor Movements and Dictatorships: The Southern Cone in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Hugo Quiroga, *El tiempo del "Proceso": Conflictos y coincidencias entre políticos y militares* (Rosario: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 2004); Pablo Pozzi, "Argentina 1976-1982: Labour Leadership and Military Government," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (May 1988); Pablo Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura (1976-1982)*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2006); Alfonso Mason, *Sindicalismo y dictadura: una historia poco contada (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 2007); Jerry Dávila, *Dictatorship in South America* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). See also the earlier quote from Novaro and Palermo.

[20] Felipe Venero has noted that prior to the 2000s, few scholars seriously questioned this periodization. See Felipe Venero, "Trabajadores y dictadura. Un balance crítico sobre la Producción historiográfica," in *Clase obrera,*

has sought to break down these temporal divisions and resituate the PRN within the longer arc of national and regional history. This effort has primarily focused on rethinking the transition to democracy and challenging narratives that saw the Alfonsín administration as a clean break with the dictatorship years.[21] If much of the early focus was on political or societal continuities, recent work has underscored the lingering consequences of laws and policies enacted between 1976 and 1983 that remained in effect into the 1990s or 2000s, and which had largely escaped attention.[22]

Less common, though no less important, has been a trend toward reconsidering March 24, 1976 as a rupture point. While the attitude expressed by Novaro and Palermo regarding the "unprecedented" nature of the PRN remains prevalent, some have (perhaps) taken that assumption as a challenge, looking to find precisely the precedent and continuities that are implied to be nonexistent. On one level, these are a question of empirical fact. The violence that defined the 1976-1983 period had begun several years prior, during the third Peronist administration and with the tacit (or at times active) approval and involvement of government authorities.[23] Thus, some have suggested that insofar as the PRN's use of repression differed from the preceding moment, it is more accurate to consider it a difference of scale than of kind.[24] Another key continuity is the

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sindicatos y Estado, Argentina 1955-2010, eds. Alejandro Schneider and Pablo Ghigliani (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015), 131.

[21] See, among others, José Nun and Juan Carlos Portantiero, eds., *Ensayos sobre la transición democrática en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1987); Hugo Quiroga and César Tcach, eds., *A veinte años del golpe: Con memoria democrática* (Rosario: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 1996); Alejandro Horowicz, *Las dictaduras argentinas: Historia de una frustración nacional* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2012); Nápoli et al., *La dictadura del capital financiero*; Juan Pedro Massano, "El proyecto de concertación. Sindicatos y Estado en la transición democrática," in *Clase obrera, sindicatos y Estado, Argentina 1955-2010*, eds. Alejandro Schneider and Pablo Ghigliani (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015); Zorzoli, "La normativa sindical entre la dictadura y el alfonsinismo"; Natalia Milanesio, "Sex and Democracy."

[22] See, especially, Nápoli et al., *La dictadura del capital financiero*; Zorzoli, "La normativa sindical entre la dictadura y el alfonsinismo."

[23] See, among others, Ronaldo Munck, "The Crisis of Late Peronism and the Working Class, 1973-1976," *Bulletin of the Society of Latin American Studies*, No. 30 (April 1979).

[24] This is a complicated argument, and one that I am not comfortable embracing wholly. At some point, the scales of violence differ so massively that they are simultaneously different in kind. Whether that applies to the violence of the PRN is a question that lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

suspension of the constitutional order, which did not in fact occur on March 24, 1976 but rather on November 4, 1974, in a decree by the democratic government of President Isabel Perón. This latter question will be explored more fully later in the Introduction and in Chapters 1 and 2. Recent work has also stressed that assumed breaks in practices, beliefs, and attitudes might not have been as definitive as previously assumed. Federico Lorenz, for example, has examined the history of naval shipyard workers from the early 1970s to the end of the decade as a single continuous history, challenging the chronological primacy of March 24.[25] Historians have begun to identify and trace institutional continuities from the 1960s through the PRN, highlighting the reappearance of certain actors and policies at different moments.[26] However, this approach remains somewhat exceptional, especially around questions related to law and labor relations. Here, my dissertation contributes to this developing trend by reexamining continuities and ruptures through the lens of Argentine labor relations and the Ministry of Labor from 1976 through the early 1980s.

I have chosen these years as the focus for this dissertation for three reasons. First, and most significantly, the *Proceso* did not maintain a consistent level of control throughout the seven years of its existence. Its authority waxed and waned in response to various internal and external factors, but the general trajectory trended toward a diminution of power as the 1970s wound to a close. The exact causes for this will be explored more fully in Chapters 1 and 2. Here, we can note that General Videla served as de facto president from 1976 until 1981, establishing a superficial stability for the regime that masked much of the internal conflict. However, over the final two-and-a-half years of the PRN, that stability evaporated. The 1981-1983 years were defined by infighting, economic collapse, and political upheaval that echoed, in many ways, the first half of

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[25] Federico Lorenz, *Los zapatos de Carlito: Una historia de los trabajadores navales de Tigre en la década del setenta* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2007); Federico Lorenz, *Algo parecido a la felicidad: Una historia de lucha de la clase trabajadora durante la década del setenta (1973-1978)* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2013).
[26] Osuna, "El Ministerio de Bienestar Social entre el Onganiato y la última dictadura."

the 1970s. This post-1981 decline included the abandonment of everything from labor and economic policies to the government's censorship laws.[27] Thus, the study's emphasis on 1976-1981 reinforces the dissertation's main contribution: taking seriously the dictatorship's political project during the years when that project appeared viable. After 1981, the regime's focus shifted from national reorganization to simply remaining in power.

Second, considering 1976-1981 as a single period does offer an alternative to readings of the history of the PRN that have tended to propose a different chronology. The predominant approach has divided the dictatorship into two phases: the first (1976-1979) defined by repression and the second (1980-1983) characterized by resistance.[28] This separation reflects several watershed moments that occurred in 1979, notably the first general strike against the regime, the visit of the Inter-American Committee on Human Rights, and the attempted palace coup against Videla by military hardliners, which signified the breakdown of the chain of command. The 1979 division is especially prominent in labor histories, following the work of Álvaro Abós and Pablo Pozzi.[29] However, I suggest that this periodization risks eliding critically important features of the period generally and specifically with respect to labor relations. As this dissertation will show, to understand the 1976-1978 years solely in terms of repression and immobilization would ignore dozens of highly visible moments of opposition and mobilization by workers across various industries. At the same time, after 1979, workers and trade-union leaders continued to negotiate and deal with military authorities despite having entered the period of so-called "resistance." Nor were these continuities limited to the field of labor. The accepted narrative holds that prior to 1979

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[27] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, esp. Chapter 3; Milanesio, "Sex and Democracy," 91.
[28] See, among others, Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*; David Pion-Berlin, "The Fall of Military Rule in Argentina: 1976-1983," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 272, No. 2 (Summer 1985); Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura*.
[29] Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*; Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura*. For analyses of this division, see Venero, "Trabajadores y dictadura"; Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar (1976-1983)."

there was a general silence around the issue of the *desparecidos* (disappeared) and human rights more broadly. However, as early as October 1976, striking Luz y Fuerza employees used the term "Desaparecidos" in their demand for the reappearance of three kidnapped coworkers, and in August 1977 the release of disappeared union leaders featured prominently in a letter submitted to the Minister of Labor.[30] Even in the rural interior, human rights were front-page news by April 1977.[31] The topic of silences and human rights discourses in Argentine history lies outside the scope of this project, but the fact that even a cursory glance at media coverage from the period shows that knowledge of these events circulated well before 1979 further suggests the potential problems with using that year as a temporal marker.

Finally, although I focus on the 1976-1981 period, this analysis depends on connections between patterns and attitudes prevalent under the PRN and the Argentine labor movement's historic practices from the 1950s through the 1970s. Rethinking labor relations during the dictatorship is near impossible without looking back to the previous decades and tracing how specific actions, ideas, and discourses reemerged in new contexts—and even in new forms—between 1976 and 1981. The predominant approach to the most recent dictatorship—treating it as a separate historical moment—contrasts sharply with important studies of Argentine labor relations between 1943 and 1976. These works have differed markedly in argument, defending the revolutionary capacity of Argentina's working class, highlighting its relative political immaturity, or unpacking its pragmatic dynamism and adaptability.[32] However, they have largely agreed that

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[30] "Se mantiene el pleito laboral que afecta a las empresas eléctricas," *La Nación* (October 13, 1976); "Reclamo gremial a Liendo," *Crónica* (August 30, 1977).

[31] In April 1977 alone, four articles appeared on the front page of *La Reforma*, the daily paper for the town of General Pico in La Pampa province that directly referred to either human rights or disappearances. "El Obispo de San Rafael se Refirió a los Derechos Humanos," *La Reforma* (April 1, 1977); "Desparecidos: Desvirtúan rumores," *La Reforma* (April 5, 1977); "Los desaparecidos y la Suprema Corte," *La Reforma* (April 20, 1977); "Fue detenido el director del 'Buenos Aires Herald'," *La Reforma* (April 23, 1977).

[32] See, among others, Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición. De la sociedad tradicional a la sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1971); Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the*

any productive engagement with labor relations should transcend the divides between military and civil regimes and instead consider certain questions across apparent temporal breaks. Again, the scope of the PRN's violence complicated this approach and contributed to the belief that after March 24, 1976 the old rules simply did not apply. However, I suggest that this perspective overlooks key continuities and despite this dissertation's relatively narrow chronological emphasis I sustain that argument by looking to patterns and practices of labor relations from the three decades that preceded the coup.

Work and Citizenship

The idea that the dictatorship radically transformed the everyday dynamics of work and labor organizing guided the first generation of labor histories about the PRN, and in turn reaffirmed the before/after character of March 24.[33] This dissertation offers an alternative reading of March 24 as rupture, but also of the evolution of labor relations between 1976 and 1983. It is along these lines that the dissertation makes a second intervention related to the imbrication of work and citizenship.

As John Dupré and Regenia Gagnier noted, the relationship between productivity and one's social, political, and/or religious standing goes back to the very beginning, when God told Adam that his life would be defined by the transformation of "the sweat of thy face" into necessary

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Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Alejandro Schneider, *Los compañeros: Trabajadores, izquierda y peronismo, 1955-1973* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2006).

[33] See, among others, Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura*; Pozzi, "Argentina 1976-1982"; Arturo Fernández, *Las prácticas sociales del sindicalismo (1976-1982)* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1985); Francisco Delich, "Desmovilización social, reestructuración obrera y cambio sindical," in *Sociedad civil y autoritarismo. El problema de la participación política y social en América Latina ante los proyectos neoliberales y las transformaciones que estos inducen*, ed. Francisco Delich (Buenos Aires: Crítica y Utopía, 1982); Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*.

sustenance.[34] Understanding this relationship and its associated practices has been a central concern of intellectuals and philosophers for thousands of years, and a quick scan of recent contributions to the literature confirms that interest remains high.[35] The European Enlightenment witnessed a boom of new concepts and attitudes related to political economy and national identity that spoke to the increasing overlap of work and citizenship. This imbrication stood at the crossroads of many of the era's prevailing currents: the use of reason, the rise of the individual, the repudiation of the Old Regime, and the emergence of a new form of participatory (if not truly egalitarian) politics.[36] These ideas would be fundamental to the development of new practices of citizenship, where citizenship entailed the relationship of the individual to the state and connoted new rights and responsibilities.[37] In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this evolving definition highlighted productive labor as vital to establishing who would be included in the new national community (those whose work contributed to the normative well-being of that community) and who would be excluded (those who refused to play that role).[38] Indeed, productivity—per definitions that stressed specific ideas of masculinity, patriarchy, and propriety—became critical to transforming man's perception of work: manual labor ceased to be

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[34] John Dupré and Regenia Gagnier, "A Brief History of Work," *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June 1996). See also Genesis 2:3.

[35] See, among others, Dupré and Gagnier, "A Brief History of Work"; Richard Donkin, *Blood, Sweat, and Tears: The Evolution of Work* (New York, NY: Texere, 2001); Richard Donkin, *The Future of Work* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Steven Peter Vallas, *Work: A Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1,000 Years* (London: Verso, 2018); Friederike Sigler, ed., *Work* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).

[36] The literature on the Enlightenment is too broad to be adequately referenced here and falls outside the scope of this project. For an excellent overview of some of the principal thinkers and philosophies, see Robert Anchor, *The Enlightenment Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); Stephen Miller, *Three Deaths and Enlightenment Thought: Hume, Johnson, Marat* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001); Jonathon Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006). For an interesting, if overlooked, example of this current within Enlightenment thought, see António Ribeiro Sanches, *Cartas sobre a Educação da Mocidade* (Covilhã: Universidade da Beira Interior, 2003).

[37] This definition is derived from Sarah Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics in Arequipa, Peru 1780-1854* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999).

[38] On the importance of labor to emergent ideas of national identity and civilization, see, among others, Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens*; Timo Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia: The Rise and Fall of Legal Rule in Post-Colonial Mexico, 1820-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); William Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

a mark of shame and instead became "a matter of pride."[39] By the 1800s, social worth was increasingly understood as a reflection of one's productivity.

A version of this process occurred in Argentina, as it did throughout much of Latin America during the nineteenth century. Following the Wars of Independence, the new republics turned to liberalism as a foundation for their emergent national communities. Over the latter half of the century, the growth of industrial capitalism in Western Europe and the United States reinforced the economic necessity of hard work while simultaneously reaffirming its moral character by linking labor with progress.[40] Argentina's industrialization from the end of the 1800s placed it among the leaders in Latin America with respect to the development of a national working class. A robust literature has examined how, over the next four decades, workers' organizations gained traction and the nascent labor movement became an increasingly powerful force for the broadening of the national community and the expansion of citizenship, with some efforts indicating tensions between the identities of worker and citizen from the 1910s into the 1930s.[41] Though the long Infamous Decade (1930-1943) would reverse some of these gains, there are compelling arguments that the political, social, and even cultural foundations for future working-class organization are to be found during this period.[42]

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[39] Timo Schaefer, *The Social Origins of Justice: Mexico in the Age of Utopian Failure, 1821-1870*, Ph.D., Indiana University (2015), 19.

[40] Although he does not make this exact argument, Weber lays the part of the foundation for this historical interpretation. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1958).

[41] See, among others, Mirta Lobato, *La Vida En Las Fábricas: Trabajo, Protesta y Política En Una Comunidad Obrera, Berisso (1904-1970)* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2001); Robert J. Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Argentina* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), esp. Chapter 1; Jeremy Adelman, "State and Labour in Argentina: The Portworkers of Buenos Aires, 1910-1921," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, no. 1 (February 1993); Joel Horowitz, *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2011). For work that specifically addresses the worker-citizen tension, see Matthew Karush, *Workers or Citizens: Democracy and Identity in Rosario, Argentina (1912-1930)* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

[42] On the political and social foundations of Peronism, see, among others, Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición*; Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Argentina Editores, 1972); James, *Resistance and Integration*, esp. Chapter 1. On Peronism's cultural

That future working-class organization would take the form of Peronism. Scholarship on Peronism and the working class has evolved considerably over the twentieth century, as early interpretations that saw workers as passive and manipulated by a charismatic leader gave way to readings that affirmed the working class's agency and class consciousness. The "orthodox" interpretation, exemplified by Gino Germani, attempted to explain Peronism's rise by citing the particular historical conjuncture of Argentine industrialization at the end of the 1930s and early 1940s and the role played by internal migration to the cities, especially Buenos Aires.[43] Although this interpretation reinforced the anti-Peronist sentiments of some in Argentina's intellectual circles, its limitations frustrated others and led to further attempts to make sense of the country's working-class history. Mariano Ben Plotkin has argued that an important contribution to this perspective was Félix Luna's *El 45*, which chronicled the events of 1945 and argued that the year had been a rupture in Argentine history, and further posited that no one—including Perón—had been fully in control of the moment. This partially laid the groundwork for another critical entry to the literature on Peronism, Miguel Murmis and Carlos Portantiero's *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*, which rejected the notion of the working class heteronomy and instead highlighted the convergence of objectives between Perón and Argentine labor leaders at a moment in which their power was growing.[44] Across these interpretations, workers' inclusion within the national

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foundations, see Matthew Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920-1946* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[43] Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición*. Following Germani along similar lines was Torcuato di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," in *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, ed. Claudio Véliz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[44] Félix Luna, *El 45: Crónica de un año decisivo*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1971); Murmis and Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*. See also Mariano Ben Plotkin, "Perón y el peronismo: Un ensayo bibliográfico," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y El Caribe*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1991).

community and a new relationship to the state, i.e. citizenship, gained increasingly value for understanding the processes through which Peronism had emerged.[45]

This connection was foregrounded in Daniel James' *Resistance and Integration*. James analyzed the historical experiences of Argentina's working class across multiple civil and military governments between 1955 and 1973, highlighting the social, political, and cultural legacies of the first and second Peronist administrations (1946-1955). His approach helped move past debates over Peronism as either demagogic or revolutionary, and instead underscored the movement's conjunctural and dynamic character. *Resistance and Integration* argued that Peronism was both a logical response to economic and class grievances and, simultaneously, a political demand for recognition and, ultimately, citizenship. James demonstrated that the movement's heterodox orientation made it a vehicle for "recasting" the question of citizenship within a new social context. Rather than invoking political rights like participation, Peronism became a vehicle for workers to criticize the existing political apparatus as inherently unjust and to claim "a democracy which included social rights and reforms."[46] This social component, as much as economic well-being or political voice, defined Peronism for supporters who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s, and remained central to their individual and collective identities into the 1970s.[47] Within this framework, citizenship went beyond one's personal relationship to the state to include the complex overlapping connections to family, neighbors, coworkers, bosses, the middle classes, and even the

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[45] For more detailed summaries and analyses of this literature, see Daniel James, "October 17th and 18th, 1945: Mass Protest, Peronism, and the Argentine Working Class," *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1988), 441-442; Mariano Ben Plotkin, "Perón y el peronismo: Un ensayo bibliográfico," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y El Caribe*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1991).

[46] James, *Resistance and Integration*, Chapter 1, esp. 13-18. On the concept of social citizenship, see T.H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Inequality and Society*, ed. Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009).

[47] James, *Resistance and Integration*, 263.

national elite. No more could one's status as a citizen be divorced from social standing vis-à-vis the rest of the country.

Given the centrality of this new form of citizenship to Peronism's durability, it is not surprising that the military government that seized power on March 24, 1976—and which hoped to eliminate Peronism once and for all—would attempt to redefine the parameters of citizenship to eliminate, or at least subordinate, this social component. More surprising is the relative lack of scholarship that has seriously addressed this aspect of the dictatorship's project, although some recent entries to this literature have begun to correct this gap.

The first round of serious investigation on trade unionism and the working class during the dictatorship, produced for the most part during the 1980s, tended to fall into one of two broad camps, arguing either that Argentina's labor movement suffered a devastating defeat after 1976 and remained largely immobilized throughout the PRN, or that the rank-and-file, reflecting an innate class-driven imperative and generally without the support of the union hierarchy, effected a powerful opposition to the regime and contributed directly to its downfall. The former position, stressing demobilization, was advanced most notably by Francisco Delich in 1982, who argued that the combination of state repression and the transformation of the industrial sector during the dictatorship effectively crippled the trade-union leadership, and by extension the labor movement.[48] The latter perspective emerged toward the end of the decade in opposition to Delich's theory of passivity, instead claiming that various oppositional practices among the rank-and-file had helped defeat the *Proceso*. This argument was exemplified by Pablo Pozzi's 1988 work *Oposición obrera a la dictadura*. Pozzi contributed a new focus on the rank-and-file during this period and laid the groundwork for rethinking narratives about the defeat of the working class.

[48] Francisco Delich, "Después del diluvio, la clase obrera," in *Argentina, Hoy*, ed. Alain Rouquié (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982); Delich, "Desmovilización social, reestructuración obrera y cambio sindical."

However, his emphasis on recovering working-class opposition to the dictatorship and the consequences of that opposition also led him to claim an absence of verifiable instances of collaboration or complicity between the rank-and-file and the regime.[49] Despite its absolutist character, this position remained largely unchallenged during the 1990s, in part because of a sharp decline in scholarly production on themes related to the labor movement and the working class.

A handful of studies from the 1980s attempted to make arguments that bridged the extremes of workers as victims or workers as heroes. In 1984, Álvaro Abós offered a temporally-informed analysis that split the dictatorship into a period of relative passivity (1976-1979), during which the unions suffered from state repression, and a period of resistance (1979-1983) during which the labor leaders' opposition damaged the authority of the PRN.[50] As described previously, this periodization of the dictatorship remained a touchstone for future research. The following year, Arturo Fernández took a different approach, focusing instead on workers' social practices and lived experiences. Fernández argued that understanding the *Proceso*'s impact required a broader engagement with working-class life.[51] Another contribution that sought to expand the conversation appeared in the co-authored book, *Argentina: From Anarchism to Peronism*, by Ronaldo Munck, Bernardo Galitelli, and Ricardo Falcón. In their chapter on the PRN period, they began to take seriously the dictatorship's reorganizational effort and offered an initial analysis of how the regime attempted to transform the structures that governed labor relations.[52] Although they largely reaffirmed the 1976-1979/1979-1983 chronology, their study, like Fernández's, pointed in new directions. However, despite their nuanced perspective, neither work produced a

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[49] Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura*, 141.
[50] Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*.
[51] Fernández, *Las prácticas sociales del sindicalismo*.
[52] Ronaldo Munck, Ricardo Falcón, and Bernardo Galitelli, *Argentina: From Anarchism to Peronism. Workers, Unions, and Politics, 1855-1985* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987).

strong response, although they more than likely contributed to Pozzi's focus on shop-floor practices in 1988.[53] Though their approaches differed from Delich and Pozzi in certain key aspects, these monographs did not change the fact that by the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the two predominant narratives on labor and the PRN tended to use either demobilization or heroic opposition as their interpretive frameworks.

Scholars have noted that Argentina's 2001 economic collapse sparked renewed interest in questions related to workers and the working class, and resulted in a new generation of studies that have begun to revisit these debates.[54] Recent contributions have explored critically important concepts beyond the victim/hero binary and have built on the foundation initially provided by Fernández and Munck et al. Luciana Zorzoli has argued for a rethinking of the historiography of the *Proceso* that challenges the reductionist notion that one wing of the trade-union movement was political in its opposition while the other was apolitical in its integrationism (and/or complicity). Instead, she suggests that neither passivity nor opposition appropriately describe the historical

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[53] At least two recent bibliographical essays make this point. See Venero, "Trabajadores y dictadura"; Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar (1976-1983)."

[54] For authors who have made this argument about 2001, see Andrés Carminati, "'Algo habrán hecho'. La historia de los trabajadores durante la última dictadura militar (1976-1983). Un repaso historiográfico," *Historia Regional, Sección Historia*, Vol. 25, No. 30 (2012); Venero, "Trabajadores y dictadura"; Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar (1976-1983)." On recent scholarship that has revisited these questions, see, among others, Victoria Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina: Los casos de Acindar, Astarsa, Dálmine Siderca, Ford, Ledesma y Mercedes Benz," *Revista Engrajes*, No. 5 (March 2006); Victoria Basualdo, ed., *La clase trabajadora en el siglo XX: Experiencias de lucha y organización* (Buenos Aires: Cara o Ceca, 2011); Victoria Basualdo, "Shop-Floor Organization in Argentina from Early Peronism to the 'Proceso' Military Dictatorship," *Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, Vol. 14 (September 2011); Daniel Dicósimo, "Dirigentes sindicales, racionalización y conflictos durante la última dictadura militar," *Revista Entrepasados*, Vol. 15, No. 29 (2006); Daniel Dicósimo, "Represión estatal, violencia y relaciones laborales durante la última dictadura militar en la Argentina," *Contenciosa*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2013); Daniel Dicósimo and Julia Soul, "La representación sindical en la Argentina durante el siglo XX. Aportes para una reflexión desde la dinámica institucional y social," *Anuario IEHS*, Vol. 28 (2013); Lucas Daniel Iramain, "La política laboral de la última dictadura cívico-militar argentina en el ámbito de las empresas públicas," *Anuario IEHS* 29/30 (2014); Lorenz, *Los zapatos de Carlito*; Lorenz, *Algo parecido a la felicidad*; Mason, *Sindicalismo y dictadura*; Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar (1976-1983)"; Luciana Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales durante la última dictadura militar argentina: Un estudio cuantitativo," *Desarrollo Económico*, Vol. 57, No. 223 (April 2018).

reality, and she adapts Richard Hyman's categories of "open" and "closed" unionism to rethink the political stances and practices of different currents of Argentina's labor movement under authoritarianism.[55] Zorzoli also initiated a long-overdue conversation on the topic of government interventions of unions during the dictatorship, a question that has remained both undertheorized and understudied.[56] In his research, Daniel Dicósimo has broken down the concept of worker "resistance" under authoritarianism to provoke further reflection on different elements of labor practice, and has shown that the relationship between rank-and-file and union leadership was not simply oppositional, but in fact a complex and fluid give-and-take that evolved in response to specific circumstances.[57] Additional entries have highlighted industrial complicity in repression against workers and the consequences of violence for working-class social structures, while at least one study, again by Zorzoli, has emphasized the overlooked but significant role of law in understanding labor and the PRN.[58] This dissertation positions itself firmly in line with these works and contributes to this conversation by attempting to apply the same measured analysis to labor relations after 1976 that has been applied to labor relations prior to 1976. Focusing on the historical interplay between work and citizenship provides a framework for that effort.

The Rules of the Game, Legality, and Legitimacy

[55] Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar (1976-1983)"; Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales durante la última dictadura militar argentina."
[56] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales durante la última dictadura militar argentina."
[57] Dicósimo, "Dirigentes sindicales, racionalización y conflictos durante la última dictadura militar"; Daniel Dicósimo, "La resistencia de los trabajadores a la última dictadura militar. Un aporte a su conceptualización," *Avances Del Cesor*, Vol. 12, No. 13 (2015).
[58] See, among others, Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina"; Lindsay DuBois, *The Politics of the Past in an Argentine Working-Class Neighborhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Lorenz, *Los zapatos de Carlito*; Lorenz, *Algo parecido a la felicidad*; Zorzoli, "La normativa sindical entre la dictadura y el alfonsinismo."

As Chapter 2 of the dissertation examines, the simple number of strikes and labor disputes over the first five years of the PRN, despite repression and legal proscriptions, disproves arguments that sustain the passivity or immobility of the working class. At the same time, between 1976 and 1980 these mobilizations produced limited concrete results, and as the decade closed, the military regime's authority appeared largely intact while the conditions facing Argentina workers had worsened considerably. Unsurprisingly, neither interpretation—workers as victims or workers as heroes—accurately captures the contradictions and complexities of this historical conjuncture. This paradox, I suggest, cannot be adequately explained by focusing solely on shop-floor responses to authoritarian policies, but requires interrogating the rationales and processes that drove the creation and enforcement of those policies.

Returning to the "rules of the game" is especially helpful in this regard. This concept not only provides a framework that encompasses both those who make the rules and those who are forced to play by them, but also emphasizes that this dynamic is not unidirectional and that the rule makers can be forced to amend or even abandon their plans based on popular response. The frequency with which the "rules of the game" ("reglas del juego") appear in public statements by regime officials and in academic studies of Argentina's most recent dictatorship reinforces its analytical utility. Part of the appeal of this framework is that it functions on two levels. First, as labor sociologist Michael Burawoy has demonstrated, the "rules of the game" can help explain how a localized version of hegemony is implemented on the shop floor. Management's ability to construct a system that workers recognize as legitimate and will voluntarily participate in—even when such participation inevitably connotes their own exploitation—can be described in terms of how well the "game" functions—and to what extent workers buy into the rules.[59] Chapters 3-5

[59] Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

will analyze negotiation and contestation in specific circumstances to illuminate how and where the "rules of the game" worked, and how and where they failed, during the PRN. Second, this framework can also help explain similar patterns on a larger scale when applied to the dictatorship's attempted institutional overhaul. This is more in line with what Villaveirán referenced in 1977, or what Argentine historian Jorge Schvarzer identified when he described Economy Minister José Martínez de Hoz's strategy as an effort to transform Argentina's economic "reglas del juego."[60]

At both the shop-floor and institutional levels, the "rules of the game" framework aids the interpretation and understanding of labor relations. The idea of the "game" bridges the two spaces and involves multiple players, reaffirming the multidirectional power dynamics that connect rank-and-file workers, trade unionists, management, and state actors. This quadripartite relationship involves multiple players, whose roles can change and evolve in response to shifting circumstances. The "game" also connotes winners and losers. While the use of those terms requires caution, they do speak to the competitive nature of capitalist labor relations and the fundamental opposition that drives much of the struggle, whether in the factory or the halls of the Ministry of Labor. Simultaneously, that the "rules" can change highlights that this relationship is not static but rather fluid. Not only can the "rule makers" reevaluate the rules at a given moment, those who must play by the rules can, in certain circumstances, push back against them and even change them. This is not easily done, especially because the players do not have equal access to or control over the rule-making process. But, it can and does occur, and these moments of change reaffirm the agency of labor, demonstrate that capital's control is never absolute, and underscore that the rules apply to everyone playing the game, even if their relationship to power remains unequal.

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[60] Jorge Schvarzer, "Cambios en el liderazgo industrial argentino en el período de Martínez de Hoz," *Desarrollo Económico*, Vol. 23, No. 91 (December 1983), 355.

This understanding of the "rules of the game" builds on both Michael Burawoy's analysis of shop-floor labor relations and William Roseberry's seminal analysis of hegemony. Hegemony is often disregarded in the context of authoritarianism, given the common assumption that hegemony depends on the consent of the governed. However, following Roseberry, I understand hegemony as a tool "*not* to understand consent, but to understand *struggle*."[61] It is a way to make sense of the mutually-constitutive relationship between dominated and dominator that defines power and its exercise. Dictatorship, then, becomes fertile ground for thinking about hegemony and the "rules of the game" help to translate this theoretical concept onto actual lived experience. Attempts to construct hegemony fail or succeed based on their ability to elicit buy-in from the governed—to get people to "play by the rules." Importantly, playing by the rules does not mean consensus. Rather, the rules exist to establish how conflict is managed. The capacity of a ruling system to respond and adapt to challenges, and to redirect those challenges into acceptable channels, defines hegemony.[62] Thus, the rules of the game, and the extent to which people play by them, have a critical role in understanding domination and resistance.

The law, as Villaveirán's comments suggest, must be considered a key element within these rules. Authoritarian legality is a complex field, made more so by the prevalence of post-facto evaluations of the legal standing and/or legitimacy of a regime or a particular statute. If taking the PRN's legalism seriously is vital to understanding attempts at domination and responses to domination, how we make sense of that legalism is far from simple. The chapters of this dissertation will engage this point from different directions based on specific contexts, but a

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[61] William Roseberry, "Hegemony and the Language of Contention," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 361. Emphasis in original.

[62] This reading draws on both Burawoy (1979) and Roseberry (1994). Like Roseberry, I tend to believe that "actually existing hegemony" is a myth. Rather than debating whether something is hegemonic or not, we are better served trying to understand hegemony as a sliding scale, in which no regime or government can ever reach a point of total domination.

broader engagement with the interplay of legality and legitimacy contributes to the foundation for these interventions.

Authoritarian governments are concerned with and need legitimacy.[63] The use of coercive violence to ensure complicity has obvious limits that every government, democratic and non-democratic, eventually confronts. The question of how, or if, non-democratic regimes can use the law to construct legitimate authority has been an object of inquiry at different moments during the twentieth century. Both Max Weber and Carl Schmitt articulated descriptive (as opposed to normative) definitions of legitimacy, emphasizing its contingent nature, albeit from different directions. Weber argued that the legitimacy of a political system reflected the faith that participants held in that system, and identified three possible sources for this belief: tradition, charisma, and legality.[64] Schmitt posited that legitimacy effectively superseded the rule of law, arguing that the sovereign had the ability to suspend the law and that the ability to do so defined the sovereign.[65] Although prone to circular logic, Schmitt essentially agreed with Weber that legitimacy did not reflect a normative justification outside of power relations, but rather derived from particular historical conjunctures and the responses to those circumstances. More recently, Giorgio Agamben has reconsidered these questions in relation to the state of exception, describing the concept's historical trajectory and suggesting that legality has become increasingly subordinate

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[63] See, among others, Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich*; Jothie Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse, and Legitimacy in Singapore* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mark Turner, "Authoritarian Rule and the Dilemma of Legitimacy: The Case of President Marcos of the Philippines," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1990); Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, "Identity, Procedures, and Performance: How Authoritarian Regimes Legitimize Their Rule," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2017); Susan Whiting, "Authoritarian 'Rule of Law' and Regime Legitimacy," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 14 (2017).

[64] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York, NY: Free Press, 1964); Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991).

[65] Carl Schmitt, *Legality and Legitimacy*, trans. John Seitzer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

to exercises of sovereign legitimacy outside of legal frameworks.[66] That this trajectory encompasses the twentieth century means that Argentina's most recent civic-military dictatorship can and should be considered as part of this theoretical debate.

From the mid-1900s, these questions resonated in Latin America within the ideological and political context of the Cold War. Guillermo O'Donnell provided one of the most well-known regionally-grounded engagements with hegemony and legitimacy in his analysis of "bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes" in the Southern Cone from the 1960s through the 1980s. O'Donnell argued that the emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarianism was inextricable from the rise of perceived threats to capitalist hegemony, and that these regimes often seized power in direct response to crises of legitimacy.[67] This interpretation helped him construct a set of general rules that could help explain this period of military dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil. However, O'Donnell's study emphasized the circumstances that precipitated the development of these regimes, as opposed to how they attempted to (re)construct legitimacy after taking control. Moreover, some scholars posited that O'Donnell's conceptual tools, originally developed to understand the advent of the military regimes of the 1960s in Argentina and Brazil, were inadequate for analyzing the dictatorships of the 1970s in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina.[68] At the same time, O'Donnell's interpretation tended to read Argentina's working class through the perceptions of the middle and upper classes, such that the belief in the threat of popular revolt

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[66] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For an interpretation of this work, see Stephen Humphreys, "Legalizing Lawlessness: On Giorgio Agamben's State of Exception," *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2006).

[67] Guillermo O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina 1966-1973 in Comparative Perspective* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 23, 30-31.

[68] See especially Hector Schamis, "Reconceptualizing Latin American Authoritarianism in the 1970s," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (January 1991). Schamis also argued, however, that the military regimes of the late 1970s represented a "clean break with any previous experiences of military rule" (202), a position which I believe to be overstated.

became conflated with the actually existing possibility of such a revolt.[69] Despite these limitations, O'Donnell offered the most developed theoretical tools for understanding authoritarianism and his work has remained a critical touchstone.

Since the 2000s, scholars have begun to unpack and reconsider many of the fundamental assumptions about legality and legitimacy under authoritarianism. Within Latin America, this work has tended to focus on state violence and its legal implications.[70] Anthony Pereira has made the case in his comparative study of regimes in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile that "while it is easy to regard authoritarian legality with what E.P. Thompson called 'the enormous condescension of posterity,' ignoring these laws—and the people who struggled against them—will do little to enhance our understanding of how authoritarian regimes actually work."[71] The major contribution of this literature—its emphasis on the legalism of repression during periods of dictatorships—is also one of its most pronounced limitations. This focus risks reinforcing the idea that authoritarian legality and legitimacy are limited to the realm of state violence, and thus overlooks all other aspects of these legislative projects. In Argentina, specifically, investigations of these issues in relation to the PRN remain uncommon but are no longer unique. Historian Paula Canelo has offered a convincing interpretation of how the dictatorship attempted to construct legitimacy through the discourses around internal and external threats.[72] Alejandra Schwartz, in 2007, correctly pointed out that the predominant focus on violence has obscured the significance of legal structures for the dictatorship's national reorganization. However, Schwartz went on to argue that "it is impossible to create laws outside of the State of Law, with the powers of the Republic

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[69] O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, esp. Chapter 6 and his reading of the *Cordobazo*.
[70] See, among others, Anthony Pereira, *Political (In)Justice: Authoritarianism and the Rule of Law in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005); Marco Palacio, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
[71] Pereira, *Political (In)Justice*, 199.
[72] Paula Canelo, "La Legitimación Del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional y La Construcción de La Amenaza En El Discurso Militar," *Sociohistórica*, no. 9–10 (2001); Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*.

intervened by a de facto government and with the imposition of laws that damage the fundamental rights of human beings as recognized in both the international sphere and the Argentine Constitution."[73] Following both Weber and Schmitt, this position appears unsustainable. The legality of de facto laws can perhaps be questioned, although if the government enacts a law, it is complicated to claim that the law is against the law.[74] The post facto decision to declare a law illegal (or unconstitutional) does not mean that prior to that point it was also illegal.

More important is the question of the legitimacy. Some have argued that equating legitimacy and normative understandings of justice effectively transposes a moral judgment onto a political question, going so far as to describe this tendency as inappropriate "political moralism."[75] To take seriously the PRN as a government requires evaluating the legitimacy of its rule independent of the moral and ethical implications of that rule. This is, of course, a challenge. Understandably, engaging with the Argentina that the dictatorship hoped to create is distasteful, a key reason why so few serious efforts have been made to this point. Certainly, this project presents certain risks: the risk of apologizing for or excusing that which is inexcusable and unforgiveable; the risk of normalizing practices that must never be allowed to seem normal; the risk that interrogating the regime's politics instead of its terrorism in some way validates its existence as a legitimate political actor. These are real concerns and should not be carelessly dismissed. Yet the alternative—to continue to paint the regime with a broad brush, to refuse to critically examine its policies and their legacies, to persist in relegating the dictatorship to the role of irrational

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[73] Alejandra Schwartz, "Las Leyes de La Dictadura. Normativa de Exclusión" (XI Jornadas Interescuelas, Departamentos de Historia, University of Tucumán, 2007), 2-3.

[74] Jeremy Bentham suggested that what differentiates legal and illegal is only the point of emanation. So long as the law is created by the sovereign power of a given state, it is legal. What happens to that law with the installation of a new sovereign is less clear. See Jeremy Bentham, *Of Laws in General* (London: Athlone Press, 1970).

[75] Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Enzo Rossi and Matt Sleat, "Realism in Normative Political Theory," *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 9, No. 10 (2014).

antagonist—is not especially helpful, either. At stake here is not whether the arrest, detainment, torture, murder, and disappearance of tens of thousands of Argentines happened (it did) nor whether this was state terrorism (it was). However, to reduce those responsible to mere monsters, to deny them their humanity, is a way to make them less frightening, not more so. As Hannah Arendt argued, accusations of inhumanity serve to flatten and simplify a conflict that might otherwise require more difficult and complex interpretations.[76] In this dissertation, I suggest that critically assessing the legality of the regime's political project, and wrestling with the legitimacy of that project, can provide new and valuable perspectives on one of the most complex and difficult periods in Argentine history.

This effort, however, demands a caveat. Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo have suggested that there exist certain moments during which the concepts of "normality" and "abnormality" fail to accurately describe daily reality. They posit that Argentina between 1976 and 1980 was one of these moments, not necessarily because of the state's brutal use of repression against the Argentine citizenry (though that contributed), but because the attempted implementation of a transformative project "from above to below" through the use of state terror effectively split everyday experience into two spheres: the realm of security and the realm of terror.[77] This dissertation seeks to respond to Timothy Mason's commitment to evaluating normality in abnormal circumstances, but also acknowledges the challenges of that goal. Day-to-day obligations—going to work, shopping, dropping children off at school—take on different significances under such conditions, regardless of proximity to specific acts of violence. That authors have highlighted the climate of fear in Argentina after March 24 reinforces this notion, but

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[76] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977). Timothy Mason's study of the Third Reich follows a similar interpretative approach. See Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich*.
[77] Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura military 1976/1983*, 124.

also complicates the argument that most Argentines did not grasp or remained ignorant of the PRN's repressive project.[78] I argue that on the shop floor different actors, often with conflicting interests, negotiated to recover some semblance of normalcy during the dictatorship. This should not be taken to mean that they succeeded in all cases, nor that those instances of "normal" labor relations were identical to similar practices prior to March 24, 1976. Instead, they evidence the continued struggle to enact a version of normalcy within the space of the worksite that has been overlooked and helps explain not only the functioning (and non-functioning) of authoritarian politics but also, specifically, how workers, trade unionists, management, and state actors used previous understandings of normalcy as touchstones for the reconstitution of particular expressions of labor relations.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation consists of five chapters arranged in two parts. Part I examines the dictatorship "from above," emphasizing the institutional organization and practices of the PRN as government. Chapter 1 offers a framework for the dissertation's largest argument about life under authoritarian rule and serves as an introduction to the specific case studies which follow in Part II. In this chapter, I push beyond these interpretations and argue that more than indiscriminate violence or proto-neoliberal economic policies, the Armed Forces aimed to create a new relationship between citizens and government. This redefinition of citizenship would root out, once and for all, the "hecho maldito" of Peronism. Reading the dictatorship through this lens sets the stage for the case studies, which reconsider the lived experience of Argentines as they struggled with and responded to this attempted transformation. Chapter 2 narrows the focus to the Ministry

[78] See, among others, Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*; Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned*; Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*.

of Labor and the regime's labor policy. While the overarching questions that structure the dissertation could be approached from various starting points, I use labor relations in recognition of the particular historical trajectory of organized labor in Argentina during the twentieth century and the centrality of "labor" as a concept to both individual and collective identities in Peronist discourse. This chapter examines the laws, decrees, and policies which the Ministry created from 1976 through 1981, and the extent to which they were enacted and/or enforced. Building on the internal contradictions described in Chapter 1, I argue that the application of these laws was consistently inconsistent—and that the criteria for their enforcement changed on an almost case-by-case basis. This challenges claims that the state of exception after March 24, 1976 meant that the government simply ceased to function. Instead, I suggest that the apparatus of the government continued operating (even increasing its output), but that its lack of legitimacy rendered the hoped-for legality uneven at best.

Part II inverts this approach and reconsiders these questions from below. Each of the three chapters analyzes a specific case study to interrogate how the changes, continuities, and contradictions explored in Part I affected the daily experiences of Argentine workers. Chapter 3 explores the Deutz Argentina tractor factory in Morón, Buenos Aires province. I focus on the years 1979-1983, during which employees led a series of dramatic actions as part of their fight for better wages and to keep the plant from closing. This chapter examines the timeline of these conflicts to demonstrate how explicitly non-activist forms of shop-floor organizing continued under the *Proceso*. Given that these highly visible confrontations produced no apparent repression, I argue that this case indicates the need for a reconsideration of predominant historical narratives around organized labor during the regime. Chapter 4 offers a potential counterpoint: the case of Mercedes Benz Argentina, where repression was exceptionally fierce. Nearly twenty employees were

kidnapped by state security forces in 1976 and 1977, most of whom remain disappeared. The scope of violence at Mercedes Benz Argentina—together with its international profile—have made the factory a common object of inquiry. However, investigations have focused almost exclusively on this violence, largely ignoring what occurred next. This chapter begins the story where those accounts leave off and traces the reconstitution of shop-floor relations at MBA from 1979 through 1982. I suggest that although the character of labor relations undeniably changed from the high-point of factory activism in 1975 and 1976, following the disappearances many practices were reimplemented—even when those practices ran counter to the dictatorship's labor and economic legislation. Chapter 5 shifts the focus away from Greater Buenos Aires and to the interior. This chapter uses the experiences of employees at the state-run telecommunications company, ENTel, in the province of La Pampa, to explore how rural communities experienced the attempted transformation of Argentina's political and economic structures. Drawing on dozens of hours of testimony from ex-*telefónicos*, I emphasize the continuities that stretched across March 24 and question the utility of interpreting that date as a rupture. The disconnect between an acknowledged lack of change and the consistent (implicit) presence of the military regime helps expose important aspects of the relationship(s) between individuals and their government under authoritarianism.

Chapter 1

The *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* in Argentine History

> "Once in place, the modern (nation-) state set about homogenizing its population and the people's deviant, vernacular practices. Nearly everywhere, the state proceeded to fabricate a nation: France set about creating Frenchmen, Italy set about creating Italians."
> – James Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*

Introduction

At approximately 3:10 a.m. on March 24, 1976, having arrested the sitting president, María Estela Martínez de Perón (the widow of Juan Domingo Perón, commonly known as Isabel), the Argentine military occupied the national radio and television broadcasting stations and issued a statement to the country. Communique No. 1 declared that as of that moment, the country was "under the operational control of the Junta Militar," and recommended that all inhabitants follow any and all orders issued by the military, the police, or state security forces. Citizens were also told to avoid actions and attitudes that "might demand the drastic intervention of operational personnel."[1] The coup, long anticipated, had finally occurred, and the Armed Forces now set to work consolidating their power. Rumors swirled that sectors of the General Confederation of

[1] Comunicado Militar No. 1 (March 24, 1976).

Labor (Confederación General de Trabajo, or CGT), the country's largest trade-union confederation, would mobilize in defense of Isabel and in opposition to the new regime, but the morning brought little resistance. Much of the population, including considerable segments of the Peronist-dominated working class, had simply lost faith in the system. The military, meanwhile, wasted no time in visually establishing its control, as residents of Buenos Aires and other major urban centers awoke on March 24 to the sight of heavily-armed troops on street corners and tanks rolling down the avenues. Later that day, as General Jorge Rafael Videla, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, addressed the country he proclaimed that the moment marked "the definitive closure of one historical cycle, and the opening of a new one whose fundamental characteristic will be the task of reorganizing the Nation."[2]

This phrase has since acquired far-reaching resonance as proof of the "refoundational" aspirations of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganization, or PRN). It convincingly stands in for the sum of the Armed Forces' intentions, while sidestepping the potentially thorny questions about what those intentions actually were. However, that question—what the dictatorship intended—demands attention. It is more than simply a historical curiosity, although that alone makes it fascinating. Rather, a deeper understanding of the regime's objectives is critical to making sense of how people lived through the attempted transformation of their daily lives, and what the consequences of this have been into the present. Authoritarian governments are often cast as homogeneous "enemies" of noble reformists and heroic revolutionaries, without sufficient engagement with how those governments functioned and/or failed. Chapter One advances two related arguments that help address this gap. The first sustains

[2] "30 de marzo: Discurso pronunciado al asumir la Primera Magistratura de la República Argentina, exponiendo al Pueblo de la Nación los fundamentos del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional emprendido el 24 de marzo de 1976," *Mensajes Presidenciales, Proceso de Reorganización Nacional 24 de marzo de 1976*, Tomo 1 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Congreso de la Nación, 1977), 7-8.

that, despite the prevalence of monolithic portrayals, the *Proceso* itself was a deeply fractured and incoherent political project. A detailed examination of its inner workings illustrates how both the division of powers between the three branches of the Armed Forces and the competing ideological currents of the Argentine Right frustrated the regime's efforts at coalescence. The second argument is that this incoherence, which manifested itself in the dictatorship's policies, discourse, and actions, helps to situate the PRN within a longer historical arc and in turn challenges exceptionalist readings of the 1976-1983 period. While these years were undeniably the highpoint of political violence and state repression in modern Argentina, the excesses did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Instead, they are part of a broader historical process whose continuities are vital to any engagement with the *Proceso* and its legacies.

Challenging interpretations that locate the PRN outside of its national and regional historical contexts is a key part of taking it seriously as an object of inquiry. Yet the heterogeneity that makes such an inquiry necessary also unavoidably makes it more complicated. Throughout the dissertation, I often refer to "the dictatorship," "the regime," "the PRN," and "the *Proceso*" as if they were singular entities. As the arguments that frame this chapter suggest, this does not reflect my interpretation of the structure of the military-civilian alliance that governed Argentina between 1976 and 1983. This usage does, however, provide an opportunity to confront a central methodological and theoretical problem of this project: abstraction. The fundamental problem of the historian—how to elaborate general arguments and concepts from concrete historical experience—inevitably requires the partial elision of subtleties and contradictions that for reasons of space or flow or sources cannot be included in her narrative. More specifically, any interrogation of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* must confront the labyrinth of paradox and contingency that defined much of its existence. Between March 24, 1976 and December 10, 1983,

eight people exercised, at least temporarily, the powers of the head of state—seven of them between March 1981 and December 1983.[3] At the same time, infighting and competition between the branches of the Armed Forces and between distinct ideological currents on the Right ensured that no one person achieved dominance within the regime. Policy became a battleground for different worldviews and the clashes between factions spilled over into the realms of enactment and enforcement. Thus, to speak of "the dictatorship," or "the regime," or "the *Proceso*" risks reproducing a homogeneity that simply does not describe the object in question.

As others have previously noted, this dilemma lacks an easy solution. To examine the history of the dictatorship requires that at times we describe it as "the dictatorship." However, foregrounding the theoretical implications of this labeling helps make us aware of any negative analytical effects. Though some level of abstraction is inevitable, wherever possible I use these terms with care and specificity. Beginning in Chapter Two, if a particular conjuncture not only revolved around struggles between the state and workers or trade unions, but also involved tensions internal to the regime, I attempt to address those circumstances directly and thus avoid giving the impression that the dictatorship was a singular coherent actor. Chapter One precedes this analysis of labor relations and labor conflict precisely because it offers a more thorough exploration of the inner workings of the PRN and its contradictions. Recognizing the dictatorship as composed of not only disparate political tendencies but also individual human beings—from the ruling Junta Militar down to the civilian administrator working in the Ministry of Labor—reinforces the idea that the state cannot operate independently of the humanity of its disparate elements, even when

[3] From March 24, 1976, the following people acted as head of state: Jorge Rafael Videla (March 29, 1976-March 29, 1981); Roberto Eduardo Viola (March 29, 1981-November 21, 1981); Horacio Tomás Liendo (November 21, 1981-December 11, 1981); Carlos Alberto Lacoste (December 11, 1981-December 22, 1981); Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (December 22, 1981-June 18, 1982); Alfredo Oscar Saint-Jean (June 18, 1982-July 1, 1982); Reynaldo Benito Bignone (July 1, 1982-December 10, 1983); Raúl Alfonsín (December 10, 1983-July 8, 1989).

those elements are in tension with each other.[4] Highlighting and explaining some of the discrepancies that characterized the day-to-day operations of the regime prepares the reader for a more detailed engagement with those operations, first from the perspective of the Ministry of Labor and then from the viewpoint of the shop floor.

This chapter tells the story of how the Armed Forces justified their seizure of power, what they did once in power, and how their attempt to consolidate that power contributed to the splintering of the regime. I then step back to ground this story in the historical developments of the Latin American twentieth century. Section I focuses on legality and the coup, examining the rhetoric of the military on March 24 and in the subsequent days. The justifications for the coup—both legal and popular—are critical for understanding the dictatorship's attempts to maintain legitimacy over the next seven years. Section II analyzes the military in control. I break down the structure of the government itself, including how positions of authority were distributed between the three branches of the Armed Forces and the regime's approach(es) towards the economy and the law. This section also unpacks the tensions within the military and how they played out in specific policy areas. The final section relocates this history within a longer trajectory, and (re)considers Videla's infamous dictum that March 24 closed one cycle of history and opened another. This sets the stage for a more thorough investigation of March 24 as a rupture point over the remainder of the dissertation, from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Chapter One closes with a brief meditation on the historiographical legacies of the *Proceso* and why the prevailing story has dominated for so long.

Part I: Legality and the Coup d'état

[4] Steve Striffler, *In the Shadows of State and Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900-1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

By the time the Armed Forces arrested Isabel Perón early on the morning of March 24 and issued their first statement to the country detailing the new national order, the population had long expected such an announcement. Many greeted the *golpe de estado* with something approaching resignation—this was, after all, the sixth coup since 1930. Since the *Cordobazo* in May 1969, tensions between the conservative establishment (including the business class, the Church, and the military) and an increasingly radicalized left (composed of students, militant labor activists, and a small but visible number of armed organizations) had come to dominate Argentina's political and social landscapes. The spread of political violence had an especially profound effect on the country's collective psyche, as accounts of kidnappings, assassinations, and bombings gave unrest and discontent sensationalized form. However, this was hardly the only rationale for military intervention. The national economy, already floundering amid global crises, was shaken to its core in June 1975 by the reforms imposed by then-Economy Minister Celestino Rodrigo. Simultaneously, as the Vietnam War wound to a close, the main theater of the Cold War shifted to Latin America, and the threat of Marxist infiltration, perceived or otherwise, became a driving factor in the articulation of the so-called "doctrina de seguridad nacional." All of these factors contributed to the justification of the coup and helped establish the legal grounds that the PRN would draw on to explain their actions.

1.1: Threats to the Nation

Perhaps predictably, the new military regime imagined themselves facing threats on all sides. Since 1966, episodes of violence against military and police personnel had risen as armed leftist groups like the Montoneros and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (the People's Revolutionary Army, or ERP) grew in both members and operational capacity. Moments like the kidnapping, trial, and "execution" of former de facto President (and retired General) Pedro

Aramburu in 1970, and the assassination of conservative trade unionist José Ignacio Rucci in September 1973 captured the country's collective imagination and left lasting psychological scars.[5] Long before the 1976 coup that installed the PRN, the Armed Forces responded to these attacks as if they were declarations of war by a hostile power—albeit, a domestic one. Following Perón's return from exile and subsequent election as president in 1973, the military stepped back and allowed the situation to play out. However, the memory of Che Guevara roaming the mountains of Bolivia in 1967 together with the increased visibility of the Montoneros and the ERP in the early 1970s ensured that their hands-off approach would not last. By 1974, the military had begun tacitly supporting the far-right death squads that operated across the country, targeting not only those suspected of participating in "guerrillismo," but also leftist labor leaders, activists, and students.[6] During this period "subversion" referred first and foremost to armed leftist organizations but this definition blurred into other categories that "threatened" the established order.[7] Even as the Armed Forces took increasingly direct and brutal steps throughout 1975 to stamp out "subversion," they came to believe that "winning the war" could only be accomplished without the limitations imposed by a civilian government. "Subversion" thus became a powerful driver of the military takeover.

The perceived need for military intervention responded to more than just the increasingly visible political violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s. From 1963 through 1973, Argentina experienced a decade of sustained economic growth—a golden era within a longer golder era of

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[5] See Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority*.

[6] The most infamous of these death squads was the Alianza Argentina Anticomunista, or AAA, organized and overseen by Minister of Social Welfare José López Rega.

[7] The extent of this threat remains debatable. Famously, Guillermo O'Donnell suggested that the rise of so-called "bureaucratic-authoritarian" regimes in the 1960s and 1970s reflected a perceived threat related to the defeat of capitalism by leftist groups, closely tied to a fundamental crisis of legitimacy. However, the ability of armed leftist movements to capture the state—as opposed to conservative fears of that possibility—is unclear and seems to lie beyond the scope of O'Donnell's argument. See O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*.

postwar prosperity.[8] Newly-elected to a third term, Perón envisioned a reformist economic platform that would resurrect the alliance between industrialists and workers which had been his base during the first Peronist period. He even succeeded in obtaining initial buy-in from capital and organized labor through his *Pacto Social* that aimed to both contain inflation and increase social harmony. However, the ripple effects from the global economic crises of the early 1970s, especially the 1973 oil crisis, undermined these efforts and brought sharp increases in inflation together with economic instability to Argentina.[9] Perón's death less than a year later effectively ended the possibility of long-term compromise between capital and labor. Under Isabel, the economy continued to worsen, and the unions pushed aggressively for higher wages to combat the rapid rises in cost-of-living. This drove inflation higher, and in June 1975 new Minister of Economy Celestino Rodrigo enacted a set of radical measures to correct this instability, including the drastic devaluation of the peso and the freeing of all prices from government controls. The *Rodrigazo*, as it came to be known, provoked skyrocketing costs and destroyed people's life savings, introducing previously unknown levels of precarity. Rodrigo, one of six men to hold the post of Economy Minister during the twenty months from Perón's death until the March 24 coup, was dismissed days later. His successors vainly attempted to bring order to the situation, but by the start of 1976 even they acknowledged that they could offer patchwork remedies, at best. The military, placing the blame for this chaos firmly at the feet of the Peronists, saw themselves as the only institution capable of restoring order.

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[8] Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto: Un siglo de políticas económicas argentinas*, 2nd. ed. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2010), 304-305.

[9] Gerchunoff and Llach have argued that then-Economy Minister José Ber Gelbard's strategies were actually working until the effects of the oil crisis hit. They wryly note that this marked the first time that Argentina had to import inflation as opposed to producing it domestically. 345-346.

A third factor contributing to the initial justification for the coup came out of the global political conditions of the mid-1970s. After the U.S. defeat in Vietnam and with Cuba attempting to foment revolution across Latin America during the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, the Cold War became increasingly hot throughout the region. Although the United States' played a limited role in supporting the PRN, especially relative to its involvement in neighboring Chile, the broader Cold War context undeniably influenced the Armed Forces' decision to seize power.[10] Argentina's military willingly adopted the rhetoric of the Cold War which presented them as defenders of freedom and God against Communist totalitarianism, and allowed them to draw rigid inclusion/exclusion binaries to distinguish "us" from "them." The so-called "national security doctrine," though never an official doctrine, emphasized the need to control the spread of Marxism and enforce regional security at all costs. Moreover, as Greg Grandin has argued for the case of Guatemala, the reactionary violence carried out against civilians and social movements by the state's security forces aimed at breaking the ties between the individual and the collective, which in Argentina meant the unmaking (or at the very least the circumscription and redefinition) of Peronism.[11] The Cold War in Argentina took on its own dimensions separate from the divisions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., instead transmuting historical domestic (and regional) conflict through a more general Cold War discourse. All of these perceived threats—subversion, economic turmoil, and the specter of Communism—overlapped at different points and in different ways. They should therefore not be considered in isolation from one another, but rather as a set of interrelated circumstances that underpinned the Armed Forces rhetoric for taking power in 1976.

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[10] This is obviously not to say that the US was uninvolved, much less that the US opposed the military coup. As many have noted, the US tacitly supported the Armed Forces and their excesses for several years, and again after the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Moreover, many members of the Argentine military received training in the United States and/or through the School of the Americas in the 1960s.

[11] Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

These obstacles—subversion, economic decline, Communism—threatened not only day-to-day stability, but also the pillars of Argentina's traditional power structures. If allowed to run amok, they might topple the Church, capitalism, patriotism, even the family itself. Especially for the *duros* (hardliners) within the Armed Forces, modernization had gone too far, and now the decadence of "the West" put the soul of the nation at risk. The "three Jews"—Marx, Freud, and Einstein—were held up as proof of a broader conspiracy to undermine the Euro-Christian values that sustained conservatism and order, and simultaneously as evidence of the ongoing collapse of that order.[12] The West—or at least the West of liberation, progressivism, and, to some extent, science and innovation—was the enemy.

Yet, the military also unequivocally described its mission as a defense of the West. The dictatorship held up the Catholic Church, the nuclear family, the nation-state, and even capitalism as causes to rally around.[13] While "the West" unmistakably underpinned all of these ideas, they nevertheless needed saving from the existential threats posed by the "other West." This was gendered in ways that helped the regime's goals resonate at institutional and individual levels. The Armed Forces represented masculine virtue, shielding the nation from subversion in the same way that the loyal Argentine (male) citizen would protect his family from the pernicious influences of the "bad West"—drugs, rock and roll, disrespect, and of course, Marxism. The feminized *Patria* served as both a space for masculine action (the execution of violence) and a vulnerable ideal that required defense. The union of these two—military/male and *Patria*/female—would produce

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[12] The idea behind this was, as related to Jacobo Timmerman during his imprisonment, that Marx had attempted to destroy the Christian idea of society; Freud had attempted to destroy the Christian idea of family; and Einstein had attempted to destroy the Christian idea of space and time. See Jacobo Timmerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1981).

[13] See, among many examples, "Propósito y objetivos básicos del proceso de reorganización nacional," in *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, Documentos Básicos* (Buenos Aires, 1976), which highlights the restoration of order, morality, Christian values, and Argentina's position within the Western and Christian world order.

civilization and its corollary, loyal, patriotic, Christian families.[14] This paradoxical construction is present in the founding documents of the PRN and rapidly became a central, if unspoken, concern for the upper echelons of the regime. Where was the line between the "good modernization" that would restore Argentina to its rightful place as leader of the region, and the "bad modernity" that would destroy the very social fabric which the *Proceso* claimed to defend? How much progress—or how much development—was just enough?

1.2: The State of Exception

To correct this perceived imbalance and return Argentina to its proper path, the military and its civilian allies pursued unfettered control over the state apparatus to push a dramatic restructuring of the nation's social, political, economic, and even cultural spheres. The *estado de sitio* (state of exception) gave them access to that power.[15] Article 23 of the Argentine Constitution specifies that "[i]n the event of domestic disorder or foreign attack endangering the enforcement of the Constitution…the province or territory which is in turmoil shall be declared in a state of siege and the constitutional guarantees shall be suspended therein."[16] The same article continues by stating that during periods of exception the President cannot unilaterally "pronounce judgment" or "apply penalties," but rather his power will be limited to transferring people from one place within the nation to another (if those persons prefer not to leave the country). Finally, Article 36 holds that "[t]his Constitution shall rule even when its observance is interrupted by acts of force against the institutional order and democratic system. These acts shall be irreparably null."[17] The tensions between these ideas, all from the original 1853 Constitution, raise questions about the

[14] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 78. See also Milanesio, "Sex and Democracy," 94.
[15] This concept is explained more fully below. It is important to note that its translations include "state of exception"; "state of siege"; and "state of emergency." I largely use the first term because of its resonance with specific political analyses, following particularly the work of Giorgio Agamben. See Agamben, *State of Exception*.
[16] Article 23, Argentine Constitution
[17] Article 36, Argentine Constitution

relationship between the normal functioning of the law and the legitimate exercise of authority. Not unlike the infamous Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, Article 23 of the Argentine Constitution foresaw the likelihood (or perhaps even inevitability) of its own suspension and sought to establish rules that would delimit that suspension. Yet the question of what acts taken during the state of exception are "valid" remains murky, at best. That the executive (or even the Armed Forces) might legally invoke Article 23, suspending constitutional law, nominally to protect the legitimacy of the constitutional order leaves the implications of a de facto government's laws and policies in a juridical grey area.

A concrete historical example can partially illuminate this uncertainty. Before 1976, the government had declared dozens of states of exception. Indeed, the first occurred in 1854, one year after the enactment of the Constitution.[18] The most recent instance was less than eighteen months earlier. On November 6, 1974 President Isabel Perón declared an *estado de sitio* in response to civil unrest and political violence. The immediate cause was the assassination of the Chief of the Policia Federal, Alberto Villar, by leftist guerrillas, but more generally her decision responded to the perception that the state had lost its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Whether this accurately reflected the conditions of the early 1970s, the military believed that Isabel's government could not regain control of the situation.[19] The state of exception declared on November 6 would remain in effect for the remainder of her presidency, meaning that over the final sixteen months and eighteen days of the "constitutional" Peronist government, the

[18] "El estado de sitio en la Argentina," *Río Negro* (June 23, 2018). From 1853 to 2001, there were 52 invocations of the state of exceptions. Accessed on January 22, 2019. Available at https://www.rionegro.com.ar/sociedad/el-estado-de-sitio-en-la-argentina-HY5265999.

[19] This perception that the state had "lost control" of its most basic function was used on the Right to argue for the necessity of more direct military intervention, up to and including a coup. However, the rise in violence perpetrated by leftists was far outstripped by violence carried out by right-wing death squads, often with the tacit or open support of elements of the Peronist government. Thus, if we take seriously the idea that the state had lost control over the legitimate exercise of violence, it is more likely that they surrendered it to paramilitary and extra-legal organizations on the Right than that groups on the Left took it by force.

Constitution was partially suspended. This suspension allowed for severe infringements on civil liberties and led to a massive spike in arrests and imprisonments, many of which occurred outside of the "normal" channels of the criminal justice system.[20] The Armed Forces enjoyed increased power and reduced oversight for domestic operations, while Congress suffered a corresponding loss of authority, as the executive branch and the military appropriated its legislative duties. Although the legitimacy of these measures is debatable (i.e. whether they reflected the will of the governed), their legality has rarely been questioned.[21] An assumption that laws and decrees from the 1974-1976 period were legal because Isabel came to the presidency constitutionally remains prevalent, though given that constitutional order was interrupted for more than eighty percent of her term, that assumption perhaps demands further evaluation.

Significantly, the continuation of the state of exception through March 24, 1976 meant that the Armed Forces, on taking power, did not need to invoke Article 23. Instead, they simply continued the existing *estado de sitio*, and authorized to themselves the faculties of the government via a series of Actas. The state of exception was maintained until October 1983 and intensified via the consolidation of authority in the Junta Militar, with one consequence being the modification of part of Article 23 of the Constitution. This is important to recognize given the widespread assumption that the March 24 coup interrupted the constitutional order.[22] The final sentence of Article 23 limits Executive powers to the detention and transportation of people within the national territory during the state of exception, but it also seemingly provides those who are arrested with

[20] According to CONADEP's 1984 report, between November 6, 1974 and March 24, 1976, some 3,443 people were imprisoned. See CONADEP, *Nunca Más* (Buenos Aires, 1984), 404.
[21] Some research has suggested that Argentines were only too happy to surrender their civil liberties for increased security in the mid-1970s. See Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority*.
[22] See, among many others, Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*, 23.

the option of leaving the country.[23] However, per the March 24 "Acta para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional" and Law 21,275, enacted shortly thereafter, the right to leave the country established in Article 23 was suspended, in the name of national security.[24] Thus, the military modified via legislation the very article of the Constitution from which they derived their justification for wielding power, a power which in turn depended on the suspension of the normal functioning of the constitutional order—all nominally in defense of national sovereignty as set forth in the Constitution. This defense of the Constitution—a centerpiece of the regime's public rhetoric after March 24—was clearly intended to invest the Junta's legalism with legitimacy, though as the previous example demonstrates, it was easy for these efforts to descend into confusion and contradiction. That the new government itself never formally declared an *estado de sitio* further muddies the legality and legitimacy of its actions as compared to those of the previous administration.

1.3: Objectives of the PRN

The somewhat opaque legal foundation for the dictatorship's legitimacy did not prevent the regime from outlining an ambitious list of objectives. Though deep divisions within the Armed Forces would surface in the days after the coup, the different factions remained united in the pursuit of a single goal: the total elimination of the "subversive" threat from the national territory. Historian Paula Canelo argues that this mission was, in fact, the only significant rallying point for the disparate elements of the military—the one thing on which they could all agree.[25] Further, it was one of few campaigns that enjoyed something approximating public support. While sharp

[23] Article 23, Argentine Constitution. The sentence itself reads: "In such case, his [the President's] power shall be limited, with respect to persons, to their arrest or transfer from one place of the Nation to another, should they not prefer to leave the Argentine territory."
[24] See "Acta para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional" (March 24, 1976); Law 21,275 (April 2, 1976). This would undergo several additional modifications over the next eighteen months before the power to deny the option to leave the country was effectively ceded to the discretion of the President.
[25] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*.

differences over the regime's political, economic, and even social policies meant that Argentines were rarely unified around a specific project, for considerable sectors of the country's middle class the memories of the political violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s made them more willing to grant the security forces considerable leeway in their push to defeat armed leftist guerrillas.[26] The "war on subversion" was especially relevant as an idea, rather than in its practical, strategic execution. While the military was undoubtedly sincere in its desire to eradicate groups like the ERP and the Montoneros, in many ways they were more useful as formless enemies that could be invoked both to unite the dictatorship and justify excessive repression to the public.

Though the defeat of "subversion" was perhaps the only concrete objective shared by the different factions of the Armed Forces, the regime articulated a set of more abstract goals that served as convenient talking points, in large part because of their discursive malleability. The Acta that established the "Purpose and Basic Objectives" of the PRN on March 24 described a series of nine items. They included the consolidation of political sovereignty through "revitalized constitutional institutions"; the protection of Christian morals and values, national tradition, and the dignity of the Argentine being; protection of national security and the elimination of subversion; full validation of juridical and social orders; achievement of a socio-economic situation that ensures the "full realization of the Argentine man," where the State maintains control of security and development while supporting private, national, and foreign investment; obtainment of general welfare through fruitful work with equal opportunity and an appropriate sense of social justice; a harmonious relationship between the State, capital, and labor with strong organizational structures, adjusted to their specific ends; construction of an educational system in accordance with the needs of the country that promotes the values and aspirations of the Argentine

[26] See, among others, Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*; Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*; Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority*.

being; and international standing within the Western and Christian world that maintained Argentina's capacity for self-determination.[27] These aims were the product of discussions between the heads of the three branches of the Armed Forces, and provided a template for policy decisions and enforcement. However, though government officials frequently invoked them in public comments and formal declarations, they remained abstract, and as time passed the dictatorship's actions would increasingly conflict with their ambitious rhetorical platform.

Meanwhile, a series of more concrete goals became battlegrounds for the military's different ideological currents. With the country still reeling from the *Rodrigazo* and the broader international financial crises of the mid-1970s, the PRN confronted entrenched economic turmoil. The collapse of the Keynesian consensus at the end of the 1960s reflected growing doubts about the role of the state in managing the economy, which some thinkers held responsible for rising inflation around the world. More broadly, as Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach have argued, this moment saw a shift in perspective related to national and international economies, away from a focus on production (a more Keynesian model) and towards an emphasis on money (in line with modern liberalism).[28] In Argentina, however, this new approach did not necessarily sway everyone. Though members of the rural oligarchy and financial elite embraced the shift, considerable sectors of the Armed Forces remained committed to developmentalism and interventionism. The *Proceso* understood that a central pillar of their mandate was the stabilization of the national economy, and there existed broad consensus about the need for action. Despite this agreement, on the list of objectives promulgated on March 24 the economy does not appear until item five, and even then its mention is accompanied by language emphasizing continued State control of key, if diffuse, areas like security and development. The foundational texts of the

[27] "Acta fijando el propósito y objetivos básicos del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional," *Documentos Básicos*, 7-8.
[28] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 355.

dictatorship thus help illustrate that even shared recognition of the problem did not necessarily translate to a single coherent plan of action.

The regime faced similar challenges on other fronts, as well. Their stated goal of consolidating political sovereignty and protecting juridical and social orders hinted at a possible vision for the future of Argentina. Many within the military aspired to construct a new social consensus in which the political system, its constitutional institutions having been "revitalized," would be able to carry on the work begun by the dictatorship and end the cycle of populist democracies and de facto governments once and for all.[29] While the third Peronist administration gave little cause for hope in this regard, sectors of the Armed Forces saw their role after 1976 as facilitating the emergence of "authentic" democracy, and they were prepared to remain in power as long as necessary to realize this remaking. As the oft-quoted (albeit recycled) saying went, the *Proceso* had "objectives, not timelines."[30] This attitude, however, would prove problematic as the question of when to launch the political reopening began to circulate. Since 1930, none of the military's experiences with reintroducing representational politics had yielded the desired results. Most recently, the collapse of the *Revolución Argentina* and the relegitimization of Peronism had, after an initial moment of promise, plunged the country deeper into chaos and further undermined the public faith in government.[31] If many within the PRN thought that an eventual return to democracy was a worthy aim, the "acceptable" conditions for such a transition remained unclear.

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[29] Quiroga, *El tiempo del "Proceso,"* 79.

[30] Videla and other officials of the PRN used this phrase, or some variant thereof, on numerous occasions. Indeed, the name they gave their political project, "Process of National Reorganization," reinforced their processual understanding of the task at hand. Though most often associated with the 1976-1983 dictatorship, perhaps in part because of this resonance, the phrase evidently circulated during the 1966-1973 dictatorship that began with the de facto presidency of Juan Carlos Onganía. See Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de ilusión y el desencanto*, 302.

[31] For more on popular responses to government after the 1973-1976 period, see O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*. For a challenge to O'Donnell's interpretation, see Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority*.

Inextricable from economic reform and political renovation was another critical goal that intersected with several of the items listed as "Basic Objectives": the remaking of Argentina's labor relations. Since 1946, the country's traditional institutions of power—the Church, the rural elite, and much of the military—had looked on Peronism with suspicion and hostility. Perón's platform during his first two presidential terms focused on expanding the parameters of citizenship to include millions of previously marginalized people. A great majority of these people belonged to the urban working class that had sprung up during the first half of the twentieth century, concentrated in Greater Buenos Aires and the industrial corridor from Rosario and Santa Fe to Córdoba. Peronism celebrated their identities as workers by acknowledging and reaffirming their dignity and status, imbricating political and social subjectivities with praxes of labor.[32] Over the next three decades, this connection between the shop floor and Peronist ideology endured despite Perón's long exile and competition among trade union leaders to assume control of the movement in his absence. The *sindicatos* (trade unions), consolidated to a greater or lesser extent under the umbrella of the *Confederación General de Trabajo* (General Confederation of Labor, or CGT), functioned as an alternative pole of authority during Peronism's proscription and sustained the symbolic weight of the Peronist worker. The PRN's desired "full realization of the Argentine man" implicitly referenced the long-standing conservative dream of undoing the "hecho maldito" of Peronism and severing the ties between politics and work. For the dictatorship, transforming the capital-labor dynamic was a necessary precursor to redefining the national subject.

Part II: The Military in Power

[32] James, *Resistance and Integration*, esp. Chapter 1.

Understanding the process through which the *Proceso* defined, pursued, and attempted to achieve these goals requires a more comprehensive engagement with its inner workings and the ways that the branches of the military divided power. This section examines these concerns in more detail, focusing on the PRN's internal organization; the war against subversion; Martínez de Hoz's economic strategies; and the regime's overhaul of key legal institutions. Each of these features helps explain, in part, the successes and failures of national reorganization. Moreover, this perspective contributes to a more serious engagement with the dictatorship as a governance project, rather than simply as an engine of indiscriminate violence. The final part of Section II unpacks the tensions within the Armed Forces, many of which directly related to debates over how to resolve these issues. While the military's factionalism originated in the early twentieth century, the manifestations of these discrepancies after 1976 would have profound consequences on their efforts to remake the country.

2.1: Organization of the Military State

Having spent more than a year laying the discursive and political groundwork for the *golpe*, the leaders of the Armed Forces wasted no time asserting their authority in the aftermath of the coup. The existing state of exception facilitated the transition from democracy to authoritarianism, and the military—which had already wielded considerable power prior to March 24—found itself able to adapt key aspects of the pre-coup structure to its new agenda. For example, on October 28, 1975 the "Directiva del Comandante General del Ejército 404/75" divided the country into five military "zonas" and assigned them to the five corps of the Army. This division remained in place after the *golpe*, though modifications allowed for the Navy and Air Force to be given control over

certain areas and regions within each zone.[33] Within this scheme, each branch of the Armed Forces maintained its autonomy, though they frequently formed "interforce agreements" meant to preclude (or resolve) jurisdictional disputes, and to permit mutual operational support when needed.[34] On the one hand, this division promoted the spread of the "lucha antisubversiva" across Argentina. As many as 340 clandestine detention centers (*centros clandestinos de detención*, or CCDs) functioned between 1976 and 1983, run by different elements of the security forces. The intelligence services of each branch dispatched agents throughout the country, collecting information for their respective high commands, which could be shared between the forces. On the other hand, the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy, and Air Force were, nominally, equal within the military hierarchy, which meant that each operated without centralized oversight. Operations were often run without the knowledge or approval of local commanders, and despite the existence of a system for addressing jurisdictional disputes, conflicts arose frequently. Even the broad consensus around the war against subversion was not immune from tensions related to control over a given area.

However, the jurisdictional disagreements resulting from the creation of the "zonas de actuación" were not the most serious internal obstacle facing the PRN. More problematic was the tripartite repartition of government positions to officers of the three branches of the Armed Forces. The ruling Junta consisted of the three Commanders-in-Chief: Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla, of the Army; Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, of the Navy; and Brigadier General Orlando Ramón Agosti, of the Air Force. The idea was to avoid the failures of previous military

[33] The commanders of the five *zonas*, however, were from the Army. Initially, they were: General Guillermo Suárez Mason (Zona 1); General Ramón Genaro Díaz Bessone (Zona 2); General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez (Zona 3); General José Montes (Zona 4); and General Abel Teodoro Catuzzi (Zona 5).
[34] Dolores San Julián, "El plan represivo de la Marina argentina y la infiltración en el grupo fundador de Madres de Plaza de Mayo (1977)," *Avances del Cesor*, Vol. 14, No. 16 (2017).

regimes that had invested a single person, whether that be Pedro Aramburu in 1955 or Juan Carlos Onganía in 1966, with the full power of the State. These three men shared responsibility for final decisions on all matters of significance, with the assumption that at least two of them would have to agree. This structure was reproduced across all levels of the government. The coup on March 24 not only deposed the President but removed members of cabinet, provincial governors, heads of state-run companies, and, in many cases, secretaries general of public-sector unions. These posts needed to be filled and following the example of the division of power established by the Junta, the military attempted to distribute them between the Army, Navy, and Air Force such that each service received a roughly equal number of positions of importance.[35]

Historian Paula Canelo has described this process as the "colonization" of the state apparatus, noting how the three branches of the Armed Forces extended into governmental positions at various levels and "occupied" those territories as a way to gain and keep power for their specific area.[36] And, like other examples of colonization, the competition between colonial powers and the desire to acquire more or better "territories" inevitably led to confrontations. That the territories in this case were often sinecures, and occasionally positions of some actual authority, as opposed to land and material resources did not necessarily matter.[37] In practice, this institutional design created conflicts between the three branches of the Armed Forces, as well as between different ideological currents across the branches, that undermined the dictatorship's attempted national reorganization.[38] Though the military authorities of the *Proceso* had witnessed the failure of first the *Revolucón Libertadora* (1955-1958) and then the *Revolución Argentina* (1966-1973),

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[35] We will return to this structure and its consequences later in the chapter. For a more thorough engagement with its origins and implications, see Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*.
[36] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 219.
[37] Of course, in many cases the positions themselves included the oversight (and therefore control) of physical territory and material resources, as in the distribution of the provincial governorships or control over prominent cities.
[38] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 35.

and doubtless hoped that their ambitious agenda could avoid a similar fate, their strategy contained within it the seeds of its own demise.

2.2: The "War Against Subversion"

There were, however, "triumphs" along the way that initially masked the problems inherent to this structure. Undoubtedly, the PRN's greatest victory was in the war against subversion—a victory whose roots extended back at least thirteen months to the beginning of "Operativo Independencia" (Operation Independence) in February 1975. Following the declaration of the state of exception, with restrictions on domestic operations largely suspended, the military moved quickly to crush the armed leftist organizations across the country. Under pressure from the Armed Forces over guerrilla activity in the mountains of Tucumán, then-President Isabel Perón signed Decree No. 261/75, the first of what became known as the "decrees of annihilation."[39] The new law effectively gave the Army free rein to "neutralize or annihilate" subversive elements in the province of Tucumán. Over the next ten months, security forces aggressively pursued their nominal target, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army, or ERP), while simultaneously expanding their net to include politicians, union activists, students, leftist militants, and even some religious leaders. Operation Independence served as a trial run for numerous tactics that became central features of post-1976 repression. These included kidnappings and torture, the establishment of clandestine detention centers, and the practice of "disappearing" people. The military showed that these strategies could be deployed effectively not only against armed opponents, but to control civilian populations more generally. Indeed, Operation Independence did not formally end until September 1977, though by that point the number of armed guerrillas acting in Tucumán had long been negligible. Tucumán became the site of the first

[39] María Seoane and Vicente Muleiro, *El dictador* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001).

triumph of the PRN (albeit largely prior to March 24, 1976) as well as the laboratory where repressive plans were tested and modified before their national deployment after the coup.

The military's operations in Tucumán and elsewhere show that the March 24 *golpe* did not introduce state terror to Argentina. Rather, the new regime quickly set about expanding and institutionalizing the push to eliminate "subversion." Repression spread rapidly from those known to be directly involved with leftist militants, to those suspected of sympathizing with its members, to those espousing vaguely leftist or otherwise undesirable ideas. This progression occurred within months of the coup, in large part because military's victory over the guerrillas was almost immediate. Even at the height of their operational capacity, the ERP and the Montoneros (by far the two largest guerrilla organizations in Argentina) had perhaps 8,000 active participants between them—a relatively small force when compared to the hundreds of thousands of active-duty soldiers across the Armed Forces.[40] By mid-1976, most of the ERP and the Montoneros had been detained, killed, or forced into exile, a resounding triumph that ultimately proved costly to the dictatorship. Having accomplished one of its primary aims in such short order, the pressure to successfully resolve the country's other pressing issues mounted considerably.[41] Simultaneously, the effective completion of the "lucha contra la subversión" meant that the one unifying goal for the regime's disparate ideological currents largely disappeared.[42] Continuing the fight became a necessity on both levels: not only to justify the continued presence of the military in power but also to create common ground that could preempt disagreement. The targets of this expanded violence were no

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[40] This number comes from Peter Waldmann, "Anomia social y violencia," in *Argentina, hoy* ed. Alain Rouquié (Mexico D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982) 212. Even this figure, which Waldmann admitted as an "estimate," is likely too high. For example, Prudencio García estimated the maximum combined strength of the ERP and the Montoneros between 1,000 and 3,000 soldiers. See Prudencio García, *El drama de la autonomía militar. Argentina bajo las juntas militares* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1995).
[41] See Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*; Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de ilusión y el desencanto*.
[42] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 13.

longer armed leftists; instead, they were now students, religious leaders, trade-union officials, shop-floor activists, politicians, academics, and mothers and fathers of the disappeared.

The move from targeting "guerrillas" to targeting broad sectors of the citizenry provoked a powerful response in the country's collective psyche. Reports of shoot-outs with subversives, glimpses of disappearances, and whispered rumors of terrible places created an atmosphere of terror. Yet the relationship between individual experiences of repression and the broader affective consequences of this approach is far from linear. As Diana Taylor has argued, in many cases the dictatorship deliberately cultivated these conditions through the performance of either public acts of violence or hidden acts of torture.[43] Taylor is primarily concerned with the imbrication of authoritarianism, gender, and nation, but I suggest that recognizing the performative nature of this repression also reinforces the political stakes of the "war against subversion," namely its potential to reaffirm the regime's legitimacy. Visibilizing state violence reminded the population of the regime's capacity and need to commit such violence.

The expansion of the definition of "subversion" after 1976 had profound and often fatal consequences for thousands of people, even as it highlighted the tensions between rhetoric and action. The reinstatement of capital punishment (Law 21,338) captured popular imaginations and continue to reverberate in contemporary narratives about the repressive nature of the PRN—despite the fact that the state never applied the death sentence.[44] Even without a single concrete case, the law reaffirmed the government's power over life and death, magnifying the specter of the disciplinary state in the popular imaginary. Between 1976 and 1978, the "lucha contra la

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[43] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 149.

[44] The only instance in which a judge applied the death penalty was in a case from 1981, in which three men convicted of murder were sentenced to death by Judge Antonio Merguin of San Isidro. The punishment was later overturned by the appellate court in La Plata, and the convicted were instead sentenced to life without parole. See Julio Serra, *Fusilados: Historia de condenados a muerte en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2008).

subversión" remained one of the country's most significant discursive spaces, not because there necessarily existed a real struggle between the Armed Forces and leftist guerrillas, but rather because this language allowed the military to maintain its authority through the performance of repression, even as it confronted growing difficulties on nearly every other front.

2.3: The Economy

Among the regime's most intractable problems was the continuing decline of the national economy, as inflation, stagnating wages, and instability racked the country. Days after the coup, the Junta Militar named José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz as Minister of Economy and tasked him with returning the country to what they saw as its rightful place as the leader of Latin America. The scion of one of Argentina's oldest and wealthiest families, Martínez de Hoz embodied patrician privilege.[45] Simultaneously a member of the rural oligarchy, the industrial elite, and the emerging class of international financiers, the new Economy Minister had been educated at Cambridge and counted the Rockefeller family among his close personal friends. He entered politics during the *Revolución Libertadora*, serving as Minister of Economy for the Province of Salta, and briefly held the same title at the national level in 1963 under de facto President José María Guido. Over the next decade, Martínez de Hoz expanded his own personal fortune in private industry, while maintaining maintained close ties to the Armed Forces. He continued to espouse an aggressively laissez-faire perspective, and even before joining the PRN, he showed little compunction about using the repressive capacity of the state to reinforce the domination of capital over labor. From the mid-1960s, Martínez de Hoz, owned Acindar, one of the largest steel manufacturers in the country. During a prolonged labor strike in 1975, in concert with state security

[45] His great-grandfather, Narciso Martínez de Hoz, had founded the earliest instantiation of the arch-conservative *Sociedad Rural Argentina* (an organization for the rural oligarchic elite) in the first half of the nineteenth century. His father, also José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, served as the head of the *Sociedad Rural* in the 1950s. Martínez de Hoz (the son) also married into the Bullrich family, another of Argentina's oldest and most established clans.

forces, Martínez de Hoz oversaw a wave of violence against Acindar workers that left dozens dead or disappeared and resulted in the arrest of more than 150 people.[46] Less than twelve months later, on March 29, 1976, he assumed the position of Minister of Economy for the *Proceso*.

On April 2, Martínez de Hoz addressed the nation for the first time and laid out the framework of his plan to rescue the Argentine economy. His so-called *Programa de recuperación, saneamiento y expansión de la economía argentina* ("Program for the Recovery, Improvement and Expansion of the Argentine Economy") quickly became known as the "Plan Martínez de Hoz." He outlined three basic objectives, in order of descending importance: the restructuring of the financial sector as a base for modernization and the expansion of the country's productive sector; increasing the country's growth rate; and achieving a "reasonable" distribution of income to maintain (in theory) the value of salaries at an adequate level.[47] Initially, the plan seemed to bear fruit, as severe wage controls in 1976 limited inflation over the first months of the dictatorship. Martínez de Hoz's economic team also aggressively pursued the implementation of wide-ranging economic reforms that substantially changed how Argentina's capital markets functioned, opening the door to rampant speculation.[48] However, these efforts quickly ran into problems, as inflation began to creep above 7% per month by early 1977, followed by a brief but violent recession from June 1977 to June 1978 that reduced national production by approximately 5%.[49] Martínez de Hoz simultaneously promoted a widespread *apertura* (opening) that he claimed would integrate Argentina more fully into the global marketplace by reducing protective tariffs and allowing the importation of manufactured goods. Despite near-unwavering support from Videla and the

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[46] The conflict at Acindar in Villa Constitución was one of the most violent and infamous moments of state repression in the years prior to the PRN. See Victoria Basualdo and Federico Lorenz, "Los trabajadores industriales argentinos en la primera mitad de la década de los 70: Propuestas para una agenda de investigación a partir del análisis comparativo de casos," *páginas*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (2012).
[47] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 357.
[48] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 358-359.
[49] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 362.

authoritarian structures of the PRN, the Plan Martínez de Hoz adopted a piecemeal approach to wage controls and market liberalization that was largely improvised and failed to stabilize the national economy. While the goals described by the Economy Minister on April 2, 1976 sounded reasonable, the policies themselves proved an eclectic, and even erratic, combination of contradictions and reversals.

The first months of Martínez de Hoz's tenure witnessed a 33% decline in real wages, as the new regime struggled to confront inflation. Government salary controls enabled the reduction of circulating money, but by the end of 1978 the Ministry felt that more drastic measures were necessary. Coming out of recession, Martínez de Hoz eased some of the wage controls and introduced a new tactic: the *tablita* ("little table"), which pegged the peso to the US dollar and set out conditions for a series of controlled devaluations every eight months that would, in theory, prevent inflation from spiraling. However, the combination of the *tablita*, the 1977 economic reforms, and Martínez de Hoz's broader efforts to rationalize the state sector and eliminate protective tariffs created a situation in which the cost-of-living continued to rise dramatically throughout 1979 and 1980.[50] The consequences of several years of irresponsible and unregulated speculation became clear as the banking system suffered a sharp collapse in 1980, with the Banco Central having to assume control over more than sixty other institutions unable to pay off the debts that they had accrued. Confidence in the Plan Martínez de Hoz, already limited, rapidly eroded following the collapse. This undermined not only the financial stability of individuals and families, but also of the industrial sector, whose outlook by the end of 1980 was nothing short of "apocalyptic."[51] One month prior to his departure, an unplanned devaluation of 10% effectively

[50] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 363-366. The authors relate the common joke that Argentina became so expensive over the final years of the decade that the poor went on vacation to Uruguay; the middle classes to Brazil; and only the rich could afford to stay in Argentina for their holidays. (366).
[51] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 367.

ended Martínez de Hoz's *tablita*. Although he was one of only two Ministers to remain for the length of Videla's de facto presidency, Martínez de Hoz's policies failed to accomplish the goals laid out on April 2, 1976. However, his strategies continue to impact Argentina's economy and, in some ways, presaged the era of "neoliberalism" under Carlos Menem in the 1990s.

2.4: The Law

Alongside its war against "subversion" and the attempted economic overhaul, the *Proceso* intervened aggressively in the legal sphere. On March 24, the Armed Forces dissolved Congress, removing the sitting *diputados* (deputies) and senators. The recent Peronist administration's failures precluded any possible trust between the military and the political apparatus, with the former deciding that they alone could guide the nation through its next phase. For the regime, the elimination of Congress was necessary, but it left the new government without a functional legislative body. Thus, on April 19, the PRN formalized a new organism called the "Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo" (Commission of Legislative Assessment, or CAL), which essentially became the dictatorship's parliament. In keeping with the broader structure of the PRN, the executive counsel of the CAL consisted of nine high-ranking officers divided between the service branches (three from the Army, Navy, and Air Force). The CAL was charged with drafting, evaluating, and eventually promulgating the *Proceso*'s legislative agenda, in concert with the various ministries and the National Executive Power (Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, or PEN). The man initially appointed to head the new body was Vice Admiral Antonio Vañek, a senior naval officer. Over the seven years that followed, the CAL produced hundreds of laws affecting everything from public education (Law 21,276), to financial administration (Law 21,526), to criminal punishments for minors (Law 22,278), to the salaries of bishops and archbishops (Law 21,950). This was hardly the first time an Argentine dictatorship had sought to use the legal

apparatus to its advantage. Indeed, nearly every de facto government since the 1930s displayed a propensity for creating new laws.[52] However, just as the state violence after March 24 differed in scale more than in kind from past repression, so too the CAL reflected a longer tradition of authoritarian legality but, per the scope of the *Proceso*'s refoundational aspirations, sought to use the law to effect a radical transformation of almost all aspects of society.

Nor was the CAL the only substantive change to the legal sphere implemented by the dictatorship. The Armed Forces also intervened the judiciary to an unprecedented degree. This involved not only removing the sitting members of the Supreme Court (through the enactment on March 24 of Law 21,258, which authorized the dismissal of judicial personnel), but also replacing dozens of judges at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. The historical relationship of de facto regimes and the courts in Argentina is long and complex, dating back to a Supreme Court ruling in 1865 that recognized the validity of measures enacted by then-President Bartolomo Mitre in 1862, effectively granting them post facto legitimacy.[53] The judiciary, and particularly the Supreme Court, continued to play a prominent role in "restoring" democracy after de facto regimes throughout the twentieth century. The question of which actions would be legitimized—and which would be struck down—was central to how military regimes saw and interacted with the courts.

The Armed Forces fully understood this reality. In the wake of the 1955 *Revolución Libertadora*, the dictatorship replaced the members of the Supreme Court, a tactic later repeated by *Revolución Argentina* in 1966, and the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* in 1976. The PRN's intervention of the courts, generally, and the Supreme Court, specifically, spoke to the depths of its reorganizational ambition, reflecting the hope for lasting impact on national

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[52] Félix Luna famously referred to the leaders of the GOU in 1945 as "legislative maniacs." Luna, *El 45*.
[53] Ernesto Groisman, "Los gobiernos *de facto* en el derecho argentino," *Revista del Centro de Estudios Constitucionales*, Vol. 4 (September-December, 1989), 36.

jurisprudence. In cases before the Court that involved the PRN, outcomes tended to favor the regime, especially from 1976 through 1981. However, the dictatorship's final years witnessed an increase in rulings against the government, which perhaps reflected rising "institutional insecurity," or, more broadly, its collapsing legitimacy, which had, after all, always been tenuous.[54] Most significantly, the Court's decision to uphold the validity of the PRN's statutes and "actas institucionales" helped legitimate the regime's attempted transformation of the country's legal apparatus, even if that project remained inevitably incomplete.

2.5: Tensions on the Right and within the Armed Forces

If the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* differed from preceding military regimes in the scale of its aspirations and the projected longevity of its changes, it nonetheless remained firmly bounded by the historical circumstances from which it evolved. The *Proceso*'s peculiar tripartite organizational structure was a direct response to past failures, when the collapse of authority in a single person consequently undermined a broader project. By distributing power more or less evenly between the three branches of the Armed Forces, the new government hoped to avoid this problem. This strategy implicitly acknowledged a far more serious problem: the continued existence of tensions and fissures within the military and the Argentine Right. Hypothetically, a broad consensus over what steps to take to "rescue" the country from the turmoil of the early 1970s, or even a single faction powerful enough to assert its will over the other service branches and rightist elements, would have obviated the need for such a schema. However, as this section will explore more thoroughly, the internal conflicts of the Argentine Right did not simply dissipate

[54] See Gretchen Helmke, "The Logic of Strategic Defection: Court-Executive Relations in Argentina Under Dictatorship and Democracy," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (Jun. 2002), 300. There were exceptions to these periodizations, as the Court occasionally ruled against the regime prior to 1981 and continued to rule in its favor over the final years of the dictatorship.

after March 24, 1976. Indeed, their impact would ultimately prove disastrous for the refoundational hopes of the new government.

The Armed Forces seized power on March 24 hoping, in broad terms, to return Argentina to what they believed to be its conservative origins as a hierarchical, Catholic, traditionalist, and patriarchal nation. Evidencing the *Proceso*'s willingness to expand their mission beyond the elimination of armed leftist organizations, Videla explained on November 22, 1977 that "[a] terrorist is not just someone with a gun or a bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to western and Christian civilization."[55] Again, the meaning(s) associated with "western" are vaguely-defined and often-contradictory, but they speak to the historical context for the PRN. Much as we cannot use "the dictatorship" or "the regime" without recognizing the distinct ideological and practical currents that such terms encompassed, neither can "the Right" escape a more thorough analysis.

The Argentine Right's dominant philosophies emerged from the global political and economic conjunctures of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Within the Right, there existed two broad tendencies: right-liberalism and a more reactionary political conservativism.[56] These wings occasionally intersected and overlapped, and individuals frequently belonged to one, the other, or both during their lives. However, though they shared several points in common, they also differed on significant issues, both ideological and tactical. The right-liberals were themselves divided into two currents.[57] The older and more established subgroup represented Argentina's

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[55] David Rock, "Antecedents of the Argentine Right," in *The Argentine Right: Its History and Origins, 1910 to the Present*, Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart, eds. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1993), 1.
[56] Paul Lewis described the two tendencies broadly as the corporativist *nacionalismo* of the right-populists and the authoritarian capitalism of the right-liberals. See Paul Lewis, "The Right and Military Rule, 1955-1983," in *The Argentine Right: Its History and Origins, 1910 to the Present*, Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart, eds. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1993).
[57] Horacio Etchichury, "Prescindibilidad y estabilidad del empleo público ante la Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación (1976-1983): derechos sociales bajo la dictadura," *Revista Pilquen*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2016), 22.

"traditional" power base: the landed oligarchy. From the mid-nineteenth century, and particularly in the wake of the *Conquista del Desierto* (1879-1882), the distribution of lands "conquered" from the indigenous peoples of the interior and Patagonia among a handful of wealthy *terratenientes* (landowners) solidified the influence of a small but powerful rural elite that dominated national politics through the first decades of the 1900s. By the mid-twentieth century, a new "technocratic" branch of the right-liberal wing began to exert itself on the national stage. Disciples of the economic philosophies of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, the right-technocrats advocated an aggressively laissez-faire approach to the reform of Argentina's economy. Álvaro Alsogaray (Minister of Economy from 1959 to 1962), Martínez de Hoz, and Adalbert Krieger Vasena—Minister of Economy during the *Onganiato* (1966-1970)—were among the most committed proponents of this school of thought from the 1950s through the 1970s. Although the traditionalists and technocrats could often make common cause at a philosophical level, strategic disagreements created frequent tension.

The conservative/reactionary wing of the Right developed out of a different set of socio-political circumstances. From the 1880s to the 1920s, waves of immigrants, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe, arrived in Argentina and sought work in the country's urban centers (Gran Buenos Aires and the industrial corridor from Santa Fe to Córdoba). Argentina's powerful but largely indifferent landowning elite initially had difficulty responding to the growing discontent of this new working class, as socialism and anarchism made notable inroads.[58] By the early 1930s, however, a counterrevolutionary Right, espousing an aggressive nationalism woven through with elements of Catholic corporativism, had emerged among Argentine workers. Supporters of hierarchy, these "nacionalistas" and "contrarevolucionarios" drew inspiration from Mussolini's

[58] Rock, "Antecedents of the Argentine Right," 3.

Italy and Franco's Spain. Unlike the agricultural-export model of traditional right-liberalism, or the restrained free-market capitalism of right-technocrats, this faction believed in state-promoted development while defending the pillars of a "traditional" values system—the Church, the family, and the *patria*. This combination of nationalism and conservatism gained traction within the Armed Forces from the 1930s onward, becoming tenets of the Rawson and Farrell regimes (1943-1946). Indeed, elements of this right-conservatism, especially patriotism, state-sponsored developmentalism, and deference to hierarchical power structures—were incorporated by Peronism after 1946.

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These same tensions between liberalism and reactionary nationalism dominated intra-military dynamics throughout much of the twentieth century, though not always along the same lines. From the late 1950s, two broad factions vied for power within the Armed Forces which, given the relationship between the military and the civil sphere over the next three decades, frequently meant control over government as well. However, their competition demonstrates how ideological lines became increasingly blurred during this period. Following the *Revolución Libertadora*, the *azules* (Blues) established themselves as the more moderate sector, advocating limited military participation in politics and occasionally proposing the relegalization of Peronism. The Blues also promoted a species of conservative developmentalism that would form the basis for military-led efforts to overhaul Argentina's political, social, and economic spheres at different points during the 1950s and 1960s. Opposing them were the *colorados* (Reds), who espoused a hardline nationalist philosophy that pushed for the eradication of Peronism, and whose policies and ideologies were closer to European fascistic impulses. Yet paradoxically, many among the

colorados supported a more aggressively non-interventionist approach tilted toward free-market liberalism—which at times overlapped with the views of sectors of the *azules*.

Yet after the *Revolución Argentina*, the installation of Juan Carlos Onganía as de facto president in 1966 was followed by the appointment of Krieger Vasena as Minister of Economy—a man who pursued a generally "orthodox liberal" approach to economic management. Meanwhile, from the end of the 1950s, the Reds argued that Peronism itself was akin to Communism, and must therefore be eliminated. The epithet "gorila" came to describe this faction of the Armed Forces, who inherited the ferocious Catholicism and almost tribal nationalism of the far-right movements of the 1930s and envisioned a racially, religiously, and socially homogeneous Argentina purged of not only ethnic minorities but also of all intellectual currents that might threaten the country's pillars of conservatism. From a political economy standpoint, the Reds also advocated for a strong state sector, albeit along more corporativist (or perhaps even fascist) lines. The confrontation between the *azules* and *colorados* reached its high point over approximately six months in 1962-63, when the two sides waged something close to an open war.[59] This conflict ended with the *azules* firmly in control, and in many ways prefaced the 1966 coup and subsequent military dictatorship. However, importantly, both traditions continued to influence political orientations within the Armed Forces, and both would resurface after 1976—as would their disagreements.

During the initial phase of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, a relatively small set of actors wielded considerable power. Despite frequent claims around their unity of purpose, the original members of the Junta Militar itself—Videla, Massera, and Agosti—differed sharply in their political orientations. Indeed, one critical reason behind the tripartite division of authority was the pervasive distrust that existed within the military. For Massera, the 1976 coup presented

[59] For more detailed analysis of this conflict, see Robert Potash, *The Army & Politics in Argentina, 1962-1973: From Frondizi's Fall to the Peronist Restoration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

the opportunity to achieve his grandest aspiration: to take the presidency at the head of a right-populist movement that would fuse elements of Peronism and Catholic nationalism, together with a corporativist economic strategy. A member of the fascistic Italian Masonic lodge Propaganda Due, Massera envisioned a right-wing "Peronism without Perón" that bore some similarities to the *Vandorista* platform of the mid-1960s.[60] The Navy largely ascribed to this ideal, and even after he stepped away from the Junta in September 1978 Massera continued to enjoy considerable support among the conservative/nationalist faction of the military. The Air Force, meanwhile, occupied a distinct ideological position. Orlando Agosti was undoubtedly the least powerful of the three Commanders-in-Chief, yet that did mean that the Air Force itself was prepared to take a back seat. As a young officer, Agosti himself had been an ally of General Benjamín Menéndez during an attempted coup against Perón in 1951.[61] With his own politics defined by his Cold War anticommunism and his vehement anti-Peronism, the Air Force was a bastion for the *ultristas* on the far-right, who prioritized the fight against "subversion" above all other goals.[62] Of the three members of the Junta, Agosti was possibly the closest thing to an heir to the *colorados*, with his combination of fierce patriotism and extreme commitment to dismantling Peronism. Having ascended to the head of the Air Force just months prior to the 1976 coup, Agosti fought to expand his branch's influence—including as a prominent driver of the *golpe* itself.

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[60] On Vandor, see James, *Resistance and Integration*; McGuire, "Argentine Unions since 1955." On Massera and his intellectual leanings, see Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, esp. 78-88.

[61] The failure of this effort led to Agosti going into exile for the next four years. He returned in the wake of the *Revolución Libertadora* and was reincorporated into the Air Force. See "Murió el ex brigadier Orlando R. Agosti," *La Nación* (October 8, 1997). Importantly, two of Menéndez's family members would play prominent roles in the PRN. His nephew Luciano Benjamín Menéndez rose to the rank of general and was a prominent *duro* who oversaw some of the fiercest repression of the dictatorship. His other nephew, Mario Benjamín Menéndez, also a general, served as the Governor of the Malvinas during the brief period of their occupation in 1982.

[62] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 162.

Meanwhile, the Army faced a significant internal division.[63] On the one hand, the views of a significant sector of the Army paralleled those of Agosti and much of the Air Force. Though all branches and factions of the Armed Forces participated, it was these self-styled *duros* (extremists, literally "hard ones") led the charge in the war against subversion and displayed the least compunction with respect to expanding its parameters beyond the citizenry. Among the most important members of the ultra-right were Generals Guillermo Suárez Masón, Luciano Benjamín Menéndez (the nephew of General Benjamín Menéndez), and Ramón Díaz Bessone (who became the Minister of Planning in October 1976). Their commitment to violence reflected both their ruthlessness but also an extremist interpretation of Catholic dogma which held that through violence Argentine society might be "purified." Similar to Massera, they imagined that military rule would continue for decades, having decided that in the wake of the chaos of the early 1970s, civilian government simply could not be trusted.[64] Though their anti-Peronism recalled the "gorilas" of the late 1950s, their near-unlimited willingness to use repression to achieve their objectives marked them as something novel. On the other hand, the so-called "moderates," led by Videla and his second-in-command, Roberto Eduardo Viola, believed that they could reset the country relatively quickly and return control to reconstituted political parties.[65] Though the term "moderate" is highly problematic given their open support for and participation in the broader campaign of state terror and repression, within the context of a military dictatorship defined by extremism and violence, the Videla-Viola faction, which included other prominent Army officials like Minister of Labor Horacio Liendo and Minister of nonetheless represented a sort of "middle

[63] Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*, 178-180.
[64] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*; Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*.
[65] See Alejandro Avenburg, *Entre la presión y el apoyo a los "moderados". La política de derechos humanos de Carter y el régimen militar argentino (1976-1978)*, FLACSO Argentina, M.A. (2009), Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*; Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*.

ground" between the right-populism espoused by Massera and the ultra-reactionary policies of the *duros* on the far right.

Predictably, this contradictory blend of ideologies and tactical approaches began to break down immediately. Tensions between the ultra-right and the "moderates" were evident in the months leading up to the coup in fierce disagreements over what national reorganization might mean and what forms it should take. Neither the *azules* nor the *colorados* really disappeared after their armed confrontation in 1962-63, and this same fundamental difference in perspective continued to exist into the 1970s. The multiple debates within the Right and within the Armed Forces—between laissez-faire capitalism and state-sponsored developmentalism; over the role of politics and political parties in the short/medium/long-term future of the country; around whether aspects of Peronism could be rehabilitated or if the whole movement needed to be excised from the national scene—all complicated the articulation and enforcement of a coherent set of policies. At the same time, these theoretical battles were compounded by more profane concerns, namely the striving of ambitious *militares* to position themselves at the head of the PRN and gain power for their particular branch or faction of the Armed Forces.

The critical exception to this disjointedness was the "war against subversion." Not only did the military enjoy considerable public support (at least initially) in attempting to rein in political violence, it remained the one area where the diverse currents of the regime agreed. However, the fact that they effectively defeated the guerrilla organizations within six months did not give them sufficient time to carry out the more ambitious societal overhaul described in the "objectives" announced in the wake of the coup.[66] Extending the definition of "subversion" allowed the dictatorship to continue their battle long for several months after all armed resistance had been

[66] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 350. Canelo also offers a thorough basis for this argument.

eliminated. However, by the middle of 1977 even this approach reached its limits. Instead, discord around social policy, economic strategy, a potential political *apertura*, and the remaking of organized labor laid bare the internal contradictions of the *Proceso*—and specifically of the Armed Forces themselves. If the recent historiographical shift towards emphasizing the role of civilian institutions in initiating and sustaining the PRN has addressed an important gap in the literature by demonstrating the multifaceted nature of the dictatorship, this focus has not necessarily helped promote a deeper engagement with the military as a political actor, defined by its own struggles for legitimacy.[67]

These internal struggles quickly acquired concrete significance for the structural integrity of the regime. Although nominally Videla, Massera, and Agosti served as co-equal officers of the executive branch (redefined as the Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, or National Executive Power [PEN]), Videla simultaneously held the title of de facto president from March 24, 1976 until March 29, 1981. In the aftermath of the "successful" campaign against the guerrilla, Videla's position as "first-among-equals" became a sticking point, particularly for Massera—who aspired to the presidency himself—and for the *duros* of the Army—who disagreed with the Videla-Viola faction's "moderate" policy towards political parties and organized labor. While the Army as a branch retained its place as the military's most powerful arm, its internal factionalization simultaneously forced Videla to make concessions to the hard-liners in order to keep his subordinates in line. This included the creation of a so-called "Super-Ministry" of Planning, under the command of the ultra-right General Ramón Díaz Bessone as a species of concession.[68] Díaz Bessone, in turn, clashed not only with members of the Videla-Viola faction, including Horacio

[67] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 27.
[68] For more detail on the Ministry of Planning, see especially Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 68-78.

Liendo, the Ministry of Labor, but also with Martínez de Hoz.[69] In the long run, however, the *duros* would lose this battle, as the so-called "Superministry" ultimately collapsed in short order, and Díaz Bessone's feud with Martínez de Hoz led not to the Economy Minister's dismissal, but rather to his own resignation.

Martínez de Hoz's victory over the nationalist/developmentalist current of the Army in 1978 did not signal the end of the dictatorship's internal struggles, however. On the one hand, both Massera and the *duros* continued to vie for the presidency. As part of his power play, Massera managed to force Videla into retirement in 1978, meaning that he could no longer serve on the Junta Militar as he was no longer the active Commander-in-Chief of the Army. His plan, however, did not attain the desired results, as Videla appointed his close ally Viola to take his place on the Junta, and reaffirmed his position as de facto president through 1980. By the time Massera resigned from the junta towards the end of 1978 to launch his own political party (*Por la democracia social*, "For Social Democracy"), with an eye towards eventual elections, Videla had consolidated enough power to fend off his challenge and remain in office through the end of his term.[70] Meanwhile, the right-nationalist sector of the Army grew increasingly displeased with the direction of the *Proceso*, especially when pressure from international human rights organizations obliged the government to modify its tactics and dramatically scale back its use of violence against supposed "subversives." For the *duros* like Suárez Mason and Benjamín Menéndez, such concessions were anathema. They viewed any attempt by external forces to interfere in Argentina's domestic affairs as necessarily

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[69] "Uncertainty returns as Argentine prices rise," *Latin American Economic Report* [hereinafter *LAER*], Vol. 4, No. 41 (October 22, 1976); "Argentina's big car makers stop their production lines," *LAER*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 6, 1978).

[70] Many rumors exist as to how far Massera was willing to go to achieve his goal. Supposedly, during trips to Spain over the final years of the 1970s, he was in regular contact with the leadership of the Montoneros to try to broker an agreement that would bring some faction of the Peronist movement behind him. He also courted deposed president Isabel Perón in an effort to gain her support for his claim, as well. See Canelo, *El proceso en su laberinto*, esp. 113-120.

"illegitimate" and advocated a hard line of "closing off" the country to such possibilities.[71] Tensions between the *duros* and Videla reached a head in the wake of the 1979 visit of the *Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos* (Interamerican Human Rights Commission) with an attempted uprising against Videla in response to his policy of "moderation." Though he put down the uprising, Videla found himself forced to retreat and publicly affirm that the "war against subversion" continued, and that the time was not yet right for dialogue with either political parties or the labor movement.

On the other hand, the *plan Martínez de Hoz* itself continued to face serious difficulties. After a brief moment of recovery in 1977, the country plunged back into economic instability and recession in 1978, and none of the Economy Minister's strategies for reining in inflation or promoting economic growth seemed to bear fruit. In part this reflected the worldwide economic context, while in part the failure responded to the continuing opposition that his policies encountered within the dictatorship, particularly from those sectors committed to a state-directed developmentalism that would expand on the Import Substitution Industrialization model of the 1950s and 1960s. As Martínez de Hoz proved incapable of carrying out his ambitious plan to rationalize the state sector and bring true economic liberalism to Argentina, he began to lose the support of even those who might seem natural allies: industrialists and his fellow free-market economists. The continuing economic uncertainty, exacerbated in many cases by the elimination of protective tariffs and industrial credits, created a strong current of discontent among small and medium businesses, who saw their livelihoods disappearing while a handful of large (often multinational) corporations gained in market share.[72] Simultaneously, Martínez de Hoz's reliance on authoritarian measures and direct governmental control alienated his fellow technocrats like

[71] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, 142.
[72] Schvarzer, "Cambios en el liderazgo industrial argentino," 402.

Álvaro Alsogaray and Juan Alemann, who by the end of the 1970s had become increasingly critical of his approach and openly questioned the direction of the Ministry of Economy.[73] On top of all of this, disagreements between the various factions over how to reform labor relations not only undermined the efficacy of those attempts, but also opened new spaces for worker and trade-union opposition to the PRN.[74] Thus, with the "war on subversion" effectively won before the end of 1976, the dictatorship quickly descended into a realm of infighting and backstabbing that hamstrung any possibility of effecting a singular and coherent plan of national reorganization.

Part III: Continuities and the PRN

On the one hand, the tensions that defined how the military regime operated were particular to their moment. The *Proceso* emerged from a specific historical conjuncture that revolved around the intersection of national, regional, and global political and economic factors that combined to create an environment of instability leading up to the March 24 coup. On the other hand, these tensions, and the responses that they provoked, did not exist in a vacuum. The history of the internal politics of the Armed Forces offers perhaps the clearest example of before/after continuity in its recycling of conflicts that dated back to the 1950s. Yet this continuity was not unique, nor was it the only kind of continuity that complicates the March 24 "rupture point." Recent scholarship has increasingly wrestled with how the legacies of the dictatorship remained a part of the political, economic, and social fabrics of Argentina following the return to democracy in 1983.[75] However, investigations into continuities in daily life and institutional practice in 1976

[73] See, among others, "Martínez de Hoz, ¿Se tiene que ir?" *Somos* (February 16, 1979); "Inflación: ¿En qué se equivocó Martínez de Hoz?" *Somos* (October 5, 1979); "Plan económico: ¿Si no cambia, muere?" *Somos* (May 30, 1980).
[74] The remaining chapters of the dissertation will expand on this argument.
[75] Massano, "El proyecto de concertación"; Nápoli et al., *La dictadura del capital financiero*; Zorzoli, "La normativa sindical entre la dictadura y el alfonsinismo."

have been far less common. Though Videla proclaimed an end to one historical cycle and the opening of another, to take him at his word would seem too simple.[76] Not only was the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* firmly rooted in Argentina's recent history, but its ambitions to remake all aspects of society—from the arts and literature, to education, to politics—produced notably uneven results.

3.1: Historical Precedents

The most obvious historical precedent for the PRN was undoubtedly the military dictatorship that governed Argentina between 1966 and 1973, which called itself the *Revolución Argentina*. During this period, three de facto presidents, Generals Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970), Roberto Levingston (1970-1971), and Alejandro Agustín Lanusse (1971-1973), held power; a right-liberal civilian economist with strong free-market beliefs was given control of the Ministry of Economy (Adalbert Krieger Vasena, 1966-1969); and the Armed Forces envisioned themselves not simply as temporary caretakers of the government, but rather as active participants involved in defining the future direction of the country.[77] If global factors—the fallout from the Cuban Revolution; Che's attempted insurgency in Bolivia; the US's growing role in supporting a transnational security state in the Southern Cone—undeniably influenced the philosophies of the *Onganiato*, to assign those conditions a determinate value risks dismissing the significance of Argentina's domestic political, economic, and social realities on the Armed Forces as a political actor.[78] Importantly, the 1963-1973 decade witnessed the highest sustained economic growth in national history, suggesting that whatever drove the military to intervene (and large sectors of civil

[76] This is especially true because this seems to be the *only* piece of official rhetoric from the PRN that historians take seriously. It features prominently in various studies of the dictatorship period yet is often seemingly accompanied by the presumption that everything else the dictatorship ever said or did was simply a mask for violence.
[77] David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), Chapter 8.
[78] Alain Rouquié, *The Military and the State in Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 6.

society to tacitly accept that intervention) did not reflect fears of an immediate financial collapse.[79] Instead, one theory holds that the proscription of Peronism created a worsening crisis of legitimacy which. When Illia attempted to address this problem with a limited relegalization of Peronism, conservatives (the Church, the military, and the bourgeoisie) felt such danger in the possibility of a resurgent Peronist movement that they once again turned to drastic extralegal measures to "restore" legitimacy.[80]

While Onganía enjoyed some limited success effecting his plan during the dictatorship's first two years—with inflation more or less under control and a "social peace" maintained largely by threat of violence—the precariousness of the military's rule was brought into sharp relief in May 1969 when an ad hoc coalition of auto workers and university students launched a massive strike that culminated in three days of pitched street fights with the state's security forces. The *Cordobazo*, as it came to be known, both dramatically demonstrated the continuing strength of Argentina's rank-and-file workers and exposed the fragility of the the regime's attempts to impose top-down social change without input from the popular sectors.[81] Over the next eighteen months, it was followed by a series of uprisings in other Argentine cities that contributed to a national climate of unrest which led to the immediate resignation of Krieger Vasena just days after the *Cordobazo*, and eventually to Onganía's replacement in June 1970. Despite its ambitious objectives, the *Revolución Argentina* rapidly crumbled such that the primary political challenges

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[79] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 304-305.

[80] O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 30-31. O'Donnell's argument famously groups several authoritarian regimes (Argentina in 1966; Uruguay in 1973; Brazil in 1964; Chile in 1973; and Argentina in 1976) under the same umbrella concept of "bureaucratic authoritarianism." His description of the breakdown of legitimacy that precipitates military intervention is somewhat unclear, however. He seems to suggest that, at least in Argentina leading up to the 1976 coup, there was a concrete possibility that the established system of class relations might simply collapse, which drove people to support the dictatorship. A more likely explanation (following the work of Carassai) is that between 1973 and 1976 collective fear of such a collapse reached a point where people willingly accepted another military regime, but not necessarily that such a systemic collapse ever really loomed. See Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority*.

[81] Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba*.

of the presidencies of Levingston and Lanusse involved negotiating the return to democracy and the end of the prohibition on Peronism. This experience had lasting consequences on the psyches of mid-tier officers across all three branches of the Armed Forces who had been enthusiastic participants in the 1966 coup only to see the project collapse under attacks from workers and students. These lessons proved critical during the PRN's planning stages in the months leading up to March 24, 1976.

By 1975, the Argentine military could also look to any of its neighbors for further inspiration regarding the seizure of the government. Brazil (1964), Uruguay (1973), Paraguay (1954), Bolivia (1964), and Chile (1973) had all experienced coups d'état over the previous decades and found themselves under some form of authoritarian rule. Although the implementation of Operation Condor was not formalized until 1975, U.S. support for right-wing dictatorships throughout the Southern Cone reassured Argentina's Armed Forces that, at the very least, they would be able to operate without interference.[82] Even as the Cold War context helped pave the way for the March 24 *golpe*, the Commanders-in-Chief had kept a close eye on the situation in Chile. The lessons they derived from the Pinochet regime indicated the intentionality and self-awareness with which they acted in 1976. First, the visibility of the attack on La Moneda and the death of Allende created shockwaves around the country, putting Pinochet on the defensive from the beginning. Videla, Massera, and Agosti did not want a similarly performative display of violence against the sitting president. Second, while they hoped to avoid international disapproval, the Argentine Armed Forces did consider the Chilean model of repression at the local level

[82] In June 1976, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sent a secret cable to Argentina's Foreign Minister, Admiral César Augusto Guzzetti, advising him that "If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly. But you should get back quickly to normal procedures." "Memorandum of Conversation," National Security Archives, US State Department, George Washington University (June 6, 1976); accessed on August 15, 2018. Available at: https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB133/19760610%20Memorandum%20of%20Conversation%20clean.pd

something to emulate. Although the repression in Chile never reached the levels that it would under the PRN, the basic principle—state terror, targeting social actors—was appealing to the Argentine dictatorship after 1976.[83] Finally, although the historical commitment to developmentalist ran deeper within the Argentine military than the Chilean, the new authorities did look to some of the economic policies of Pinochet's "Chicago Boys" as a model, even if the *Proceso* never committed as fully to such measures. Despite the apparent paradox of the PRN following the example of a country with which it would nearly go to war in 1980, Chile's influence on the Argentine dictatorship, especially regarding its relationship to other international actors, cannot be overlooked.

3.2: The PRN and Civil Society

The *militares* who took power in 1976 recognized the potential importance of this national and regional trajectory. If past de facto regimes had failed to achieve their aims because of opposition from different sectors of civil society, then civil society itself would have to be remade. Argentina, like much of the world, had lived the long 1960s as an era of upheaval and transformation, as young people rejected many of the tenets of the previous generation and sought to integrate themselves into a global youth experience. Over the previous decade music, art, literature, clothing, and drugs had all changed radically, and the *Proceso*'s leadership drew direct connections between these changes and the downfall of the political project of the *Revolución Argentina*, on the one hand, and the chaos of the mid-1970s, on the other.[84] Though they may have disagreed on what methods to use, nearly every sector of the Armed Forces believed in the necessity of more direct control over social policy to restore the country's conservative values.

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[83] "Meeting Transcript," National Security Archives, (July 9, 1975), accessed on August 18, 2018. Available at: https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB133/19760709.pdf.

[84] On this transformation of youth and its consequences, see Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Under directives from the Ministry of Culture, hundreds of books were banned for "subversive" content, including works by Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Eduardo Galeano, and Perón. The regime even organized public "book burnings" on multiple occasions, with intentional echoes back to Nazi Germany. Nor did the dictatorship limit its interventions to literature. The Ministry of Culture's Comité Federal de Radiodifusión (Federal Committee for Radio Broadcast, COMFER), blacklisted hundreds of songs, ranging from protest songs by Argentine musicians to pop hits by international superstars. Many of Argentina's most celebrated artists and intellectuals found themselves targets of the PRN, including Rodolfo Walsh, Julio Cortázar, Fernando Solanas, and Charly García. Most went into exile; some were imprisoned for several years; still others were disappeared and/or killed. While closing off Argentina completely from the rest of the world proved impossible, the dictatorship nevertheless pursued aggressive limitations on the socio-cultural output and consumption of the citizenry.

Nor were these controls the regime's only effort at fundamentally redefining the social and cultural parameters of the Argentine people. Closely related to prohibitions on literature, music, and art were the new educational guidelines for students of all ages implemented during the first year of the PRN. The plan for transforming the nation's educational system revolved around two related poles. The first involved repressing elements of the cultural and pedagogical "renovation" that had shaped Argentina's public education in the 1960s and 1970s, especially with respect to ideas on psychology and psychoanalysis.[85] The second emphasized the disaggregation of the public school environment through discriminatory practices meant to break down the

[85] Pablo Pineau, "Reprimir y discriminar. La educación en la última dictadura cívico-militar en Argentina (1976-1983)," *Educar em Revista*, No. 51 (January-March, 2014). This distrust of psychology and psychoanalysis relates back to the paradoxical stance of the PRN vis-à-vis "the West." Even as they positioned themselves as defenders of Christianity and Western values, they decried the corrupting influence of Western hedonism and godlessness, often embodied by certain figures (like Freud, for example). For more on Argentina's relationship to psychiatry and psychoanalysis, see Marion Ben Plotkin, "The Diffusion of Psychoanalysis in Argentina," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1998).

homogenizing impulse constructed earlier in the twentieth century.[86] Certain measures taken in the immediate aftermath of the coup signaled the rigidity of the new approach, including laws that authorized the dismissal of instructors suspected of involvement in "subversive" activities; the termination of contracts for "reasons of service"; and the ability of the Minister of Education to suspend, in part or in full, the "Statute of Instructors" that governed labor relations in the schools. However, as with other objectives, internal disagreements and structural factors quickly showed the limited coherence of the dictatorship's educational policies. Of the eight original cabinet members appointed after March 24, only two were replaced in a little over a year: the Minister of External Relations and Culture, Rear Admiral César Augusto Guzzetti; and the Minister of Education, Dr. Ricardo Bruera, both as a direct result of their inability to effectively realize desired changes.[87] Indeed, the Ministry of Education experienced considerable turnover throughout the dictatorship, with four different heads over the first five years. While the discourse around the *Proceso*'s overhaul of education marked it as one of the most meaningful ruptures with historical precedent, the involvement of people like Bruera, who had served in various capacities during the *Revolución Argentina*, indicates continuities in personnel and policies that complicate arguments about a definitive break with the past.[88]

The PRN's prohibitions of certain books and music together with the overhaul of the educational system aimed at transforming the consciousness of Argentina's citizenry over the long

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[86] Pineau, "Reprimir y descriminar."

[87] See Mariana Gudelevicius, "La política educativa implementada durante el primer año del 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional': contradicciones y límites," *Trabajos y Comunicaciones, 2da Época*, No. 38 (2012). Both men were replaced in May 1977, approximately fourteen months after assuming their posts. The Ministry of Planning, created in October 1976 to appease the hard-liners, also saw rapid turnover, as General Díaz Bessone only held the post until December 1977. Bruera was also one of only two civilian ministers in the cabinet (the other being Martínez de Hoz).

[88] This is true, as well, for Bruera's successors, including Juan José Catalán, who served as Minister of Economy for the Provincial Government of Tucumán from 1967 to 1968, and Juan Rafael Amadeo, who acted as Undersecretary of Education during the Onganía regime.

term. While these measures had concrete consequences in the present, the true impact would become clear in the beliefs and conduct of future generations. Even those factions of the Armed Forces that envisioned indefinite military rule recognized the eventual need to reincorporate civil society into the political sphere to some extent. Some, including Videla and his supporters, hoped to cede control back to the political apparatus sooner, rather than later. However, most high-ranking *militares* acknowledged that no such action could be taken until the politicians and the political parties had been disciplined. The chaos of the previous decade had effectively convinced the military that the political system, as currently constituted, could not cope with the challenges facing the country.[89] After March 24, the dissolution of the Senate, the intervention of the provincial governments, and the replacement of the members of the Supreme Court all made clear the new regime's lack of interest in sharing power with the established political system. At least initially, the Armed Forces would assume responsibility for the political sphere at the highest levels.

Yet this unilateral approach did not preclude the continued involvement of politicians and political parties—even after political activity was legally proscribed in the wake of the coup. On the one hand, the parties themselves accepted the dictatorship with much the same combination of unease and resignation that characterized the broader response of Argentine society. With the new regime in power, the two largest parties the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) and Partido Justicialista (PJ, the party of Peronism) worked to maintain dialogue with the Armed Forces and carve out a space to pursue their own priorities without necessarily contradicting the stated objectives of the PRN. Videla repeatedly floated the promise of an *apertura* that would lead to the normalization of

[89] Although the military would not necessarily have interpreted it this way, in part this reflected the lack of successful incorporation of the Peronist movement into the party system over the previous thirty years. See Drake, *Labor Movements and Dictatorships*.

political practice in the near future, without ever establishing a concrete timeline for such a process. Through the end of the 1970s, political parties largely refrained from criticizing the *Proceso*, in part not wanting to complicate the eventual return of democracy. On the other hand, while active-duty and retired military personnel were appointed as interventors to dozens of key posts throughout the government, the dictatorship's "reorganizational" ambitions included replacing hundreds of lesser officials, as well. For example, at the municipal level, nearly 800 *intendentes* (mayors) from ten different political parties were appointed by the regime between 1976 and 1979.[90] This does not necessarily indicate complicity, but rather the simple reality that government by force had limits. In the political sphere, the PRN actively sought allies to help with the day-to-day administration of its project, even as it kept them on unequal footing.

3.3: A "New Cycle of History"

The dictatorship's public discourse and policies after March 24 seem to support Videla's claim that the *golpe de estado* marked the closure of one historical cycle and the opening of another. Visions of a future Argentina where the military remained the ultimate arbiter of political legitimacy, either through the direct exercise of power or by "allowing" acceptable civilian administrations to govern, fed the ambitions of the Armed Forces and their allies. That the idea of "national reorganization" turned on the profound remaking of the nation and its citizenry cannot be denied. However, to take Videla's statement at face value—to assume that the coup did, in fact, mark a rupture between an "old" order and a "new" order—presents both historiographical and ethical problems.

First, while many historians have pointed to Videla's first national address, and specifically to his line about cycles of history, the rest of the regime's rhetoric has often been overlooked.

[90] "Article Title (**TO FIND**)," *La Nación* (March 25, 1979).

Recent research has begun to challenge this tendency, and certain features of the PRN's broader discursive framework, like Massera's public statements in 1977 and 1978 as he angled for the presidency, attracted attention from scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s.[91] Yet for many years, official declarations, speeches, Ministerial decrees, and even most laws and resolutions, were frequently dismissed, both academically and in popular perception, as a mere smokescreen for repression and the implementation of authoritarian capitalism, rather than being considered as critical aspects of the reorganizational project itself. Videla's turn of phrase on March 24, 1976 seems to be one of few exceptions to this rule. This attitude is historiographically problematic because it takes seriously one statement while effectively ignoring the potential historical weight of thousands more. By privileging the line that indicates rupture and eliding the thousands of moments that might emphasize continuities (of practice, of philosophy, of institutions), the inconsistency inherent in this approach reinforces a major feature of the historiography on the PRN: its exceptionality. Despite Videla's claim and the wave of violence that followed, March 24 did not definitively close one cycle of history, nor did it open an entirely new cycle. Rather, millions of Argentines lived the next seven years as a logical extension of the preceding decade, yet another in a string of military interventions that aspired to "restore" order and came up short. To draw a sharp distinction between what came before the *golpe* and what came after risks omitting that people's lives were not uniformly defined by this temporal boundary.

[91] For recent scholarship, see Canelo, "La legitimación del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional y la construcción de la amenaza en el discurso militar"; Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*; Canelo, "Los desarrollistas de la 'dictadura liberal'; Osuna, "El Ministerio de Bienestar Social entre el onganiato y la última dictadura"; Schwartz, "Las leyes de la dictadura"; Zorzoli, "La normativa sindical entre la dictadura y el alfonsinismo"; Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar."

This is closely tied into the second set of problems, which are more ethical than academic—even if separating those concepts is neither wise nor fully possible.[92] The prevalence of the "exceptionality" narrative has profound consequences for public perceptions of the dictatorship period into the present day. This perspective supports an "us" and "them" mentality that locates responsibility for the horrors of the late 1970s and early 1980s with a few actors, as opposed to considering them within a longer historical arc that might implicate (or involve) broader sectors of society. As examined in the introduction, this is largely a logical reaction. In the wake of a mass tragedy of national/regional scope, to create an inclusion/exclusion dynamic around normative ideas of "good" and "evil," or "victim" and "perpetrator," can be a critical step in coping with the past.[93] Yet coping does not necessarily imply confrontation, and Argentina's recent history has made clear that the decision of when to start and how to tell this story carries enormous political stakes. Scholars, and Argentina more generally, have increasingly challenged the notion of 1983 as a rupture point, arguing that the legacies of the dictatorship continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with some extending into the present. Yet with few exceptions, this same consideration has not been applied to actors, policies, practices, and beliefs that carried over from the late 1960s/early 1970s into post-coup Argentina. This lacuna has allowed for a limited and purposeful politicization of the PRN that links the Armed Forces almost exclusively with the country's elite, right-wing current and makes little mention of how other actors from the right, the center, or the left lived these years. The problem is not necessarily that people who were complicit in the dictatorship have somehow escaped punishment. Instead, the problem is that exceptionalizing the *Proceso* has

[92] I do not want to suggest that somehow scholars do not have (or should not have) various ethical responsibiilties to balance within and alongside their work. Indeed, I would argue that ethics is an integral element of successful scholarship.

[93] See, among others, Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

impeded a real reckoning with its causes, experiences, and effects. Only by resituating the dictatorship within an historical trajectory that not only extends forward past 1983, but also back past 1976, can we begin to address these outstanding questions.

Conclusions

This chapter has two main purposes. On the one hand, it serves as an introduction to/extended caveat for much of the empirical work in the subsequent chapters. Many of the characters introduced here reappear at different points throughout the dissertation, often with in different circumstances and with different roles. This fluidity reinforces the cautionary goal of this chapter—namely that the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* was never a homogeneous entity, and that to refer to it as such elides critical discrepancies in ideology, history, and practice within the Armed Forces. Tensions within and between the different factions continuously complicated and undermined the dictatorship's efforts to "reorganize" the nation. The rapid victory over "subversion" left these factions without a goal around which they could unite. While the fissures did not become chasms until the final years of the 1970s, political ambition, strategic disagreements, and opposing worldviews rapidly broke down the supposed internal cohesion of the Armed Forces and laid bare the lack of purpose. Thus, invocations of "the dictatorship," "the regime," and/or "the PRN" within the dissertation are not meant to connote a cohesive organism so much as a collection of related but often disconnected positions which occasionally overlapped but more frequently clashed.

On the other hand, this chapter presents several of the main thematic concerns of the dissertation. First and foremost, it sets the stage for a deeper analysis of citizenship. The refoundational project envisioned by the military and their allies was not limited to the overhaul

of the national economy or the political structures (although those were key features). At its heart, the "reorganization" involved remaking the citizenry itself—socially, culturally, and as Chapter 2 examines, through their relationship to labor. Second, this chapter establishes the framework for rethinking authoritarian legality by unpacking the mechanisms through which the dictatorship established its legal powers. De facto rule did not equate to disregard for the structures and institutions of legality. Despite the continuation of the state of exception, the law remained significant, not only for those enacting new legislation but also for those whose lives were shaped by those policies. A third theme introduced is the recognition of continuities across supposed chronological rupture points. The PRN's internal problems were products of the particular evolution of the Armed Forces as an institution and the relationship between the military and civil society. This historical trajectory is both closely tied to and mirrored by similar continuities of philosophy and praxis within the halls of government, among trade-union leaders, and on the shop floor. Citizenship, the law, and continuity provide a framework for understanding both the institutional functioning/non-functioning of the Ministry of Labor and the responses to national reorganization among working Argentines.

Chapters 2 through 5 take these themes and explore them in different contexts. The Ministry of Labor served as a critical site for the creation and implementation of structures meant to shift the labor-capital equilibrium and simultaneously to transform the workers themselves. However, its very importance also made it a site of conflict and competition. The two generals who held the post of Minister of Labor from 1976 through 1981, Horacio Liendo and Llamil Reston, both belonged to the so-called "moderate" tendency and were closely allied with Videla and Viola. This would complicate the implementation and enforcement of labor policies throughout their terms. This inconsistent legalism of the Ministry both reflected and highlighted

its fiercely contested role in remaking citizenship. These same questions frame Part II of the dissertation. The three case studies described in Chapters 3-5 illustrate how conflicts around citizenship and the law were shaped by continuities and ruptures on the shop floor. Arguing that the PRN must be considered within the longer trajectory of Argentine history does not mean an absence of significant change between 1976 and 1983. In all three chapters, the daily lives of workers, management, unionists, and even government officials are profoundly and perhaps even irrevocably altered by the challenges they were forced to navigate. However, those transformations cannot stand alone, nor can they serve as an accurate summary of lived experience in general during this period. Instead, as Chapter 1 has outlined, the question will be how continuities of ideology and practice remained relevant and how they themselves evolved in the face of fluid and often opaque circumstances.

Chapter 2

The Ministry of Labor, Labor Legislation, and the Performance of Legality

> "There is nothing simple about anything that affects man, so let us be on our guard against simplism of any kind."
> – Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*

Introduction

On February 11, 1977, unknown persons removed Oscar Smith, the former Secretary General of the Buenos Aires chapter of the Federation of Light and Power Workers (Luz y Fuerza), from his car and disappeared him. He was never seen again. Since October 1976, a public struggle had raged between Luz y Fuerza Buenos Aires and Servicios Eléctricos de Gran Buenos Aires (SEGBA), the state-run power company. The dismissal of more than 200 people, including dozens of senior delegates and union representatives, had sparked the conflict, but the dispute actually responded to recent legislation aimed at dramatically restructuring labor relations at SEGBA. These measures included increasing the workweek by ten hours and management's new ability to fire personnel without cause. Although the laws had gone into effect at the end of 1976, Luz y Fuerza workers had refused to comply with the new schedule and had shut down power stations, cutting off electricity around Greater Buenos Aires, on multiple occasions. Oscar Smith had

resigned his position when the union was intervened in April 1976, but he retained much of his influence and remained an important union interlocutor for the military throughout the conflict.

Indeed, Smith met with not only General Liendo and other authorities from the Ministry of Labor, but also with General Suárez Mason, commander of the First Army Corps, and eventually with de facto President Videla himself. From the mid-twentieth century, Luz y Fuerza had maintained close relations with the state and understood its commitment in terms of national well-being. The union highlighted this relationship in a public declaration on October 20, 1976, while simultaneously acknowledging the PRN's objectives, stating "[t]he unions have been, are, and will be an impassable barrier against subversion…We don't want to remain marginalized from the Process of National Reorganization, in which all of us workers are committed. We just want to be heard."[1] On February 10, 1977, after almost four months of protests and negotiations, Smith, Liendo, and Colonel Américo Daher, the Army's delegate to the Ministry of Labor, agreed in principle to a deal that would end the strike and normalize SEGBA's daily operations. The next day, Smith was disappeared and the agreement collapsed. Within weeks, the remaining *lucifuercistas*' resistance folded, and the new work schedules went into effect.

This violence proved devastating for the power workers, but it also highlighted the paradox at the heart of the Armed Forces' approach to labor policy and labor relations. Smith's case exemplified the dictatorship's repressive tactics, yet having finally resolved the conflict, to disappear Smith made little sense. No concrete evidence ever emerged that would shed light on responsibility, but two competing interpretations have evolved. The first suggests that the *duros* of the Army, notably Suárez Mason, disapproved of Liendo's "conciliatory" attitude and orchestrated the episode to undermine him. The second claims that Massera, upset at being

[1] "Quedaron normalizadas las empresas de electricidad," *La Nación* (October 21, 1976).

marginalized and hoping to replace Videla as president, ordered the disappearance to embarrass Videla and the Army. Regardless of which version is closer to the truth, they share the same basic concept: that by the start of 1977, internal discord within the Armed Forces had reached such a level that discrepancies between official rhetoric and actions were spilling over into the public with deadly results. Chapter One unpacked the competing ideologies that led to breakdowns across the *Proceso*. This chapter focuses on the Ministry of Labor and labor legislation to show how the dictatorship attempted to create a new national subject—and how and where that attempt failed.

Given its central role in mediating the relationship between identity, work, and citizenship, the lack of research on the Ministry of Labor is somewhat surprising. This gap partially reflects the prevailing emphasis on violence that allows for more dramatic interpretative possibilities than does administration. However, returning to the idea of authoritarian exceptionality highlights another factor. In formal interviews and informal conversations, union leaders, rank-and-file workers, shop-floor activists, and labor lawyers, repeatedly claimed that because the Ministry was intervened, it simply did not function. Yet available documentary evidence shows that this is clearly not the case. Liendo, and his successor Llamil Reston, actively pushed new policies, participated in negotiations, and mediated labor conflicts. The Ministry and its personnel—some 5,000 people in 1976—continued to carry out their daily responsibilities, and workers, unions, and management continued to appeal to the Ministry in times of conflict. This chapter resituates the 1976-1983 period within the trajectory of Argentine history by tracing the institutional history of the Ministry itself and interrogating how the PRN pursued its reorganizational strategy through its use of the country's legal apparatus.

Labor policy and labor relations thus become tools for the exploration of tensions between citizenship, authoritarianism, and the rule of law. The *Proceso* recognized the significance of "the

labor question" and the need to address it. The regime's production of a new legal framework sparked debates around "the shape that the future labor movement will take, its intrinsic organization, and the rights and duties it will have"—indeed, nothing less than "*the role of the workers in Argentina's current reality*" was at stake.[2] Significantly, despite the animosity toward Peronism that permeated the Armed Forces, this reading sustained the conflation of labor and citizenship that developed with Peronism in the 1940s.[3] This meant that as the power workers' struggle intensified in late 1976, the SEGBA president could warn employees that "as long as they behave themselves as good Argentines, good citizens, and good workers, there won't be any reason for more layoffs," and trust that the overlap of these categories would be understood by both the Luz y Fuerza personnel and the general public.[4] His comment connected patriotism, the national community, and labor in ways that echoed earlier Peronist rhetoric even as the context invested these concepts with radically different meanings.

This imbrication of work and citizenship is hardly unique. Kathi Weeks has argued that work is not simply economic activity—i.e., "how income is distributed"—but also, more importantly, "the basic means by which status is conferred."[5] Work combines economic necessity with social imperative to shape the construction and performance of new political and social subjectivities, a process that, in Argentina, is closely linked to the legacies of Peronism. While Weeks acknowledges that work creates subjects, she suggests this process is not always visible, but in Argentina, however, one's status as a worker has long been fundamental to claims to a set of political and especially social rights—indeed, for claims to a specific form of citizenship.[6]

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[2] "La Junta trata hoy las reformas a la Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales," *Clarín* (December 12, 1976). Emphasis in original.
[3] See James, *Resistance and Integration*, esp. Chapter 1.
[4] "Imposti descartó una negociación," *La Opinión* (October 9, 1976).
[5] Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 6.
[6] James, *Resistance and Integration*, Chapter 1.

Accepting that work produces subjects, and that in Argentina those subjectivities are inextricable from citizenship, then efforts to redefine and/or reorganize work are more than merely restrictive and/or repressive. They are also, at least aspirationally, productive of new subjectivities, and by extension new citizens. Labor law thus becomes vital to understanding the intersections between citizenship and work under the PRN.

How, then, did the dictatorship's legislation and policy shape Argentina's labor relations? The *Proceso* hoped to remake citizenship both institutionally, by transforming the legal parameters of the individual-state relationship, and on the shop floor, by redefining everyday practices of production. This chapter puts these two objectives in dialogue with each other to interrogate the role of the law in everyday lived experience. In doing so, this approach responds to historian William Forbath's call to take seriously the critical intersections of legal and labor history.[7] Reading the formal changes to the governing apparatus alongside the practical impact on Argentine workers' daily rhythms illuminates the dynamic relationship between law and labor, and demonstrates how that relationship shaped social, political, and economic realities under authoritarianism.

The regime's labor laws were central to its implementation of a hegemonic project that would redefine the capital-labor balance and the parameters of citizenship. However, despite the military's effective monopoly on force and the lack of cohesive opposition, attempts to construct legitimacy through labor legislation and the associated official discourse provoked widespread resistance. Workers, trade-unionists, industry, the agricultural sector, and even members of the Armed Forces challenged this project in different ways. As time passed and the dictatorship found

[7] William Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

itself unable to effect a coherent strategy, the disconnects between rhetoric and practice widened until they threatened to undermine its very foundations.

Given the *Proceso*'s non-democratic nature, the distance separating language from action might seem trivial. However, to understand labor relations, specifically, and patterns of governance, more broadly, in Argentina during the late 1970s and early 1980s, this focus is critical. Like all governments, civilian or military, after March 24 the PRN hoped to establish order via the creation and enforcement of rules. That this project coexisted with widespread legal and extralegal repression does not make it unimportant. On the contrary, the relationship between state violence and civil manifestations of discontent underscores the significance of discourse. Actors drew on complex and fluid rhetorical structures to either reaffirm their legitimacy (in the case of the de facto government) or avoid legal and extralegal retribution (in the case of workers and unionists). The increasingly tenuous connection between official language and the dictatorship's actions damaged its attempts to consolidate authority and—especially for organized labor—opened spaces for the articulation of certain forms of opposition. At the same time, these responses did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but rather built on established traditions of working-class organizing adapted to the socio-political conditions of life under military rule. Both the PRN's legalism and the workers' responses are thus grounded in historical precedent. After all, the post-March 24 state of exception was not a rupture with the previous political reality—it was a direct continuation.

The Armed Forces continued Isabel's partial suspension of Constitutional law to facilitate their establishment of a hegemonic project that would set the country on a path away from populism. Yet the conflicting visions of what that might look like proved a key factor in the regime's undoing. Although it succeeded in creating new "rules of the game" through legislative efforts, the PRN largely failed to secure the necessary buy-in from the various players that would

have invested those rules with legitimacy. This failure was not limited to civil actors, as the members of the dictatorship itself disagreed—often vehemently—on both the rules and whether they would play by them. This infighting crippled attempts to remake labor relations. Most players, including many who represented the state, decided that returning to the existing rules in some form was preferable to going along with the *Proceso*'s new legal corpus.

This growing disconnect between discourse and practice vis-à-vis labor relations helps orient the analytical focus of this chapter. The Ministry of Labor, responsible for drafting and enforcing much of the regime's labor legislation, remains the primary object of inquiry. However, two other institutions—the Ministry of Economy and the *Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo* (CAL)—also played critical roles. This chapter is not chronological, a decision that reflects both the overlaps between processes of drafting, enacting, and applying new laws and inconsistencies and contradictions that defined Ministry of Labor operations. Section I traces the Ministry's history from its origins in the early 1900s up through the actors, ideologies, and politics of the *Proceso*. This section explains the responsibilities and limitations of the Ministry of Labor, paying special attention to the forces that sought to undermine Liendo (and later Reston) by challenging the direction of labor policy. Section II reads a selection of the regime's labor laws to illuminate what this authoritarian legalism hoped to accomplish. I argue that this legislation was more than restrictive, and that it outlined a vision for a new "worker-citizen" that the PRN hoped would supplant the Peronist worker in the national imaginary. The final section examines the breakdown of the dictatorship's legalism. By the end of the decade, the law's ability to accurately describe government actions—tenuous from the beginning—had sharply declined. Discrepancies between the letter of the law and its practical enforcement highlighted the limits of authoritarian power and are central explaining the crumbling of the *Proceso*'s legitimacy.

One methodological note: this chapter describes a series of confrontations between rank-and-file workers, trade unionists, management, and state officials. The emphasis on labor conflict does not necessarily mean that such episodes were the norm, though I suspect they were more common than has been commonly acknowledged. Rather, these struggles, though perhaps aberrant from a statistical perspective, tend to leave more visible traces in the historical record and thus offer richer analytical possibilities. However, we must also remember that for much—perhaps most—of Argentina's working class, such moments of open resistance were the exception and not the rule.

Part I: The Ministry of Labor

1.1: Evolution of the Ministry of Labor

Over the seven decades leading up to March 24, 1976, the Ministry of Labor evolved into Argentina's principal mediator of the labor-capital dynamic. This period saw a series of critical episodes that shaped the structure and tenor of the relationship between workers' organizations and the state. At the turn of the twentieth century, violent labor clashes in Buenos Aires and Santa Fe provoked fierce repression by the government. The strikes and subsequent repression catalyzed new organizational efforts among workers, who hoped to incorporate the massive immigrant population that had arrived since the 1880s, and within the government, which recognized the need for a new relationship to labor.[8] Recent arrivals had become grist for the country's rapidly expanding commercial and industrial sectors which were reorienting themselves toward external markets. Argentina's booming export economy and the corollary demand for reliable labor power

[8] Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, 165. It is hard to understate the magnitude of the demographic shift. Between 1895 and 1914, Argentina's population effectively doubled, from 3.9 million to 7.8 million people. See also Mirta Lobato, "Historia de las instituciones laborales en Argentina: una asignatura pendiente," *Revista de Trabajo*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (November 2007).

prompted the restructuring of the national productive apparatus. In 1904, renewed outbursts of labor unrest motivated President Julio Roca to empower a special project to regulate and oversee labor. The so-called "Código de Trabajo" (Labor Code) was the state's first attempt to exert formal control over the labor market. Three years later, José Figueroa Alcorta established the National Department of Labor (Dirección Nacional de Trabajo, DNT) with a dual mission: to collect, coordinate, and publish relevant information about working conditions, and, to improve the material, social, intellectual, and moral conditions of the Argentine worker.[9] This intervention reflected Argentine society's mounting concern about labor conflict, especially among lawyers and academics.[10] While the following decades saw inconsistencies and reversals, these intertwined impulses remained central for government oversight of public- and private-sector workplaces.

The 1943 coup d'état led by the *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* marked a significant change in labor policy. Colonel Juan Domingo Perón took charge of the DNT and quickly used his position to develop contacts with prominent labor leaders. In December 1943, just two months after the coup, Perón transformed the DNT into the Secretario de Trabajo y Previsión (Secretariat of Labor and Welfare, STP), from which he implemented a host of social and economic policies benefiting Argentina's working class.[11] The following year, Perón engineered the creation of a new institution within the executive branch: labor courts. These courts proved critical spaces of inclusion for previously marginalized workers who used them to demand recognition, and occasionally redress, from the state.[12] Rank-and-file support, in turn, was critical to Perón's political rise that culminated

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[9] Lobato, "Historia de las instituciones laborales en Argentina," 147.
[10] Juan Manuel Palacio, "The Rise of Labor Courts in Argentina," in *Labor Justice Across the Americas*, ed. Leon Fink and Juan Manuel Palacio (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018).
[11] Lobato, "Historia de las instituciones laborales en Argentina," 151.
[12] As Juan Manuel Palacio has shown, despite Perón's reputation as the "father" of labor justice in Argentina, the push to create such an institution predated Perón by several decades. However, as Secretary of Labor, Perón was able to realize their creation. Despite initial resistance, the courts were eventually accepted and, after the 1955 coup, reaffirmed as central to national labor policy. See Palacio, "The Rise of Labor Courts in Argentina."

in his decisive electoral victory in the 1946 presidential elections. Once in office, Perón wasted little time consolidating his ties to organized labor, using the STP as the conduit between union leaders and the Peronist state. His reorganization of the government in 1949 led to the replacement of the STP by the Ministry of Labor. Throughout this institutional evolution, the merging of social and labor policy meant that the material well-being of the working class improved alongside their increasing affective sympathies for Perón himself. By creating an arm of the state capable of instrumentalizing the strength and numbers of Argentina's labor movement, Perón tied the fates of Peronism and organized labor together.[13] This state-labor dynamic effectively harnessed the potentially revolutionary quality of Peronism and redirected it along reformist lines—with the Ministry of Labor playing a crucial role in realizing this agenda.

The self-proclaimed *Revolución Libertadora* that removed Perón from office in 1955 hoped to erase Peronism's legacy by reversing many of the reforms and policies that had benefited the working class over the previous decade. However, it quickly became clear that Peronism could not simply be put back into the bottle. For the next eighteen years, the Ministry of Labor's mission oscillated based on the political orientation of the government in power at a given moment—but always against the backdrop of Peronism's proscription. Yet many of the measures instituted by Perón endured, and some, such as the labor courts, that had been criticized under Peronism gained acceptance and legitimacy under military rule.[14] The Ministry of Labor, tasked with overseeing and enforcing rights, duties, conditions, and protections for Argentine workers, could not help but

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[13] James, *Resistance and Integration*, esp. Chapter 1. As James explains in analyzing Perón's first term, "Increasingly the unions were incorporated into a monolithic Peronist movement and were called upon to act as the state's agents vis-à-vis the working class, organizing political support and serving as conduits of government policy among the workers." 11.

[14] Palacio, "The Rise of Labor Courts in Argentina"; Juan Manuel Palacio, "El Grito En El Cielo: La Polémica Gestión de Los Tribunales de Trabajo En La Argentina," *Estudios Sociales*, No. 48 (2015).

act as the primary mediator of the often-tense relationship between organized labor, private capital, and the state.

Meanwhile, the organism's formal status continued to evolve. From 1958 to 1966, it was the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, reflecting new responsibilities vis-à-vis the management of the *obras sociales* and other social benefits. After the 1966 coup, the Onganía regime demoted the Ministry to a Secretariat located within the Ministry of Economy and Labor. The state's responsibility to workers was thus subordinated, both practically and institutionally, to then-Economy Minister Adalbert Krieger Vasena's modernization and rationalization policies.[15] Labor's status as a Ministry was restored in 1971, and Perón's return and subsequent reelection in 1973 reaffirmed the historic ties between government and labor movement. However, his death less than a year later plunged the country into uncertainty, creating a power vacuum. Between July 1974 and March 1976, there were four different Ministers of Labor, with none serving more than twelve months. By March 24, the Ministry of Labor—like much of Isabel's government—had largely lost control of its primary charge: managing the interactions between workers and capital.

1.2: Intervention and Takeover

Five days after the Armed Forces' intervention, the Junta named General Horacio Liendo, commander of the Sixth Mountain Infantry, as Minister of Labor. Many of the senior officials at the Ministry were dismissed and replaced with *militares*, including the new Undersecretary for Labor, Colonel Carlos Alberto Longo, and the Undersecretary of Planning, Captain Roberto Dell'Asta. In the weeks that followed, Colonel Juan Pita assumed his post as interventor of the CGT, solidifying the regime's oversight of the key spaces of organized labor. In his first national address on May 1, Liendo laid out the Ministry's objectives: to "correct excesses, prevent

[15] James, *Resistance and Integration*, 217. As James points out, Krieger Vasena's strategies targeted working-class gains and sought to weaken the power of organized labor, to help Onganía consolidate his authority.

deviations, reorder and redirect national life"; to "impose a harmonious relationship between the State, capital, and labor," with each sector playing its specific role; and finally, echoing remarks by Videla, to bring the working class into the national reorganization process as active participants.[16] The Ministry became the face of the regime's efforts to "remake" labor relations in Argentina, both domestically (through legislation, enforcement, and dialogue) and globally (through the country's involvement in international bodies, like the ILO). Though the Ministry's rhetoric was lofty from the start, many recognized that these changes would take time. As one report described, "it is logical…that after a period in which the union structure held —according to general consensus— excessive influence and power, the labor question would take a prolonged period for its total definition."[17] Unpacking this "prolonged period" is central to understanding the dictatorship's attempts to remake the national community.

In many ways, Liendo was an interesting choice, and his appointment indicated the PRN's complex internal dynamics. A career soldier, Liendo joined the Army at eighteen and rose steadily during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1962, he spent time in the United States for a course in advanced command strategies. Months before the 1976 coup, Liendo was promoted to Brigadier General and given command of the Sixth Mountain Infantry Brigade. Although Liendo embodied a conservative *militar*—having dedicated his life to the Army and the *patria*—his place within the dictatorship was less clear. He did not subscribe to the right-liberalism of Martínez de Hoz, nor did he share the extremism of *ultristas* like Guillermo Suárez Mason.[18] This does not mean that Liendo's *azulista* philosophy was incompatible with repression. As Minister of Labor, he vocally supported the fight against "subversion," and he oversaw the application of draconian labor laws

[16] "El general Liendo expresó que los obreros deben participar del proceso," *La Opinión* (May 2, 1976).
[17] "La Junta trata hoy las reformas a la Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales," *Clarín* (December 12, 1976).
[18] For a more thorough engagement with the politics of the Argentine Right, see Lewis, "The Right and Military Rule."

that severely restricted workers' rights and crippled salaries. Yet Liendo remained more open to dialogue than most members of the dictatorship. He saw communication as critical to the *Proceso*'s success and specifically to winning buy-in from the trade unions. His tenure at the Ministry of Labor saw several moments of conflict with labor leaders, but his public rhetoric consistently emphasized that dialogue was necessary for the normalization of labor relations—even when that stance provoked sharp criticism from within the dictatorship.

Liendo's public positions should not be taken at face value, but neither does not mean they should be dismissed out of hand. Two key pieces of evidence attest to Liendo's sincere belief in dialogue and normalization. First, these ideas were cornerstones not only of his time as Minister of Labor (March 24, 1976–February 8, 1979), but also in 1981 when he served as Minister of the Interior. At Interior, he immediately cultivated connections with political parties and pushed to end the prohibition on political participation. During Liendo's approximately twenty days as interim head of state (after the palace coup against Viola at the end of 1981), his first public statement reaffirmed that despite the moment's uncertainty the *apertura* (opening) remained the government's primary objective. His support for a controlled return to democracy was thus not limited to his time as Minister of Labor. Second, and perhaps more convincing, many of his colleagues strongly disapproved of his attitude towards organized labor. Liendo frequently clashed with Martínez de Hoz and often publicly criticized the Ministry of Economy's actions. He also butted heads with the *duros* who tended to believe that a better strategy involved crushing the unions as opposed to negotiating with them. Indeed, Liendo's departure from the Ministry of Labor in 1979 was largely a result of these tensions. The ultraright pushed for Liendo's resignation, and Videla acquiesced to relieve pressure on his own position. The demand for Liendo's head suggests

that his commitment to dialogue was genuine—and that it earned the genuine enmity of his fellow *militares*.

1.3: Authority, Power, and Discord (1976-1981)

As described in Chapter One, beyond general discontent with the direction of the country under the 1973-1976 Peronist government and a commitment to eradicating subversion, few issues gave coherence to the *Proceso*. The "labor question" might have potentially been such issue—the Armed Forces agreed that the current situation was untenable and that a drastic restructuring of the trade-union system was needed. However, the military's ideological and strategic contradictions prevented the pursuit of a single approach. Liendo found himself under assault from the technocratic right-liberals, the extremist right-corporativist faction, and the right-populists. Any mention of "normalization" provoked scoffs from the technocrats, fury from the *duros*, and frustration from the populists. Liendo's close ties to Videla, who shared the Labor Minister's viewpoint to some extent, brought only tepid support, and Liendo was often forced to face this criticism alone. The arguments over how best to reorganize (or unmake) the labor movement—and thus resolve the labor question—deepened the divisions within an already fractured military. The Ministry of Labor quickly became an easy target for this discontent, and between 1976 and 1979 the regime's economic policies and public criticism from other high-ranking officers often undermined its strategies.

While the tensions within the military were potentially embarrassing when they spilled over into the public, the enmity between Liendo and Martínez de Hoz proved more consequential for labor relations. The Labor/Economy clash involved a combination of policy, ideology, and personality.[19] A member of one of Argentina's most prominent oligarchic families, Martínez de

[19] See, among many others, "Liendo estuvo con Martínez de Hoz," *La Opinión* (August 20, 1976); "Strikes highlight problems of Argentina economy," *LAER*, Vol. 4, No. 36 (September 17, 1976); "Liendo encomió la actitud obrera

Hoz had already demonstrated his lack of concern about the "normal" functioning of democracy and his hostility towards organized labor.[20] Unsurprisingly, he displayed little compunction about using his new position as a weapon against Argentina's working class. Shortly after taking office on April 2, 1976, the Ministry of Economy allocated to itself the power to determine salaries for all workers (public and private), thus aggressively inserting the dictatorship into conflicts over wages.[21] This became a battleground for Liendo and Martínez de Hoz, who disagreed as to what constituted adequate salaries. In September 1976, while visiting an auto plant during a labor conflict, Liendo publicly undercut the Ministry of Economy's policies by admitting that wages were "insufficient" and met with rank-and-file employees to listen to their complaints.[22] Their mutual dislike reflected not only contrasting plans for the labor movement, but also their different subject positions within Argentina's political right. If Liendo exemplified a staid military conservatism rooted in the middle class, the Martínez de Hoz was the embodiment of the *porteño* elite, a member of the highest stratum of the oligarchy who had spent his life cultivating a transnational sensibility within the realm of global finance.[23] Not only did the two men disagree on how reorganize the trade-union system, they also failed to establish any productive personal relationship.[24]

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ante la difícil situación económica," *La Opinión* (September 19, 1976); "Prosigue el estudio del reajuste de los sueldos," *La Opinión* (December 11, 1976); "Resguardar el principio de autoridad," *Somos* (February 11, 1977); Claudio Polosecki, "La situación salarial," *Clarín* (September 21, 1977).

[20] Martínez de Hoz had, in fact, already served briefly as Minister of Economy under de facto President José María Guido in 1963, and as president of Acindar oversaw the brutal repression of his own workers in 1975. See Basualdo and Lorenz, "Los trabajadores industriales argentinos en la primera mitad de la década del '70."

[21] Law 21,307; Decree 906/76.

[22] "Strike highlight problems of Argentina economy," *LAER* (September 17, 1976)

[23] For example, Martínez de Hoz studied at Cambridge prior to returning to Argentina and maintained close ties to members of the international banking class, including the Rockefellers, throughout his career.

[24] Although Martínez de Hoz and Liendo disliked each other, the Economy Minister did maintain personal relationships with other members of the Armed Forces, including with then-Minister of the Interior, General Albano Harguindeguy. The two men took an extended hunting trip through Patagonia in March 1978. See "Ministros en el Sur," *Somos* (March 17, 1978).

The friction between Liendo and Martínez de Hoz mirrored tensions throughout the regime. Massera and the Navy schemed to oust Videla, while Díaz Bessone and Suárez Mason pursued an extreme-right agenda, and the Videla-Viola faction attempted to chart a "middle path."[25] Meanwhile, broader concerns over the economy, a possible democratic *apertura*, and labor unrest prevented the regime from uniting behind a single approach. The first major cabinet reshuffling of Videla's de facto presidency at the end of 1978 saw Liendo forced out and replaced by Llamil Reston, also an Army Brigadier General with close ties to the new Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Roberto Viola.[26] Most assumed that Reston would follow the same course as Liendo, lending support to the idea that Liendo's forced retirement was more retributive than related to policy disagreement.[27] Reston, like his predecessor, belonged to the "moderate" (Videla-Viola) faction of the military, and although he perhaps did not emphasize dialogue as much, his appointment did little to shift the orientation of the Ministry.[28] The political motivations behind the criticisms of Liendo's lax approach become more apparent given that under Reston the enforcement of many of the regime's more draconian labor laws seemingly experienced a notable drop-off.

Throughout this period, the Ministry of Labor confronted a series of political and structural factors that frequently impeded its authority. Opponents of negotiation, including the *duros* of the ultraright (Minister of Planning Díaz Bessone, Suárez Mason, Menéndez); the right-populist faction led by Massera; and the right-liberals, notably Minister of Interior Harguindeguy and

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[25] On these internal conflicts, see Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*, esp. Chapter 1.
[26] See "Argentina: Videla tightens his grip," *Latin American Political Report*, Vol. 12, No. 43 (November 3, 1978). Liendo himself was reportedly happy to be free of his burden, asking to be transferred back to "the tranquility of a military posting." He was appointed to the Estado Mayor, where he served until he was named Secretary of the Interior under Viola in 1981.
[27] Claudio Polosecki, "El nuevo ministro de Trabajo," *Clarín* (Jan. 29, 1979).
[28] Labor leaders and shop-floor activists tended to recall Reston as more gregarious than Liendo, and in some cases people remarked on his friendliness with Peronist leaders. In contrast, JH claimed that Liendo had been more willing to receive union leaders, while Reston generally refused to see him.

Martínez de Hoz, all complicated efforts to maintain channels of communication with labor leaders. Further, mentions of "normalization" provoked immediate and vocal disapproval from one or more of these sectors, forcing Liendo to retreat and clarify that any normalization was conditional, and that the current circumstances were not right.[29] Even his policy agenda, such as it was, clashed with Martínez de Hoz's strategies, especially on salaries and employment. The Ministry of Labor also found itself hemmed in by structural factors. Most significantly, the economic slide of the mid-1970s continued through the rest of the decade before a full-fledged collapse at the start of the 1980s shook the country's financial sector to its core. Any concrete steps imagined by the government to transform the material conditions of Argentina's working class were necessarily circumscribed by spiraling inflation and deindustrialization (in large part resulting from Martínez de Hoz's policies).[30] Yet despite the common narrative that the Ministry of Labor simply ceased operating during the PRN, it continued to play an active role in the creation and enforcement, albeit selective enforcement, of labor legislation, and in the mediation of conflicts between capital and labor. Though limited by circumstance, the Ministry's policies, actions, and discourse continued to impact the everyday functioning of labor relations across the country.

1.4: Collapse and Normalization (1981-1983)

At the same time, the trade-union hierarchy confronted its own prolonged internal battle dating back to at least the late 1960s, when serious challenges to orthodox Peronist labor leaders emerged on shop floors and in union halls. Though short-lived, the CGT de los Argentinos (founded March 1968 and effectively dissolved in 1970) represented a major success for "open"

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[29] See, among others, "Liendo recibe hoy a los sindicalistas," *Clarín* (January 3, 1977); "Liendo anunció que se disolverá la Confederación General Económica," *Clarín* (May 2, 1977); "Normalización," *Clarín* (May 2, 1977).
[30] Gerchunoff and Llach, esp. Chapter 8.

or "transformative" unionism, which saw organized labor as a dynamic mechanism for limiting capitalist control over civil society. This perspective contrasted with "closed" or "integrationist" unionism that advocated a professionalized unionism strongly identified with and dependent on the state, and less concerned with challenging the existing capital-labor dynamic.[31] As Luciana Zorzoli has suggested, this distinction cannot be reduced to labeling the former "political" and the latter somehow "apolitical." Zorzoli argues that integrationist unionism implied "ideals of social organization" that carried political weight—although their politics were not necessarily overt or revolutionary.[32] Importantly, the separation between these currents ebbed and flowed as their interests diverged and overlapped with changing circumstances. Individual actors and/or groups could move back and forth without much difficulty during the late 1960s and through most of the 1970s.

These tensions between transformative and integrationist unionism cannot be divorced from the regime's attitude (or attitudes) towards organized labor. Following the coup, the intervention of the CGT and most of the country's strongest trade unions left the labor movement searching for a path forward. This moment might have produced a truce that would have allowed labor to offer a coherent challenge to the incoming administration. Instead, the split between "closed" and "open" unionism intensified and organized labor experienced further fragmentation. The non-intervened unions debated how to approach relations with the military, and two general trends consolidated. The first pursued a more conciliatory position, while the second adopted a more confrontational approach. These efforts were complicated by the legal uncertainty

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[31] See, among others, Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a las organizaciones sindicales durante la última dictadura militar argentina"; Richard Hyman, *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1975); James, *Resistance and Integration*.

[32] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a las organizaciones sindicales," 488. Obviously, the origins of this struggle between "transformative" and "integrationist" unionism predate the rise of the CGTA and can be traced back to the rise of Perón and perhaps even earlier. See James, *Resistance and Integration*; However, the CGT de los Argentinos (1968-1971/72) marked a high point for this oppositional attitude's appeal and legitimacy among Argentine workers.

engendered by the dictatorship's aggressive legislative overhaul alongside its inconsistent enforcement. Between 1976 and 1983, the closed/integrationist current formed several bodies, including the *Comisión de Gestión y Trabajo* (CGyT), the *Comisión Nacional de Trabajo* (CNT), and eventually the CGT Azopardo. Similarly, the open/transformative current evolved through a series of organisms that included several transitory commissions, the *Comisión de los 25* (also called "los 25"), and the CGT Brasil. These tendencies represented most unions, but other groupings—like the self-described "Independientes" and the intervened unions—also fought for a place at the bargaining table.[33] Much like the Armed Forces' ideological divisions, the labor movement's factions demonstrated a high degree of adaptability that complicates hard-and-fast characterizations. At different moments, these currents participated in direct actions against the dictatorship, and on other occasions they pursued dialogue and negotiation.

Efforts to unite the labor movement's disparate elements began as early as 1977, but they were frequently scuttled by tactical disagreements and competition between labor leaders. Not until March 29, 1982 did the two main tendencies coordinate a direct action, organizing a national day of protest against the *Proceso* and bringing tens of thousands of people to the Plaza de Mayo to demand democratization. Just four days later, many of those same demonstrators returned to the Plaza—only this time the crowd, including thousands of Argentine workers, celebrated the government's invasion of the Malvinas. Days later, several prominent labor leaders, including Saúl Ubaldini, Secretary General of the CGT Brasil, traveled to the Malvinas to participate in the April 7 inauguration ceremony for General Mario Benjamín Menéndez, the new military governor of the islands.[34] Despite this show of support, following the military's ignominious defeat the same

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[33] See, especially, Santiago Senén González, *Diez años de sindicalismo: de Perón al Proceso* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1984).

[34] Carla Sangrilli, "La combativa CGT en tiempos de la guerra de Malvinas (1982)," *Revista Escuela de Historia,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (January-June 2012). Their willing presence on the islands is further complicated by the fact that Galtieri's

trade unionists wasted no time in pulling another about-face. In June 1982, they demanded the Armed Forces relinquish power and step aside.

These rapid swings were not simply consequences of the Malvinas' impact on the collective national psyche, nor are they meant to evidence the cynicism of the labor leaders (though that was almost certainly a factor). Rather, the fluidity of trade-union attitudes towards the dictatorship—even after the regime's control had declined notably—demonstrate the complicated and often paradoxical conditions which these actors, both from the labor movement and the dictatorship, were obliged to navigate. Between 1976 and 1983, neither organized labor nor the Armed Forces and their allies managed to articulate a singular cohesive vision. Everyone involved faced internal and external challenges that created uncertainty and contradiction. Understanding this period requires caution against simplifying these complexities or overlooking apparent paradoxes in order to fit certain positions to established narratives.

After the Malvinas War, the military managed to cling to power for nearly eighteen months, attempting to set the terms for the transition to democracy—and to protect themselves and their "accomplishments" from any consequences that a new government might try to impose. On July 2, 1982, Héctor Villaveirán became the first civilian Minister of Labor in more than six years. Villaveirán, a labor lawyer with historical connections to the trade-union leadership and a former undersecretary of labor in the 1950s, was tasked with managing the increasingly visible manifestations of worker opposition and continuing the reapplication process for unions under the new Law of Professional Associations.[35] From 1981 to 1983, hundreds of unions filed for recertification per the terms established by Law 22,105, meaning that even as the dictatorship's

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appointed Governor, General Menéndez, had led state repression against "subversives," including many labor organizers, during "Operativo Independencia" in Tucumán in 1975.

[35] Gerardo Munck, *Authoritarianism and Democratization: Soldiers and Workers in Argentina, 1976-1983* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1998).

authority waned this aspect of their project remained at least partially viable.[36] The PRN's final year saw certain prohibitions relaxed and laws repealed, yet the labor movement's internal divisions continued to undermine its ability to resist the partial reification of policies instituted by the military since 1976. Normalization thus brought a paradoxical mix of formal recognition for practices that had been tacitly accepted under the PRN, combined with trade-union participation in structures created by the dictatorship to remake organized labor. No single cause can explain this contradiction, but a close reading of the laws themselves helps shed some light on the issue.

Part II: Law and Citizenship

Two related impulses guide this engagement with the Ministry of Labor's laws, decrees, statutes, and resolutions: first, the need for a detailed exploration of the *Proceso*'s legal corpus and the official discourse(s) associated with it; and second an analysis of how this legislation and language contributed to the rhetorical construction of what I argue can be referred to as a new "worker-citizen." Reading these laws as aspirationally productive of new subjectivities, rather than simply restrictive, contributes to the recovery of the dictatorship's complex vision for Argentina's future citizenry and new national identity.

2.1: Labor Law

2.1.1: Law and Legality

The notion that the rule of law is incompatible with de facto government has at times hindered efforts to take seriously the PRN's legalism.[37] Claims that laws enacted by non-

[36] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales durante la última dictadura militar argentina," esp. 504. The reasons for this trend are complex, and unfortunately lie outside the scope of this chapter. However, in part the explanation potentially lies with the need of union hierarchies to reassert control over their bases, which became easier to do under the conditions established by Law 22,105. Tension between union leadership and the rank-and-file might therefore help explain an important aspect of why normalization followed the path that it did.
[37] Schwartz, "Las leyes de la dictadura," 2-3.

democratic regimes are innately illegal simply do not reflect most historical experience. Enrique Groisman has suggested that there exist three possible responses to a break in the constitutional order: the negation of all de facto governmental acts as juridically invalid; the acceptance of certain acts that cannot be undone and that obey urgent needs, restricting their reach and limiting their temporal authority; or the admission of their unrestricted validity.[38] It is these latter two options—limited acceptance or general validation—that frequently have been adopted after redemocratization, as jurisprudence and the new legislative order incorporate aspects of authoritarian legalism. This alone indicates the need to take seriously the rule of law under de facto governments, given that the restoration of "normal" rule rarely (if ever) signifies the total erasure of the previous administrative state's actions.

More generally, the partial suspension of constitutional order did not negate the fact that the law continued to matter deeply for people's everyday lived experience. The Armed Forces' invocation of Article 23 to legitimate its power did not stop workers, trade unionists, management, and corporate leaders from making claims to the law. Neither did the state of exception mean that the governmental apparatus of the state ceased to function, as the Ministry of Labor and its dependencies continued to participate in disputes over salaries, working conditions, the right to organize, and workers' use of direct actions. Even as the *Proceso* attempted to concretize its legitimacy, its relationship to and manipulation of legality problematized that objective. Though legality and legitimacy may be related, the regime was repeatedly forced to confront the distance between the letter of the law and its practical consequences, especially as that gap continued to grow.

[38] Groisman, "Los gobiernos de facto en el derecho argentino," 36.

This disconnect was not immediately apparent, although one might suggest that it was present in the PRN's founding documents.[39] Tacit—or overt—approval from sectors of civil society after March 24 gave the impression that the military enjoyed something approaching consensus. The *Proceso* wasted little time in attempting to consolidate these hints of legitimacy through the overhaul of Argentina's legal institutions. From March 1976 to March 1977, the Ministry of Labor sanctioned hundreds of laws, decrees, statutes, resolutions, and decree-laws outlining the new, albeit somewhat inconsistent, parameters for "acceptable" trade unionism. Most of these measures were unmistakably repressive, but they simultaneously left or created new spaces for permissible action by workers and their representative organizations. Rather than prohibit trade unions outright, the regime focused on deconstructing the historical relationship between (majority Peronist) union bureaucrats and the (majority Peronist) shop floor. Central to this effort was the claim that unions did not represent their constituents, and instead were instruments for the personal enrichment of their leadership. While some on the far-right would have happily eliminated unions altogether, the Videla-Viola faction, as well as the right-populists, believed they needed to create a discursive space for "good unionism" to replace Peronist structures. Labor legislation and norms, together with official rhetoric that celebrated an idealized vision of the Argentine worker, became the means through which they pursued that objective.

2.1.2: Early Labor Law (1976-1977)

The Armed Forces' swift action to redefine the limits of union activity after March 24 evidenced their recognition of the labor movement as one of the only forces capable of challenging their authority. Their legislative agenda undermined key protections and rights for rank-and-file

[39] Paula Canelo has convincingly argued not only that the PRN's tripartite structure ensured its failure, but also that the regime's ambitions were incompatible with its tactics in nearly every area except the war on subversion. See Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*.

workers and union delegates, and the Ministry of Labor intervened many of the country's largest unions, federations, and confederations. On March 24, Law 21,261 suspended the right to strike, together with all other forms of direct action that threatened normal productive rhythms. Like most of the PRN's policies, these restrictions nominally applied to both employees and employers. The law borrowed from legislation enacted in 1966 (under de facto President Onganía) that established a range of punishments: fines for business that failed to comply, and the possibility of summary dismissal for workers who interrupted production.[40] The same day, Law 21,263 struck down two articles of the existing Law of Professional Associations (Law 20,615, enacted in 1974 by Perón) and three articles of Decree 1,045/74, which effectively invalidated the "fuero sindical" on the grounds that it violated the guarantee of equal protections under the law established in Article 18 of the Argentine Constitution.[41] Couched in language "defending" equality, the law effectively stripped union delegates of many of their protections and exposed them to possible retribution and dismissal by employers.

These laws, together with a third (Law 21,270, that intervened the *Confederación General de Trabajo* and seized its bank accounts, funds, and patrimony), were accompanied by Decree 9 (March 24) and a Ministerial resolution, Resolution 2 (April 2), that reinforced the suspension of all collective actions by associations of workers, employers, or professionals apart from the activity related to their internal administration and the management of their *obras sociales*.[42] In both the decree and the resolution, this suspension was "transient." However, their text referred to "process[es] of disorder, corruption, and subversion" that had affected the unions during the previous administration, with the implication that the restrictions would continue until these

[40] "Ley 21.261 del 24/3/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo* (Year 18, No. 4, April 1976), 113.
[41] "Ley 21.263 del 24/3/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo* (Year 18, No. 4, April 1976), 113.
[42] "Decreto No. 9 del 24/3/76"; "Resolución No. 2 del 24/3/76 (M.T.)," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo* (Year 18, No. 4, April 1976), 114-115.

problems were satisfactorily resolved.[43] Workers holding union positions (regardless of their rank) would "only be able to invoke their union status…in defense of individual rights, concretized in complaints pertaining to non-compliance of legal norms or valid *convenios*, and for activity correspondent with the internal administration of their respective entities and their *obras sociales*."[44] Together, these measures not-so-subtly implied that the unions had overstepped their bounds and needed to be checked.

This legislation underscored two related goals: a) protection of the productive regime from organized resistance by the labor movement, and b) the depoliticization of the trade-union system. Following the example of previous military regimes, the intervention of the CGT, the largest and most powerful workers' organization, eliminated a potential site for opposition to government actions, and the Ministry's laws, decrees, and resolutions laid the groundwork for the eventual separation of unions from politics. This initial phase took place against the backdrop of state violence supposedly aimed at "subversives," but which increasingly targeted the rank-and-file. Initially, the legal punishments associated with these norms were relatively minor, sometimes referencing previously existing disciplinary regimens. However, as the dictatorship continued to produce new legislation over the next several months, and as labor found spaces to challenge capital, the state, or both, the consequences became increasingly grave.

The Ministry of Labor expanded and codified these initial proscriptions over the subsequent months. Many measures responded to Martínez de Hoz's desire to shrink the state sector and reduce public employment. Law 21,260, passed just after the coup, authorized the firing of any public-sector employee for "reasons of security." This anticipated the passage of Law 21,274, also known as the Ley de Prescindibilidad (Law of Disposability) which allowed for the

[43] "Decreto No. 9 del 24/3/76," 114.
[44] "Resolución No. 2 del 24/3/76 (M.T.)," 114.

dismissal of state employees for "service reasons" through December 31, 1976. The text of the law argued for the necessity of "a real and concrete cleansing process of the Public Administration, without partisan or sectorial connotations," but unsurprisingly many of those fired occupied important positions in their unions and/or had a history of labor activism.[45] By authorizing summary dismissal for "service reasons," the protections for public employment enshrined in the Constitution effectively disappeared. This project of "rationalizing" the state sector was furthered by policies like Decree 1,230/76, which created the "Permanent Commission for Administrative Rationalization," and Law 21,485 (December 30), which extended the period of application for the Ley de Prescindibilidad by an additional twelve months.[46]

Other measures extended the state's intervention into relations between labor and private capital. Law 21,297 (April 23) abolished more than a dozen articles of the former Ley de Contrato de Trabajo and authorized the Ministry of Labor to form investigative commissions tasked with studying and creating new norms concerning the right to strike; the regulation of rural work; the regulation of specialized legal statutes of labor; and the labor code.[47] On May 7, Law 21,307, jointly authored by the Ministries of Economy and Labor, enabled the Poder Ejecutivo Nacional (National Executive Power, PEN) to set the minimum wage and establish norms governing salary increases for all productive activity.[48] In July, Law 21,356 suspended all elections and assemblies for employer associations and associations of workers. Because it precluded the possibility of elected representation, this legislation also authorized the Ministry of Labor to extend the mandates

[45] "Ley No. 21.274 del 29/3/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 4 (April 1976), 119-120. It was this law that facilitated the firings at Luz y Fuerza in October 1976 that precipitated the conflict which produced the disappearance of Oscar Smith in February 1977.
[46] "Decreto 1.230 del 6/7/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 7 (July 1976), 386; "Ley 21.485 del 30/12/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 19, No. 1 (January 1977), 72.
[47] "Ley No. 21.297 del 23/4/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 5 (May 1976), 147.
[48] "Ley 21,307 del 7/5/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 5 (May 1976), 155-158.

of all current union delegates and to intervene those associations as necessary.[49] The Ministry framed its role as "ensuring institutional continuity" so that the unions, with the Ministry's approval, could carry out those activities that still fell under their purview—internal administration and management of the *obras sociales*. Establishing the Ministry's control over the extension (or removal) of representatives privileged "the achievement of the ends and policies concurrently established in the Acta for the Process of National Reorganization and in the Acta fixing the Purpose and Basic Objectives of the Process of National Reorganization."[50] This new legal corpus thus simultaneously formalized state control over labor relations while also attempting to bring key structures and institutions into line with the dictatorship's broader discursive framework.

Organized labor, however, was not prepared to accept these changes without protest. A series of wildcat strikes swept the auto industry in August and September 1976, paralyzing production at several of the largest factories in the country. This was followed by organized opposition from La Fraternidad (the railroad conductors' union), and shortly thereafter Luz y Fuerza workers began their *quite de colaboración*, refusing to comply with SEGBA's new work schedules. During the final months of 1976 and the first months of 1977, the Armed Forces responded to these challenges with a wave of violence against union delegates and rank-and-file workers. This repression was often carried out with the complicity or active cooperation of industrialists, who provided lists of "troublemakers" to the security forces. In numerous cases, troops were stationed at factory doors, supposedly to control entry and exit but in reality as an intimidation tactic, while the military occasionally established clandestine detention centers at the worksites themselves.[51] While the war against "subversion" had begun prior to March 24, during

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[49] "Ley 21,356 del 22/7/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 8 (August 1976), 383.
[50] "Ley 21,356 del 22/7/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 8 (August 1976), 383.
[51] Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina." Most infamously, Ford established a clandestine detention center within the factory itself. This case returned to international prominence with the

this period it was extended into the workplace, and state repression became a tool against Argentines whose ties to *guerrillismo* or leftist movements were tenuous, at best.

The PRN responded to this opposition by workers with renewed commitment to its legislative project, approving several critical regulations before the end of 1976. The first, enacted on September 9 in response to growing labor unrest, was Law 21,400, also called the "Ley de Seguridad Industrial" (Law of Industrial Security). Invoking powers conferred by the *estado de sitio*, this measure reaffirmed the regime's earlier proscriptions, including the prohibition on all direct actions (strikes, slowdowns, interruptions, etc.).[52] This law, however, differed from its predecessors in the punishments that it established for noncompliance. Instead of fines or possible dismissal, Law 21,400 mandated up to six years in prison for workers who participated in such actions, and terms of up to ten years for those who instigated and/or organized them. Like earlier legislation, 21,400 applied to both employers and employees, yet most understood its passage at this specific moment as proof that the real targets were not the industrialists who might lock out workers, but rather the workers who were mobilizing across different industries. Despite this intent, the reciprocal limitations spelled out in the law would prove significant in struggles against management during the years to come.

Meanwhile, pressure on public-sector employees continued to mount with Law 21,418, which excluded several categories of state workers from collective bargaining agreements.[53] This proved a precursor to more dramatic legislation. On December 12, the regime sanctioned Law 21,476, invalidating clauses of existing collective bargaining agreements in both the public and

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conviction of two former Ford executives in December 2018. See Uki Goñi, "Argentina: two ex-Ford executives convicted in torture case," *The Guardian* (December 11, 2018).

[52] "Ley 21.400 del 3/9/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 9 (September 1976), 454.

[53] "Ley No. 21,418 del 17/9/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 10 (October 1976), 584. Law 14,250 (first enacted in 1953) defined the parameters for negotiating and enforcing collective bargaining agreements between workers and employers.

private sectors, but "fundamentally in the public sector or in the businesses of the State [that] have meant privileges or differential situations, with grave impact on the economic and financial situations of those organisms."[54] The clauses corresponded to protections and rights won over the previous three decades, and their elimination dramatically undermined the security and stability of trade-union officials and representatives throughout Argentina. Again, the discursive justification behind these policies lay in delegitimizing organized labor by highlighting the inequality of a representational structure that had (supposedly) functioned on privilege. The dictatorship further expanded its intervention into labor relations via several additional measures. Decree 2,908/76 (November 19) set the basic remunerations (i.e. the minimum wages) for all existing *Convenciones Colectivas de Trabajo*, backdated to November 1, carrying through on the premise of Law 21,307 and giving the PEN (and, by extension, Martínez de Hoz) control over salaries for nearly all Argentine workers.[55] The Economy Minister asserted this new control through a series of decrees in December, setting the wages for key segments of private industry and much of the public sector.[56]

The labor legislation produced between March 24 and December 31, 1976 shared several defining characteristics. While the immediate objective was to limit the labor movement's ability to oppose government action, we must recognize that the limits established by these laws were partial and contradictory. The Videla/Viola faction of the dictatorship hoped to replace the Peronist union structure, which they considered overly politicized, with demobilized professional associations. The consistent emphasis on the need for "legitimate representation" and descriptions of the "distortions" of the previous era implied that before March 24 the unions had been mere

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[54] "Ley No. 21.476 del 10/12/76,' *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 12 (December 1976), 715.
[55] "Decreto No. 2.908 del 19/11/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 12 (December 1976), 641.
[56] See "Decreto No. 3.349 del 22/12/76"; "Decreto No. 3.575 del 30/12/76"; "Decreto No. 3.576 del 30/12/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo*, Year 19, No. 1 (January 1977), 1-2, 83-85.

instruments of demagoguery, failing to defend the interests of their members.[57] To some extent this tactic worked: throughout the first years of the PRN, rank-and-file workers and trade unionists tended to focus on problems related to their economic well-being while engaging less with overtly political issues. Yet despite their rhetoric, the regime's internal tensions complicated efforts to define what the "appropriate" terrain of union activity actually was. The policies described so far impacted the shop floor in different ways, but the dictatorship would eventually put its faith in the overhaul of the Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales to effect the promised refoundational change.

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The measures that gave the *Proceso* the power to set and manipulate public- and private-sector salaries had consequences beyond their effects on workers' pockets. They inserted the government more directly into the management of labor conditions and labor relations, affecting the relationship of state and industry. Although management proved willing to collaborate with (and even request the help of) the Armed Forces on various occasions, notably when it came to handling "troublemakers" among their employees, sectors of the military believed that domestic industry, like labor, required "disciplining."[58] The state's role as overseer of the private sector introduced new problems, notably the intensification of tensions between the Ministries of Labor and Economy. While Martínez de Hoz prioritized the fight against inflation, using legislation to effectively freeze wages for most working Argentines, Liendo's primary concern throughout late 1976 and into 1977, handed down to him from the Junta, was preventing labor unrest and

[57] "La ley de Asociaciones Profesionales y las obras sociales," *La Nación*, 7/13; Luis Domenianni, "Prosigue el estudio del reajuste de los sueldos," *La Opinión* (12/11/1976); "Prorrogan la suspensión de un artículo de la ley de gremios," *Clarín* (10/1/1976).
[58] Dicósimo, "Represión estatal, violencia y relaciones laborales durante la última dictadura militar en la Argentina," 1-2.

maintaining stable employment. Thus, he believed that higher wages (and more stable working conditions) were necessities, even if they had to be guaranteed by the state.

The conflict between Economy and Labor spilled over into the public eye on multiple occasions. In early September 1976, after Martínez de Hoz authorized a 12% increase in salaries, auto workers at GM, Mercedes Benz Argentina, IKA-Renault, and Chrysler responded with a wave of wildcat strikes and slowdowns, protesting the adjustment for failing to keep pace with rising cost of living. Liendo, touring the GM Barracas factory, admitted that wages were insufficient, but noted that they would not be readjusted for the rest of the year.[59] The Labor Minister further stated that he believed the origins of the conflicts to be socio-economic, as opposed to political-ideological, and chose not to enforce the recently-enacted Law 21,400 that mandated dismissals and prison terms for hundreds of workers.[60] Liendo directly contradicted the Ministry of Economy, which defended the recent raises. However, his reluctance to follow the letter of the law and prosecute the striking workers did not extend to him taking up their cause, even if he claimed to understand their discontent. At least in public, he made no effort to challenge or undermine Martínez de Hoz's decision leaving salaries at their current level through 1976.

The dictatorship's role in determining wages and arbitrating salary conflicts brought further complications. Despite the rhetoric of rationalization and liberalization, in practice the dictatorship expanded its involvement in most economic sectors. The contradictions of this "authoritarian neoliberalism" created tensions between the regime and Argentina's industrialists. Though companies were technically permitted to increase salaries above the official rates (provided they did not pass those costs on to consumers), doing so undermined the Ministry of Economy's control

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[59] "Se normaliza el cuadro laboral en las fábricas de automotores," *La Opinión* (9/11/76); "Strikes highlight problems of Argentine economy," *LAER*, Vol. 4, No. 36 (September 17, 1976).
[60] "Strikes highlight problems of Argentine economy," LAER, Vol. 4, No. 36 (September 17, 1976).

over the national situation. This problem emerged as early as May 1976, with Martínez de Hoz concerned that businesses were granting raises independent of official standards.[61] The reasons behind this were complex, but in part they reflected some combination of management's desires for a productive workforce and to avoid prolonged conflicts that, under the dictatorship, had fewer channels for institutional resolution. The passage of Law 21,400 in September, following the auto workers' strikes, responded in part to this tension by giving the regime (and to some extent management) another tool to quell worker unrest. Yet this did not resolve the more fundamental disconnect about acceptable salary levels, and private industry's wage adjustments continued to create difficulties for the Ministries of Labor and Economy as they tried to assert their authority across all levels of labor relations.

Besides creating and enforcing new labor policies, the dictatorship wielded an additional tactic that significantly impacted labor relations. From the 1930s, the practice of "intervening" trade unions, federations, and confederations had been a common tactic for the federal government to assert direct control over organizations it considered troublesome. The reasons for interventions varied widely, as did the form of intervention. Typically, interventions involved the replacement of the organization's leadership by military or government administrators, and the seizure of funds, bank accounts, and patrimony that pertained to these entities.[62] Though this strategy was not exclusively applied to worker organizations (during the twentieth century the state intervened employers' associations, public and private companies, and even municipal and/or provincial

[61] "Argentina's economy runs out of control," LAER, Vol. 4, No. 19 (May 14, 1976).
[62] By the mid-twentieth century, these assets could total many millions of dollars for some of the larger trade unions, and union federations and confederations.

governments), after the 1955 *Revolución Libertadora*, trade unions, federations, and confederations experienced interventions with the highest frequency.[63]

On March 24, the PRN intervened the country's largest labor confederation (the CGT), and in the subsequent days and weeks dozens of prominent unions followed. The national leaderships of numerous powerful unions and federations, including the UOM, SMATA, UOCRA, and the AOT, were intervened, and military personnel took control of their assets and daily operations.[64] However, most Argentine trade unions utilized a chapter model, and while these interventions affected the highest levels of labor leadership, individual chapters and locals often retained some or most of their autonomy.[65] Luciana Zorzoli has suggested that focusing solely on the intervention of the national leadership of SMATA, for example, where the Secretary General José Rodríguez was replaced by a military interventor, obscures the fact that many regional and local delegates remained in their administrative roles.[66] To overlook this distinction risks eliding potentially significant continuities. Further, the rationales for interventions remain blurry. Though the justification for certain actions, like intervening the CGT, appear self-evident, others—like the Union of Gastronomic Employees and Workers of Tucumán (per Ministry of Labor Resolution 762 on October 20, 1976)—are less immediately explicable.[67] A systematic and comprehensive analysis of interventions requires further research, and unfortunately lies outside the scope of this

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[63] Notwithstanding, the third Peronist government carried out numerous interventions between 1973 and 1975, including intervening five provincial administrations (Formosa, Córdoba, Mendoza, Santa Cruz, and Salta).

[64] The Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM) represented metalworkers; the Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines de Transporte Automotor (SMATA) represented autoworkers; the Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina (UOCRA) represented construction workers; and the Asociación Obrera Textil de la República Argentina (AOT) represented textile workers. These are just a handful of the unions that the PRN intervened after March 24, but they represented a significant portion of the country's industrial workforce and evidenced the dictatorship's tendency to intervene large and powerful unions/union federations.

[65] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales."

[66] This seems also to have been the case with many of the UOM locals. See Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales."

[67] "Resolución No. 762 del 20/10/76 (M.T.)," *Boletín de Legislación del Ministerio de Trabajo*, Year 18, No. 11 (November 1976), 624. It should be noted that Tucumán had a long history of militant labor activism during the 1960s and into the 1970s which perhaps made it a target of the military regime.

dissertation. However, it is important to acknowledge that the widespread use of interventions, together with the laws, decrees, resolutions, statutes, and decree-laws that the Ministry of Labor enacted over the first year of the PRN, reflected the fervent, though not always unified, desire within the Armed Forces to dramatically transform Argentine labor relations.

2.1.3: The Law of Professional Associations

This desire was perhaps most evident in the efforts to create and implement a new Law of Professional Associations (Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales, or LAP). Remaking the legislation governing the everyday dynamics of labor and management was a key step in one of the regime's central missions: deconstructing Peronism's influence on Argentine society. In November 1973, shortly after his return, Perón enacted a new Law of Professional Associations (Law 20,615) that both reflected the input of and favored the trade union hierarchy.[68] From 1974 to March 1976, Law 20,615 established the conditions for collective bargaining, and agreements tended to benefit workers.[69] The post-March 24 suspension of collective bargaining meant that these contracts remained technically in effect even though new measures impacted specific aspects of the agreements, such as salaries. The enforcement of these *convenios* was often inconsistent (or even nonexistent), yet their continued existence as an alternative site of legal authority—for industrialists as much as for workers—created regular problems for the regime. The dictatorship hoped that a new Law of Professional Associations would transform negotiation as well as the basic structures of organized labor, including the worker-delegate ratio; the existence of second-

[68] In particular, this law benefitted the orthodox Peronist brand of trade unionism that Perón himself had constructed and sustained over the previous three decades. Prior to 1976, the Law of Professional Associations has its own unique history, which demonstrates the central role of labor legislation in Argentine political and social history. See, among others, Torre, *El gigante invertebrado*; Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón*; James, *Resistance and Integration*, esp. Chapter 9.

[69] While it is true that labor in general tended to benefit from these contracts (especially vis-à-vis capital), the real beneficiaries were often orthodox Peronist labor leaders, whose authority over the rank-and-file was reaffirmed within these contracts. See James, *Resistance and Integration*, 246; Torre, *El gigante invertebrado*.

and third-degree bodies (federations and confederations); union control of the *obras sociales*; the predominance of the closed shop; and unions' political participation.

Together with the Ministry of Labor, the *Comisión de Asesoramiento Leglislativo* (Commission of Legislative Assessment, or CAL) took on the responsibility for crafting this law. By the winter, the two had started work on a replacement for Law 20,615.[70] The CAL created a special subcommittee (Subcomisión 4) to handle the project, classified as PEN 164. Subcomisión 4 produced dozens of drafts and held numerous closed hearings with labor lawyers, trade union leaders, and military officials to discuss possible amendments to the new law. Though official sources promised the law's imminent completion in mid-1976, three-and-a-half years passed before its enactment. The new Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales demonstrated the extent of the dictatorship's commitment to its notion of legality. Given the time and effort invested, the ultimate objective was likely as much about the remaking of Argentine labor relations into the future as it was about limiting the scope of organized labor's power. These transformations would, presumably, endure long after the military relinquished its authority.

The delays and false starts were not merely a byproduct of the regime's excessive thoroughness. More than forty months of debate and negotiation also reflected deep schisms within the regime over the question of how to reorganize the labor movement. The possible prohibition of federations (second-degree organizations) and confederations (third-degree organizations) quickly became a sticking point. Some argued for strengthening and supporting first-degree bodies, while prohibiting "personería gremial" (official union status) for second/third-degree organisms. Developmentalist sectors of the military argued that although unions should (ideally) dedicate themselves to protecting the rights of their members, their role in politics and their

[70] Law 20,615, the Law of Professional Associations enacted under Perón in 1974, remained in effect, despite the invalidation and modification of several key clauses via legislation and decrees sanctioned after March 24.

historical import could not be ignored. This approach tended to favor not only free affiliation and organization, but also official recognition for federations and confederations.[71] On the far right, some *duros* even pushed for the abolition of shop-floor unions altogether, to be replaced with a more fascistic model of organizing that would eliminate the legacies of Peronism completely.[72] Though this idea rallied the extremists, it never received enough backing to become a serious possibility. The text of the new law thus became an ideological battleground, where the internal divisions of the Argentine Right played themselves out.

The legislation's progress (slow as it was) captured the interest of important sectors outside the dictatorship, as well. During 1977 and 1978, the Confederación General de Profesionales (the General Confederation of Professionals, or CGP, is an entity that represented organizations of "professionals," including doctors, lawyers, and scientists, among others) repeatedly contacted the members of Subcommittee 4 to argue, in increasingly forceful terms, for a clearer distinction between "union organisms" and "professional associations."[73] Their evident concern was that if Law 20,615 applied to all associations (of workers, employers, and professionals), the regime's modification of that legislation might be similarly broad—maybe even negatively impacting those who suspected they were not the targets of these new norms. Meanwhile, between 1976 and 1979, workers and trade unionists pushed with growing vehemence to stop the overhaul of the existing labor law and, failing that, to ensure that any new policy would respect, and protect, the historic

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[71] "La Junta trata hoy las reformas a la Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales," *Clarín* (December 2, 1976).
[72] See, among others, "La nueva ley de Asociaciones Profesionales," *La Razón* (November 1, 1976); Horacio Daniel Rodríguez, "Existen diversas alternativas para la Ley de Asociaciones," *La Opinión* (November 30, 1976); Alberto J. Schazin, "'En 1977 se juega lo que seremos en los próximos 50 años,' afirmó Massera," *La Opinión* (December 22, 1976).
[73] "Ref. Adecuada denominación de la Ley de Trabajadores," Folios 39-40, AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 12, Carpeta 1; "Memorandum" Folios 43-44, AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 12, Carpeta 1; "Ref. Solicitud de audiencia," Folios 63-64, AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 12, Carpeta 1; "Ref.: 'Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales: incorrecta denominación'," Folios 66-68, AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 12, Carpeta 1.

conquests of the labor movement. Unsurprisingly, the CGP's petitions seemed to carry more weight than those of the working class and their representatives.

The professionals' perception of the intent of the law was, essentially, accurate. The *Proceso* did intervene and eventually dissolve the Confederación General Económica (General Economic Confederation, Argentina's primary association of employers), and kept close watch on other employer and professional organizations, intervening some. Yet early reports on the debates over the Law of Professional Associations emphasized that the rank-and-file and trade unions were the objects of study. An article on July 13, 1976 reported that the Armed Forces had agreed unanimously that "workers organizations will not be able to act in political functions and that they will need to adjust their actions exclusively to their appropriate area…and contribute to a harmonious dynamic between State, capital, and labor."[74] This modified invocation of the "Basic Objectives" of the PRN made clear that the ultimate goal was not reforming the bodies composed of industrialists, financiers, or professionals, but rather the transformation of those entities that represented the country's shop floors and worksites.

The enactment of the new law was also delayed by concerns that once the new labor relations framework was put in place, the unions would once again have room to operate.[75] Thus, despite rumors in July 1976 that the final draft would be ready in 45 to 60 days, progress remained slow over the next three years. For a regime dedicated to performing, at the very least, a superficial legalism, disentangling politics and trade unionism, and confining labor to its "proper area" of operation, proved a serious challenge. Just months before the law's passage in November 1979, numerous questions remained unanswered. Even issues that had been "resolved" continued to present challenges.

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[74] "La ley de Asociaciones Profesionales y las obras sociales," *La Nación* (July 13, 1976).
[75] Roberto García, "Vasto informe sobre la política laboral," *La Opinión* (July 30, 1976).

Over the first two weeks of August, Lieutenant Coronel Luis Borla, the National Director of Professional Associations (a dependent entity of the Ministry of Labor) met with Subcommittee 4 to discuss outstanding issues on multiple occasions.[76] By this point the military had agreed to strip federations and confederations of their juridical status, but in response to a question from the committee, Borla raised a problem: eliminating second-degree organizations would create uncertainties for the *obras sociales*, because under Law 18,610 (enacted in 1970), the only entity that could legally sign collective bargaining agreements that included provisions related to the *obras* was a federation, not a union local.[84] To resolve this, Borla continued, would require not only new regulations for social welfare programs (that might eventually divorce them from the unions) but also a more complex normalization procedure to permit the *obras*' uninterrupted functioning. While the PRN always intended to reform the country's social welfare system, this discussion between Borla and the members of Subcommittee 4 evidenced their belief that existing legislation remained legally binding.[77] Legalism was not merely a smokescreen for unilateral decision-making, but rather a fundamental aspect of how the *Proceso*'s governing apparatus operated.

During 1979 alone, the CAL considered numerous versions of the Law of Professional Associations, incorporating (or at least acknowledging) comments and criticism from different sectors of the PRN and from each branch of the Armed Forces.[78] In addition to least three meetings

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[76] Borla, appointed in July 1977, held the post for several years and was one among several military officials interviewed by the CAL during this process.

[84] "Reunión del día 9 de agosto 1979," AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpeta 4. See specifically Folios 386-387.

[77] What is significant here—and elsewhere, on how to structure collective bargaining, the ratio of delegates to rank-and-file, mechanisms for internal elections, etc.—is the underlying assumption. Borla's statements come from transcripts classified by the military regime, presumably to stop them from publicly circulating. Though the preservation of all official documents carries some risk (that they will be reproduced or distributed), there is little to suggest that either Borla or the members of Subcommittee 4 ever believed these files would be made available.

[78] Folios 1-8, AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpeta 1; "Aspectos que se consideran convenientes incluir en la reglamentación," AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpeta 1, Folios 9-32.

with Borla that year, the members of Subcommittee 4 also summoned labor leaders no fewer than six times. These interviews brought *dirigentes* from prominent non-intervened unions, including Jorge Triaca, Hugo Barrionuevo, and Saúl Ubaldini, into the CAL chambers for several hours to discuss proposed legislative changes.[79] There is no record of the extent to which the Subcommittee or the Ministry of Labor incorporated their criticisms, but their mere participation in these proceedings challenges common ideas about the totalitarian nature of the regime. As Coronel Carlos Cornejo, head of the Subcommittee on Social Welfare and Labor, explained to one group of unionists, "In this meeting, we are going to do what we have done with other people, which is to say collect the inquietudes of the labor sector with respect to this law."[80]

The CAL's invitation to Peronist trade-union leaders to participate in deliberations over the new Law of Professional Associations presents a serious interpretative challenge. Given the number of meetings that occurred, it would be unwise to simply dismiss these encounters as irrelevant. Cornejo repeatedly emphasized the limits of the CAL's power, explaining that the "rules of the game" meant that its role was to assess and advise.[81] Yet, that stance does not reflect its standing as the dictatorship's primary legislative organism. The Subcommittee's attitude toward labor is difficult to analyze, as Cornejo alternates between sharply correcting statements made by union leaders and openly declaring the regime's support for the continued existence of the CGT.[82] To assume that Subcommittee 4 gave their ideas the same consideration as Borla's recommendations is almost certainly too simplistic. However, their participation in these

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[79] See meeting transcripts from July and August, 1979, AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpetas 3, 4.
[80] "Reunión del día 14 de agosto de 1979," AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpetas 4.
[81] "Reunión del 31 de julio de 1979," AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpeta 3, Folio 72; "Reunión del día 3 de agosto de 1979," AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpeta 3, Folio 128.
[82] "Reunión del día 14 de agosto de 1979," AGN Archivo Intermedio, Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo, Caja No. 11, Carpeta 4, Folios 390-394.

interviews suggests that the dictatorship's public position around the incorporation of workers into the project of national reorganization went beyond mere rhetoric, and that some members of the regime recognized that labor reform would require integrating actors within the labor movement with ties to (and perhaps power over) the rank-and-file.

By mid-1979, the new law, long promised, seemed imminent. Although some debates remained unresolved, internal and external pressures had reached a point where the Armed Forces could no longer delay. At this conjuncture—paradoxically defined by the success of the previous year's World Cup campaign and the resounding defeat of "subversion," on the one hand, and rising economic instability and increasing attention from international human rights' activists, on the other—the regime enjoyed perhaps its acme of legitimacy even as its fragility became more apparent by the day. The situation on shop floors across the country also spoke to the need for immediate action, as protests over salaries, working conditions, and factory closures intensified. Despite somewhat sparse attendance, the national day of protest on April 27 grabbed the regime's attention. A sweeping new law aimed at reforming one of Argentina's central institutions undoubtedly seemed an opportunity to build on previous successes and correct emerging problems.

The days prior to the law's enactment confirmed the volatility of national labor relations. Direct actions and conflicts involving thousands of workers in banking, meatpacking, ceramics, shoe manufacturing, and other industries rocked the country during the first week of November.[83] With pressure mounting, the PRN made its move. On Thursday, November 15, Videla signed into law the new Ley de Asociaciones Gremiales de Trabajadores (whose name incorporated the concerns of the CGP by making explicit its target). After more than three-and-a-half years of

[83] See, among others, "Paralización de varias fábricas aceiteras," *El Diario* (November 2, 1979); "80 por ciento de aumento para obreros de calzado," *El Diario* (November 2, 1979); "1.454 obreros en conflicto," *El Diario* (November 2, 1979); "Levantó los paros el personal de un banco," *La Nación* (November 3, 1979); "La CUTA definiríase hoy sobre la ley sindical," *La Nación* (November 9, 1979).

debate and anticipation, the response was immediate and widespread. The press—and especially the conservative media—praised the government and celebrated the new legislation as a major milestone. The right-leaning magazine *Somos* noted that the long and arduous process of drafting the law had achieved its objective of "reordering the Argentine labor movement and situating the unions in their specific role."[84] Even mainstream outlets recognized the potential import of Law 22,105, with several newspapers reproducing the text in its entirety and featuring detailed analyses of its implications.[85] Meanwhile, from November 15 trade-union leaders and workers' representatives lodged official protests and forceful condemnations. They argued that it stripped unions and shop-floor delegates of their powers and protections and tipped the scales in favor of capital to an unacceptable degree.

The 80+ articles of Law 22,105 outlined dramatic changes for both the shop floor and the union hierarchy. The historical prominence of the CGT meant that the dissolution of existing third-degree organizations received much of the immediate attention. However, the implications of Law 22,105 were much broader. Significantly, it gave the Ministry of Labor wide leeway to intervene directly in the internal operations of trade unions whenever such actions were deemed necessary and/or whenever a specific union was judged to have violated an existing norm. The new law also reaffirmed the dictatorship's commitment to separating labor and politics. Article 8 expressly prohibited workers' organizations from participating in political activity or supporting (directly or indirectly) political parties or candidates, while Article 10 defined the "only end" of trade unions to be the "defense of the labor interests of their workers."[86] At the same time, the law aimed to

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[84] Ariel Duarte, "Gremios: salió la nueva ley," *Somos* (November 16, 1979).
[85] See "La nueva ley para los trabajadores"; "Desaparece la CGT y se prohíbe la participación política"; "Severa Crítica de la CUTA"; "Libre afiliación de obreros", *Crónica* (November 16, 1979); "La CUTA se opone a la nueva ley y condenó la disolución de la C.G.T." and "La pirámide sindical"; *Clarín* (November 16, 1979).
[86] "Ley de Asociaciones Gremiales de Trabajadores," *Boletín Oficial* (November 20, 1979).

transform unions' daily operations in the workplace. Articles 14 through 19 imposed new terms on who could serve as a union delegate and the ratio of delegates to workers. New requirements for members of directive committees included term limits of three years, prohibitions on immediate reelections, and a minimum of four years at the current job. Candidates for internal commissions and related bodies faced the same term limits and prohibitions, but the minimum period of employment was two years. Anyone seeking a post with the union at any level was required to have a clean criminal record.[87] These measures allowed management and/or the state to exclude "troublesome" employees—those with criminal records (keeping in mind that after March 24, all direct action was criminalized), those that changed jobs often (perhaps because they had been fired from a previous position for political reasons), those with overt ideological and political commitments—from influential positions.

The institutional and shop-floor restrictions affected the everyday dynamics of labor relations, but the elimination of existing confederations produced the largest reaction. Since the mid-1940s, the *Confederación General de Trabajo* had been the backbone of the Peronist movement, even amending its official preamble in 1950 to align its politics with "the Peronist Doctrine."[88] On the day of the coup, the Armed Forces intervened the CGT and military interventors remained in charge of the confederation for the next three-and-a-half years. Discussions of the new Law of Professional Associations frequently turned on the question of the CGT's abolition—not only between the regime and trade unionists, but also among factions of the Armed Forces. However, widespread disapproval of politically powerful labor organizations within the military did not, in fact, translate to the prohibition of second- and third-degree entites.

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[87] "Ley de Asociaciones Gremiales de Trabajadores," *Boletín Oficial* (November 20, 1979).
[88] Ricardo Sidicario, "Consideraciones sociológicas sobre las relaciones entre el peronismo y la clase obrera en la Argentina, 1943-1955," in *Populismo y neopopulismo en América Latina. El problema de la Cenicienta*, 168.

Article 75 stripped all "actually existing" confederations of their *personería gremial* and juridical status, effectively eliminating the CGT at that moment. However, the legislation left open the possibility that a similar confederation could be recomposed receive official recognition in the future.[89] Thus, when Jorge Triaca, the leader of the Plastics Workers' and Employees' Union, stated that "sooner or later, under whatever form, the CGT will always be present," it was more than simple rhetoric.[90] That potential was part of the text of the law itself.

The new Law of Professional Associations represented the most sweeping attempt to restructure Argentina's trade-union system, but it was also emblematic of the tension between rhetoric and practice that defined the regime's labor policy. Law 22,105 went through dozens of drafts and years of discussion and debate, with countless articles being included/excluded at different moments. Yet despite that effort, the end result fell short of accomplishing the PRN's primary objective—creating a system capable of governing organized labor in Argentina that would eliminate the legacies of Peronism and establish a new labor-capital relationship. While the Law did introduce concrete changes, some of which aligned with the dictatorship's goals, much of its ambition remained unrealized.

2.1.4: Interventions

Law 22,105 was among the most visible strategies for the formal reorganization of Argentina's labor relations, but scholarship on unions and the PRN has tended to emphasize another tactic: the intervention of trade unions and labor federation/confederations. However, this focus has not necessarily illuminated the origins, forms, and/or scope of these interventions.[91]

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[89] "Ley de Asociaciones Gremiales de Trabajadores," *Boletín Oficial* (November 20, 1979); Duarte, "Gremios: salió la nueva ley."
[90] Duarte, "Gremios: salió la nueva ley."
[91] There are a small number of important exceptions to this, including Arturo Fernández (1985). Recently, Luciana Zorzoli has addressed this question with a new perspective that promises to advance our understanding of interventions during the PRN. See Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a las organizaciones sindicales."

Interventions are often treated as homogeneous (all interventions function in the same way) and somewhat ahistorical (an accepted strategy for exercising government domination).[92] The lack of critical attention is significant precisely because of the power of interventions (historically) and their long shadow (historiographically). Recognizing that an organization or entity was intervened tends to color assumptions as to how those institutions functioned (or did not function). The prevalence of this perspective on interventions is more than simply an historical curiosity. It contributes to how the broader narrative of exceptionality around the PRN has assumed and maintained such prominence in Argentina.

Much as the Ministry of Labor's intervention did not preclude important functions from continuing, we cannot assume that the intervention of trade unions after March 24 meant their total immobilization. The *Proceso* undeniably took a firmer hand than previous military regimes regarding its assumption of direct control. Out of 1,175 union organizations (across first-, second-, and third-degree entities), approximately 385 (or 32%) were intervened at some point between 1976 and 1983.[93] While this total is significantly lower than previous evaluations, it still indicates the dictatorship's reliance on this strategy, as nearly one-third of organizations suffered some form of intervention over this period. However, not all interventions were equal. The interventions of the CGT and prominent national-level federated unions like the UOM and SMATA have usually received the most attention, yet the overwhelming majority of interventions (some 94%) occurred at the level of first-degree organizations (local chapters).[94] Moreover, the intervention of federations and confederations did not necessarily "trickle down" to the affiliate chapters at the factory level. For example, although the regime's Resolution 1 in March 1976 intervened the UOM

[92] See, among others, Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*.
[93] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales," 499.
[94] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales," 499.

and replaced the national leadership, local leaderships were rarely simultaneously (or subsequently) intervened. As Luciana Zorzoli has argued, to look at the intervention of the UOM at the national level without also recognizing that most of the union chapters maintained their autonomy would elide important continuities and "dramatically overestimate" the number of affected workers.[95] While interventions were critically important, they still must be considered within the immediate historical circumstance particular to each situation.

2.1.5: Labor Law at the End

The PRN's successful enactment of the new Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales could not completely hide its limitations with respect to the text of the law itself and its presumptive enforcement. These reflected broader structural changes affecting the PRN as the 1970s ended. Continuing economic instability, mounting pressure from domestic and international human rights organizations, and the increasing factionalization of the Armed Forces severely damaged the regime's authority. Moments like the attempted palace coup against Videla and Galtieri's ousting of Viola evidenced the dictatorship's unraveling. These internal struggles not only contributed to declining control and crumbling legitimacy—as the regime proved unable (or unwilling) to fully enforce its own laws—but also to the waning of its reorganizational efforts. Between 1980 and 1983, the Ministry of Labor's focus shifted from refoundational overhaul of Argentina's labor system to a limited consolidation of the dictatorship's "accomplishments," together with guidance of the normalization of labor relations. The Ministry continued to play a critical role, navigating a resurgent labor movement and an authoritarian government in decline, but its primary focus was no longer on national reorganization.

[95] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales," 500.

One critical exception to this increasingly "defensive" approach was the passage of Law 22,269 on July 30, 1980. Historically, trade unions had administered their own social welfare programs (*obras sociales*). Given healthcare's financial and social implications for union members and their families, the *obras* had also become powerful bargaining chips for unions. Their role in providing healthcare, distributing benefits, and allocating resources for tourism and travel, made control over *obras sociales* critical. This arrangement had been reaffirmed and expanded ten years prior with the enactment of Law 18,610.[96] With their command of billions of pesos, the *obras* provided the economic base of the trade union system. Discussion of reforming them began within months of the 1976 coup, and sectors of the PRN argued that leaving these programs under the control of the unions was incompatible with the broader goal of limiting labor autonomy.[97] The *obras* remained a flashpoint of debates related to the new Law of Professional Associations throughout 1977 and 1978, before the Ministry of Labor and the CAL eventually began advancing drafts of the legislation without amending the *obras sociales*. Their decision reflected, perhaps, the delays that had already impeded the law's progress, as well as a growing recognition that the situation's complexity demanded a parallel set of regulations.

Law 22,269 proved to be among the final proactive steps taken by the PRN to reorganize Argentine labor relations. When it was submitted to Videla for his signature, the accompanying text explained that while the *obras* were necessary to finance the administration of healthcare, in the future this must be accomplished within a framework of defined national policy and under the control of suitable entities able to address whatever contingencies might affect their members.[98]

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[96] "Ley 18.610," *Boletín Oficial* (March 5, 1970). Significantly, although the law effectively obliged employers to increase their contributions to workers' healthcare, it was enacted under de facto President Onganía. For a detailed analysis of Law 18,610 and its importance, see Jorge Katz, *El sector salud en la República Argentina: Su estructura y comportamiento* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993).
[97] "La ley de Asociaciones Profesionales y las obras sociales," *La Nación* (July 13, 1976); "Pautas para la ley gremial," *Clarín* (July 16, 1976).
[98] "Obras Sociales," *Boletín Oficial* (August 20, 1980).

Clarín noted on August 16 that while the new norm contained dramatic political and economic modifications, but that its philosophical approach to social welfare did not, in fact, differ greatly from the existing Law 18,610, and in terms of day-to-day administration, it "practically does not introduce innovations."[99] Though perhaps simplistic, the article did highlight that the new law's priority was not to transform the *obras sociales* themselves, but rather to remove them from the control of the trade unions. The regime justified this measure by pointing to inefficiencies and corruption, and it simultaneously took control of what had been, to that point, the unions' most important economic base.[100] Almost a decade passed before organized labor recovered control of its social welfare programs.

This would prove, however, the last gasp of the PRN's "reorganizational" ambitions. The next two years witnessed the rapid dissipation of what remained of the dictatorship's legitimacy. The ineffectiveness of the Viola presidency, followed by Galtieri's palace coup and the disastrous Malvinas campaign, meant that by June 1982 the regime's authority had all but vanished. For the Ministry of Labor, this period was defined by the contradiction between intense effort and an increasing lack of direction. Llamil Reston stepped down in March 1981 and was replaced by the former interventor of the CGT, Commodore Julio César Porcile. Porcile, the first non-Army Minister since the coup, held the post through the end of the Malvinas War, before the disintegration of the Galtieri government began the process of de-militarization of the government apparatus.

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[99] "Un cambio sustancial," *Clarín* (August 16, 1980).

[100] Zorzoli, "Legislación laboral," 8. For example, Law 22,269 mandated that a minimum of 80% of all gross resources controlled by the individual *obras* must be dedicated to medical service, and applied the same restrictions to 90% of all resources controlled by the Instituto Nacional de Obras Sociales (National Institute of Obras Sociales), an umbrella organization tasked with certain regional and national concerns). This meant that the *obras* provision of benefits (including perks like vacation packages, hotels, cars, etc.) would be severely curtailed, thus undermining the unions' ability to use the *obras* as a means of rewarding its members.

During the dictatorship's final phase, Dr. Héctor Villaveirán oversaw the incremental normalization of labor relations and managed the transition to democracy. Under Villaveirán, important laws, including Law 21,400 (the Law of Industrial Security) were officially rescinded, though many were already somewhat moot given the prevalence of direct actions, including strikes and mass demonstrations. At the same time, the first years of the 1980s saw the regime roll back the existing interventions in unions and federations, replacing the interventors with "delegados normalizadores" and/or "comisiones normalizadores." These individuals/entities usually came from among the workers themselves and were responsible for managing the process through which the unions formally reassumed control over both daily operations and national-level policy decisions. This normalization had long been part of the dictatorship's discourse, but the conditions under which it occurred were not those chosen by the Armed Forces. Even prior to the Malvinas debacle, pressure from organized labor had started to force concessions, and together with the regime's increasing fragmentation, opened new spaces for the articulation and practice of opposition.

Though it occurred in fits and starts—and largely outside the full control of the PRN—, normalization did not prevent the codification and formalization of certain key elements of the dictatorship's labor reforms. The 1979 Law of Professional Associations proved central to this effort. Despite claims about its limited efficiency, between 1980 and 1983 as many as 87% of active union organizations started or completed the procedures for official "actualization" of their juridical status under the new law.[101] More than half successfully brought their internal functioning into accordance with the law's guidelines, meaning that at in the early 1980s this legislation shaped

[101] On the presumed ineffectiveness of the new labor law, see, among others, Drake, *Labor Movements and Dictatorships*, 167. For statistics and analysis of trade-union participation in Law 22,105, see Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales," 504

hundreds of elections for delegates and representatives.[102] Further, these laws did not simply disappear after December 1983. Numerous norms instituted under the dictatorship remained legally binding throughout the 1980s, with some lasting until the 1990s and into the 2000s.[103] Any discussion of the "effectiveness" or impact of law (whether a particular measure or the broader corpus) under the *Proceso* is complicated by both its extended timeframe and uneven (or at the very least understudied) enforcement. If the dominant narrative on labor laws under the PRN has suggested that they were inconsequential to the actual functioning of labor relations, that conclusion seems, at best, unproven—and at worst, a serious oversimplification.

2.2 The New Worker-Citizen

Much of the discourse that accompanied the dictatorship's legal output centered on creating a new citizenry that both matched and could help realize the regime's reorganizational objectives. The PRN's labor legislation and labor policies were no exception. In some sense, the steady rhythm of wildcat strikes, go-slows, *quites de colaboración*, and other manifestations of worker resistance between 1976 and 1982 provided the Armed Forces numerous opportunities to incorporate citizenship into their rhetoric. Discourses of citizenship became a means for both defining and reinforcing a shared national identity, and for creating a sense of obligation and loyalty among the Argentine working class. Videla's first address to the nation conflated labor and citizenship, invoking the establishment of "a just order, within which work and self-sacrifice will be valued; where the fruits of one's efforts will transform into better living conditions for all; in which honest and exemplary citizens will find support and energy."[104] Later that year during the Luz y Fuerza

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[102] Zorzoli, "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales," 504.
[103] See Massano, "El proyecto de concertación. Sindicatos y Estado en la transición democrática."
[104] "30 de marzo: Discurso pronunciado al asumir la Primera Magistratura de la República Argentina, exponiendo al Pueblo de la Nación los fundamentos del Proceso de Reorganjzación Nacional emprendido el 24 de marzo de 1976," *Mensajes Presidenciales, Proceso de Reorganización Nacional 24 de marzo de 1976*, Tomo 1 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Congreso de la Nación, 1977), 8.

conflict, Suárez Mason (a prominent *duro* and the commander of Zona 1), issued a formal warning to the power workers. He urged "[f]emale and male citizens" to "protect your livelihoods, ignore those who incite you to upset your labors, don't let them take away from the noble effort in which all Argentines, without exception, find ourselves engaged. It is for your own good, and that of your family, and that of the Patria."[105] Framing his appeal through the relationship of productive labor to citizenship, Suárez Mason included the family and nationalism as discursive elements that helped reinforce the broader themes of self-sacrifice and patriotism. Three years later, the enactment of the Law of Professional Associations provided a chance for the reaffirmation of these ideals, as Videla addressed the nation and proclaimed that the new law not only guaranteed free and strong unions, but also would promote the regular functioning of all groups that represented the national citizenry.[106] The repetition of this theme evidences the perception within the PRN that Argentina's citizenry needed to undergo a dramatic transformation. Labor—both in theory and in practice—proved a critical avenue for the attempt to carry it out.

Official statements frequently outlined the regime's vision of the ideal labor-citizenship dynamic, but it was through legislation that the military attempted to implement this new order. If the dictatorship's goal was, in part, to "discipline" organized labor, to accept this as the only objective would seem overly simplistic given its "refoundational" aspirations.[107] Although a policy area, labor law proved a critical tool for the discursive construction of a new citizenry, both because of the Argentine labor movement's historical significance and because these norms nominally affected nearly everyone in the country. The Ministry of Labor's first actions on March 24—

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[105] "Advertencia del Comando militar," *La Opinión* (October 7, 1976). Significantly, the language here is rather unique, in that it refers explicitly to female and male citizens (ciudadanas y ciudadanos).
[106] "Videla: 'Sindicatos libres y fuertes," *Crónica* (November 16, 1979).
[107] Several scholars have suggested that the PRN wanted to "discipline" the labor movement. See, among others, Quiroga, *El tiempo del "Proceso"*; Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*; Zorzoli, "Elementos para una nueva síntesis en los estudios sobre las organizaciones sindicales argentinas bajo el gobierno militar."

including the invalidation of the right to strike (Law 21,261), the dismissal of the *fuero sindical* (Law 21,263), and the suspension of nearly all union activity (Decree 9)—were enacted within a rhetorical framework that emphasized the necessity of "effectively increasing production" and the pursuit of "order and justice [for workers]…always in the service of national interest."[108] Measures like the Law of Industrial Security of the Law of Professional Associations echoed this language. While discrepancies between branches of the Armed Forces undoubtedly complicated the enforcement of much of the *Proceso*'s legal apparatus and delayed the passage of key elements (most notably Law 22,105), the new corpus did direct the efforts of all citizens towards a single, albeit often undefined, goal: the well-being of the *patria*.

In concert with the attempted redefinition of the national polity by remaking individuals and families, the regime's labor legislation had a second, equally significant, aim: the depoliticization of Argentina's working class. Despite the factionalization of the military on numerous significant questions, nearly everyone agreed that the decades-long imbrication of the shop floor and the ballot box needed to be undone.[109] Obvious examples include the prohibition of all activity not directly related to trade union internal administration (Decree 9/76) and Article 8 of Law 22,105, which expressly forbid workers' organizations from participating in political activity and/or supporting political campaigns and candidates. At the same time, much of the PRN's labor law and the public statements that accompanied it reproduced a subtle language of depoliticization that distinguished "appropriate" union action from "political" activity. Per the text of Law 21,263, inequalities between different classes of workers that violated the equal protection statutes of the Constitution necessitated the invalidation of the *fuero sindical*.[110] The dictatorship's

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[108] "Ley 21.263 del 24/3/76"; "Ley 21.263 del 24/3/76"; "Decreto No. 9 del 24/3/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo* (Year 18, No. 4, April 1976).
[109] See, for example, "La ley de Asociaciones Profesionales y las obras sociales," *La Nación* (July 13, 1976).
[110] "Ley 21.263 del 24/3/76," *Boletín de Legislación de Trabajo* (Year 18, No. 4, April 1976), 113.

control over wages and salaries became a mechanism to "correct" remunerative differences between unions that were, according to the official rhetoric, the result of politicking during the previous administration.[111] Connections between inefficiency, inequality, and corruption, on the one hand, and the "improper" activities of trade unions, on the other, defined the formal discourse around the *Proceso*'s labor policies—from laws to decrees to interventions. Though claims were often vague and unsubstantiated, they nonetheless reinforced the portrayal of Argentina's unions as dangerous entities that needed to be checked in order to prevent them from undoing the very fabric of the country.

Who, then, was the new worker-citizen that the *Proceso* hoped to constuct? While the fierce and prolonged disagreements between factions of the Armed Forces over policy and tactics complicate blanket statements, the regime's legislation, decrees, and public statements shared a handful of common characteristics that help establish the parameters of this figure. Unsurprisingly, he was almost always masculine—a male head-of-household who provided for and protected his wife and children through his labor. Although official rhetoric included occasional references to female workers and their role, they were the exception, not the rule.[112] Within this heavily gendered perspective, the role of women would ideally be limited to reproduction of the family unit, as opposed to direct involvement in productive practice. This reflected, in part, the corporativist philosophy of the conservative factions of the military. The *duros*, Massera, and to some extent Videla and Viola envisioned parallel remakings of the national body politic and the family unit, and patriotism was a vital feature of this project at both levels. In the text of the laws and the official discourse that accompanied them, the worker's effort existed for the good of the nation. Concretely, the PRN promoted this idea of well-being through the inculcation of nationalist

[111] Luis Domenianni, "Prosigue el estudio del reajuste de los sueldos," *La Opinión* (December 11, 1976).
[112] This tendency is, in part, what makes Suárez Mason's explicit reference to male and female citizens so unique.

values at familial and societal levels. Within this framework, there could be no more noble cause than to sacrifice for the *patria*.

Invocations of sacrifice and family also resonated with the dictatorship's appeal to religiosity. If the military attacked "subversives" for numerous reasons, their godlessness featured prominently. As with many of the regime's allegations, it did not take long for those claims to shift from armed leftists to any perceived "enemy" of the dictatorship's reorganizational project. The celebration of Catholicism—especially a conservative, traditionalist interpretation of Catholic teachings supported by the institutional Argentine Church—was a cornerstone of the language surrounding and the justification for much of the PRN's legislation. Laws, including many labor laws, were consciously framed vis-à-vis Catholic traditions, with the expectations being transferred to the targets of those laws. Finally, the dictatorship needed to redefine not only the socio-cultural features of their idealized worker-citizen, but also his productive value. Efficiency and apoliticism were the central tenets of this push. By repeatedly stressing the irregularities and inefficacies of the previous government, and vowing to correct them, the *Proceso* underscored its purported commitment to reforming the country's productive apparatus. This meant not only a top-down reorganization of Argentine industry, but also the redeployment and depoliticization of Argentina's rank-and-file workers. Ultimately, the "New Argentine Man" would embody all of these traits: patriarchal, nationalist, Catholic, efficient, and apolitical. Of course, given the persistent disconnects between language and practice, effecting these changes proved far more difficult than promoting them in the abstract.

Part III: Rhetoric, Practice, and Legitimacy

Parts I and II of this chapter have focused primarily on what the Ministry of Labor and labor legislation ideally looked like under the PRN, leading up to the articulation of a new vision of worker-citizen. This final section explores the breakdowns of these efforts by shifting the emphasis from discourse to practice. Even prior to March 24, 1976, the Armed Forces encountered difficulties articulating a unified plan for national reorganization. The arena of labor relations was no exception. The tensions between conservatives and liberals—and within each of those currents between developmentalists, *ultristas*, technocrats, and the rural oligarchy—not only spilled over into the creation of labor policy (as evidenced by the more than three-and-a-half years needed to enact a new Law of Professional Associations) but were also evident in its enforcement. Dividing the governmental apparatus between the three branches of the military effectively precluded coordination on a variety of issues and gave provincial administrators and military interventors a considerable amount of autonomy.[113] Inconsistencies, even under similar circumstances, contributed to the rapid breakdown of the regime's legitimacy and simultaneously opened spaces for the growth of increasingly organized resistance from both rank-and-file workers and the trade-union hierarchy.

3.1 Enforcement and Inconsistencies

With the division of the country into five *zonas* (composed of dozens of *subzonas* and *áreas*) and the tripartition of positions of authority between the Army, Navy, and Air Force, the application of laws, policies, and norms was often left at the discretion of local commanders. Unsurprisingly, given the military's ideological heterogeneity, this lack of oversight often led to uneven enforcement of labor legislation, even by military personnel. When and where (and to what extent) to "apply" a law became questions of public debate. On several occasions during the early

[113] Canelo, *El Proceso en su laberinto*.

years of the *Proceso*, officials threatened enforcement in lieu of actually following the letter of the law. The statement issued by Suárez Mason in 1976 during the Luz y Fuerza conflict, described earlier in the chapter, exemplified this selectivity. Although Law 21,400 had been passed just weeks prior to his public declaration, and despite the undeniable violation of the law by thousands of power workers in Buenos Aires, Suárez Mason's response was not to immediately apply the punishments prescribed by Law 21,400, but instead to remind the protesters that the law was "in effect," and that they could face more severe consequences if they did not stop their actions.[114] This approach was hardly unique, as both public and private industries experienced similar inconsistencies throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s.

Why is this selective application of the law important? On the one hand, the law was not the regime's only tool for redefining labor relations. The widespread and intentionally performative use of extralegal repression reached its high point between late 1976 and the end of 1977.[115] Violence and the threat of violence remained the backdrop against which all "official" discussions of labor policy occurred. On the other hand, the contrast between the law's uneven enforcement and the possibility of violence exposed the limits of the PRN's project. Unable (or unwilling) to implement a standardized legal system, workers, unions, and management began view the government as increasingly unreliable. Despite its draconian laws, episodes of direct and indirect opposition took place both on the shop floor and in the corporate boardroom. The refusal to follow the dictatorship's norms existed in constant tension with the possibility that those norms could be applied in any given scenario.

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[114] "Advertencia del Comando militar," *La Opinión* (October 7, 1976). His "restraint" is made more exceptional, of course, given his general propensity for violence.
[115] As described at the start of this chapter, the disappearance of Oscar Smith evidenced this reality.

The problem of inconsistent enforcement was reinforced by the contradictions between the *Proceso*'s stated goals and its legislative corpus. Again, these discrepancies derived from the fragmented nature of the dictatorship itself, which often left the Ministries to pursue their own platforms independent of any larger strategy. Thus, while the regime's discourse aggressively promoted the idea of a patriarchal family in which only the male head-of-household worked outside the home, Martínez de Hoz enacted policies promoting rationalization and laissez-faire capitalism that made it increasingly difficult for families to subsist on a single income. Official rhetoric espousing patriotism and the promise of a modern, developed Argentina fit poorly with the elimination of protective tariffs and the opening up of the country to the fluctuations of the global marketplace. This clash of right-conservative values centered on the defense of the family and the nation against right-liberal/technocratic prioritization of free-market economics. For rank-and-file workers, who heard and often believed that a strong domestic industry was critical for national development, the collapse of real wages after 1976 and the closure of factories after 1979 signaled a chasm between language and practice. Workers and management were frequently forced to interpret laws and decrees in an unstable environment, and then to decide how (and whether) to pursue their own priorities alongside (or at the expense of) the central objectives of the PRN.

Yet despite these tensions, the dictatorship still found occasional success in bending the governmental apparatus to its will. In one of few studies that takes seriously the judiciary during the 1976-1983 years, Horacio Etchichury analyzed the Supreme Court's treatment of Law 21,274 (the Ley de Prescindibilidad). Using cases brought by former public-sector workers for wrongful termination (and occasionally for non-payment of legally mandated severance), Etchichury argues that despite criticism from legal scholars on both the left and the right, the Court (made up of judges appointed by the Armed Forces following the coup) supported the dictatorship's primary

ambition for Law 21,274—undermining the stability of public employment to allow for the shrinking of the state sector.[116] Though after 1980 the Court began to limit the ability of the PEN to apply Law 21,274 without any limitations, it never ruled in favor of a plaintiff who tried to reclaim their job after being fired—and in most cases ruled in favor of the enforcement of the law over the final years of the dictatorship. Like Luciana Zorzoli's findings on trade-union applications for re-recognition under Law 22,105, Ethichury's research complicates univocal narratives about the "success" or "failure" of policy and legislation under the PRN. Such dichotomies obscure the grey areas in which issues like negotiations over wages and salaries, modifications to the Law of Professional Associations, and the use of direct action on the shop floor actually occurred, and consequently risk warping their associated meanings.

3.2 The Workers Respond

Similarly, understanding labor's responses to the official policies and practices, for both the rank-and-file and trade-union leadership, demands a nuanced approach. Starting in the early 1980s, the debate centered on whether the dictatorship had been a dramatic defeat for the centralized union structure, or if the working class had, in fact, caused its downfall through their opposition to the regime's policies. Though this polemic continues to cast a long shadow over the historiography of labor and the *Proceso*, recognizing the validity of certain elements of both positions does not necessarily bring us closer to the lived experience of Argentine workers between 1976 and 1983. Instead, attending to the challenges and contradictions that the rank-and-file confronted on a day-to-day basis, and balancing this analysis with a serious engagement with the

[116] Etchichury, "Prescindibilidad y estabilidad del empleo público ante la Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación (1976-1983)." Although Article 14 of the Argentine Constitution gave state workers some defense from dismissal without cause, the Court ruled that Law 21,274 was not a "labor law" but rather an emergency measure, which therefore took precedence over all other labor protections (Etchichury, 26).

political project of the dictatorship, can contribute new insight into both how workers navigated this terrain in the moment and what the implications of this dynamic might be.

3.2.1: Defense of Workers and Unions

In the aftermath of March 24, the new regime faced limited organized resistance from the labor movement. This lack of direct opposition likely influenced attitudes within the dictatorship around questions related to the deconstruction/reconstruction of the existing trade-union system. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that sectors within the PRN believed that, if given the choice, Argentina's working class would abandon Peronism and willingly opt into a different, and apolitical, organizational structure. One year after the coup, the Ministry of Labor oversaw a massive reaffiliation process presumably aimed at severing the historical ties between the shop floor and the union bureaucracies. During the first two weeks of April 1977, all workers—even those already affiliated with unions—were made to "reaffiliate" by deliberately opting in to the union again. This turned out to be more onerous than one might expect, as millions of people had to physically write in their desire to remain in the union and, per Decree 385/77, complete all the requisite steps within a very short time frame (a matter of weeks).[117] The same decree specified that although employers would continue to retain quotas for union dues, only those employees who had successfully completed the necessary paperwork would be covered, effectively putting the financial solvency of the unions in jeopardy if their members failed to reaffiliate.[118] This measure was intended to end the supposed "coercive" representation of the Peronist system that per the regime silenced participatory democracy on the shop floor. By creating fissures between the rank-and-file, the dictatorship hoped to break down the monolithic loyalty to Peronism that gave the labor movement much of its political and social weight.

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[117] "Plazo para reafiliaciones," *Clarín* (April 7, 1977).
[118] "Plazo para reafiliaciones," *Clarín* (April 7, 1977).

However, the established loyalties of Argentina's working class would not be dismantled so easily. While Ministry of Labor sources and trade-union spokespeople refused to speculate in the days leading up to the deadline, at least one report based on interviews with people on factory floors estimated the reaffiliation rate above 90%, and perhaps higher in the industrial sector. The report claimed that "this response did not so much imply unrestricted support for the union leaderships, but rather a concrete ratification of the purpose of unionization that animates Argentine workers."[119] Days later, Dr. Eduardo Pourciel, a Ministry official, gave an interview. When asked about the reaffiliation vote, which with the deadline passed seemed an unqualified success for the unions, Pourciel refused to engage, stating that he did not have specific numbers before dryly quipping that "[p]erhaps within a few days we can confirm that success."[120] While the regime's plan ultimately had little impact, and while this incident has received little attention, its significance lies in the recognition that even at the moment when extralegal repression was at its peak and workers were supposedly in retreat, there nevertheless existed sufficient cohesion to mobilize those workers around a specific cause and prevent the transformation of labor relations.

Though little more than a historical footnote, the reaffiliation vote in April 1977 contributes to a broader discussion of working-class responses to the dictatorship's policies. This debate has primarily broken down along two related axes: one oriented around the poles of "opposition" and "demobilization"; and one that interrogates the temporal divisions of the 1976-1983 period. The predominant perspective combines these two polemics to suggest that between 1976 and 1979, the state used repression and terror to demobilize workers and limit organized resistance, while between 1980 and 1983 the unions regained much of their former power and effected increasingly

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[119] "Plazo para reafiliaciones," *Clarín* (April 7, 1977).
[120] "Temas Laborales en Reunión de Trabajo," *TELAM* (April 15, 1977).

visible opposition, punctuated by a series of general strikes in 1982 and 1983 that contributed to the downfall of the dictatorship.

If this periodization helps illuminate aspects of the conflictive capital-state-labor relationship under the *Proceso*, it also risks eliding significant manifestations of resistance and, paradoxically, acquiescence to the actions and policies of the military regime. The idea that both rank-and-file and trade-union opposition changed after 1979 has some validity, as the number, scale, and visibility of labor conflicts undeniably increased during the 1980s. However, to read that as proof of immobility among the working class between 1976 and 1979 would greatly oversimplify the realities of Argentina's labor relations during those years. Authors have frequently noted the prevalence of strategies like "trabajo a desgano," "trabajo a tristeza," "quites de colaboración," and sabotage, which slowed or interrupted production while offering workers some protection from reprisal.[121] Yet these tactics, though widely used, were far from the only expressions of resistance.

Despite the constant threat and occasional realization of state violence, between March 24, 1976 and the first general strike on April 27, 1979, public- and private-sector employees carried out dozens of high-profile confrontations across the country. Over this period, the average number of conflicts per year topped 120, which, though far below the average for the 1972-1975 years (over 280 annually), illustrates that labor disputes did not simply disappear during the first years of the dictatorship.[122] The legal prohibitions on direct action neither dissuaded workers from engaging in collective protest nor did they translate into a consistent set of responses from

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[121] See, among others, Pozzi, *La oposición obrera a la dictadura*; Hugo Quiroga, "El tiempo del 'Proceso,'" in *Nueva Historia Argentina*, ed. Juan Suriano, Vol. 10 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2005); Dicósimo, "La resistencia de los trabajadores a la última dictadura militar."

[122] Edward Epstein, "Labor Populism and Hegemonic Crisis in Argentina," in *Labor Autonomy and the State in Latin America*, Edward Epstein, ed. (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 26-27.

management and the state. A survey of 174 conflicts between March 1976 and March 1981 found that in 61 the workers' demands were fully met by management; in 54 demands were partially met; and in 59 the workers came away with nothing.[123] This analysis did not include all labor disputes from this period and covered the first two years of the 1980s. However, the findings suggest both that over the early years of the PRN workers occasionally won concessions, and that management remained open to negotiation on a limited basis and around a specific range of issues.

The motivations for these conflicts also demand attention. Historian Paul Drake has argued that most strikes emphasized "concrete objectives, not political goals."[124] Wages and the defense of established labor rights and privileges were the highest priorities, while direct challenges to the regime's authority gained momentum after 1981 (and especially following the Malvinas War in 1982). Although concrete evidence related to labor disputes during the dictatorship is difficult to reconstruct, Drake's position appears reasonable. Over the first years, statements from trade-union officials and shop-floor representatives rarely included overt calls for redemocratization, while salaries, working conditions, and job security featured prominently in most labor confrontations.

Yet politics was never absent from these conversations. First, to separate "economic" concerns from "political" problems is complicated by how to define the limits of either "the economic" or "the political." Struggles for a living wage and safe workplace may be couched in "economic" language, but they are undeniably "political" campaigns that revolved around the relationship of workers to the means of production. Second, even recognizing this inherent difficulty, between 1976 and 1979 Argentine workers repeatedly used explicitly political rhetoric when addressing topics like labor legislation, due process, and the rule of law. Just six months

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[123] Ricardo Falcón, "Conflicto social y régimen militar: la resistencia obrera en Argentina (marzo 1976-marzo 1981)," in *Sindicalismo y regímenes militares en Argentina y Chile*, Bernardo Galitelli and Andrés Thompson, eds. (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1982), 132.
[124] Drake, *Labor Movements and Dictatorships*.

after the *golpe*, during the Luz y Fuerza strike, power workers publicly condemned the *desaparaciones* of their colleagues and called for them to be returned alive.[125] In May 1977, as union leaders debated whether or not to participate in the International Labor Organization's annual meeting in Geneva, they ultimately made their attendance contingent on several conditions, including the release of union delegates who had been detained without charge.[126] Normalization—which Liendo himself discussed early and often—remained a central pillar of workers' complaints throughout the first years of the dictatorship. To periodize labor relations around a supposed lack of political demands prior to 1979 overlooks critical moments of confrontation involving challenges to the PRN's authority by trade unions and the rank-and-file

Similarly, to suggest that after 1980 the labor movement overcame its internal divisions and pursued a *plan de lucha* that toppled the dictatorship would be an oversimplification. From 1980 to 1983, labor conflicts did increase markedly, with the per year average more than doubling relative to the previous four years.[127] Yet organized labor remained fractured and the broader division between oppositional and conciliatory currents persisted. A unified CGT would not reemerge until late 1983, just two months before redemocratization. Meanwhile, concerns within the Peronist union leadership over maintaining control of the rank-and-file forced labor leaders to walk a tightrope between supporting more confrontational attitudes from below and reining in challenges to the hierarchical power structures.[128] The reappearance of tactics like national strikes (after 1979) and the growth of trade-union combativeness thus existed in tension with, for example,

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[125] "Se mantiene el pleito laboral que afecta a las empresas eléctricas," *La Nación* (October 13, 1976). The employees were later released alive (see "El gobierno nacional intimó al personal de las empresas eléctricas a normalizar tareas," *Clarín* [October 15, 1976]).
[126] Roberto García "Los gremialistas decidieron no designar delegados para la OIT," *La Opinión* (May 13, 1977).
[127] Per statistics compiled by the Centro de Estudios Nueva Mayoría, the average number of labor conflicts in Argentina between 1980 and 1983 was nearly 290. See Mariel Payo Esper, "De los conflictos laborales a las huelgas generales. Algunos apuntes para pensar su dinámica 2002-2012 en Argentina," *Sociohistórica*, No. 33 (2014).
[128] Munck et al., 216.

the high number of applications for official recognition under the new Law of Professional Associations after 1980.

By 1980, resurgent economic instability, persistent infighting, and mounting pressure from unions, political parties, and human rights groups had the dictatorship on its heels. The vision of indefinite military rule was replaced by an increasingly limited effort to keep control and, after June 1982, to determine the terms of the inevitable transition to democracy. This crisis of legitimacy opened new spaces for resistance on the shop floor and in the streets. Although direct actions had continued since March 24 and despite the relatively low attendance, the general strike of April 27, 1979 was an important transitional moment with respect to its ambitions. As the dictatorship's grasp on power weakened, organized resistance gained momentum until, on July 22, 1981, the labor movement launched another national day of protest featuring demonstrations not just in Buenos Aires, but also in Mendoza, Tucumán, Rosario and Córdoba. Unlike the April 27 mobilization, this protest sparked a wave of subsequent labor conflicts that drastically undermined Viola's authority. At the factory level, confrontations between workers and management became common occurrences, while demands for redemocratization and the immediate normalization of labor relations were picked up by not only the base, but also the trade-union leadership. The national day of protest called by the CGT Brasil (representing labor's combative wing and the heir to the Comisión de los 25) on March 30, 1982 proved pivotal in then-President Leopoldo Galtieri's decision to move up his timetable for the invasion of the Malvinas to head off the growing discontent. Following Argentina's swift defeat, the CGT Brasil organized another strike in September, which was rapidly followed by two more in December and March (1983), in coordination with the CGT Azopardo.

Yet the intensification of protests after 1979 did not translate into a break in dialogue between the unions and the dictatorship. If during the final years of the 1970s labor desperately tried to keep open channels of communication, the first years of the 1980s saw leaders of both intervened and non-intervened unions continuing to negotiate with military authorities—albeit from a considerably stronger position. However, the partial recovery of their power did not solve the immediate paradoxes facing union leaders. The invasion of the Malvinas on April 2 came 72 hours after the largest popular demonstration against the dictatorship in six years. In its wake, several unions issued statements calling for national unity at this critical moment.[129] Though this support came with reaffirmations of the labor movement's concerns, they rang slightly hollow given the participation of high-profile leaders in the regime's propaganda on the islands.

Meanwhile, in 1980 the *Proceso* began replacing military interventors with "delegados normalizadores" or "delegados transitorios" to oversee normalization. Despite rank-and-file pressure to resist, the trade-union bureaucracy cooperated in significant numbers between 1980 and 1983. Their participation in the regulatory overhaul mandated by Law 22,105 is difficult to understand, particularly given the PRN's waning authority and the growing oppositional power of organized labor. One argument offering a partial explanation is that the guidelines established by the new legislation gave entrenched union leaders a means to reassert control over radicalized factions that had emerged on shop floors in the late 1960s and challenged orthodox Peronism. If on the one hand, the prospect of a virulently anti-Peronist military regime collaborating with Peronist labor leadership to ensure their continued domination after years of violence seems far-fetched, on the other hand the accusation of complicity between the unions and the dictatorship

[129] "La hora de la unidad nacional" *Clarín* (April 8, 1982); "Apoyo, pero con independencia," *Clarín* (April 12, 1982).

was convincing enough to help propel the Radical Party's Raúl Alfonsín to victory over the Peronist candidate in the 1983 presidential elections.

If we can identify a general trajectory from more diffuse and local moments of resistance during the PRN's initial years to a systemic pattern of opposition defined by national strikes and led by the trade unions between 1979 and 1983, this should not be taken as evidence of a rigid periodization, nor does it indicate a unidirectional (or univocal) evolution of combativeness among Argentine workers. Labor disputes, and their resolutions, often ran counter to commonly-accepted narratives that suggest an era of worker immobility followed by rank-and-file militancy.

3.2.2: Appropriation of Discourse

Beyond strikes and direct actions, Argentine workers quickly found other means for confronting management and pushing back against state policy. Shop-floor delegates and trade-union officials routinely made their cases directly to the public. These statements occasionally included overtly political elements, including condemnations of disappearances, calls for normalization, and (less often) direct criticism toward the PRN. In other contexts, they sought to both win the favor of military authorities and distance the unions from "subversion" by drawing on a nationalist, religious, and pro-capitalist rhetoric that often echoed the dictatorship's own discourse. Common examples of this approach included patriotic declarations, sharp critiques of Marxism, and a clear commitment to the goals of the *Proceso*.

This adoption of official rhetoric proved an important tool in struggles over wages and working conditions. On May Day, 1977, the "Comisión de los 20" (a loose organization that incorporated diverse currents of the labor movement) released a four-page statement. They declared that it was a day for self-reflection and consideration of how all sectors might make

"honest and patriotic contributions" towards the shared goals of the nation.[130] For the Comisión de los 20, this included acknowledging the role played by organized labor in precipitating the current crisis. "However," they continued, "we are persuaded that now is the time for rectification, for creative contribution to the common cause of all Argentines, for sacrifice and patriotism; and not for sterile fights and subaltern complaints."[131] Citing recent remarks by Videla, the statement approved of "winning the peace" and "National Unity," priorities outlined by the de facto president. Yet rather than accept the labor and economic policies of the PRN, the Commission proceeded with a sustained critique, arguing that dramatic changes were necessary not only to realize what they sustained were "shared objectives," but also to avoid further decline in the immediate future. Citing their own patriotism, loyalty, and commitment to the nation, the Comisión de los 20 repurposed the dictatorship's own language to promote a radically distinct agenda.[132]

This rhetorical appropriation should not surprise us. The advent of previous military regimes (notably in 1955 and 1966) provoked similar responses from the working class. Peronist unions and base organizations consciously articulated their demands and defended their conquests not in the discursive register they had used under Perón, but rather within a framework of shared values.[133] More significant, perhaps, is that these similar patterns between 1976 and 1983 have received comparatively little attention. If the *Proceso* attempted to redefine not only relationships of production but also workers' identities, then understanding rank-and-file and union responses

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[130] "1º de mayo: Día universal de los trabajadores," Doc. 04653, Archivo del Sindicalismo "Santiago Senén González," Universidad Torcuato di Tella (May 1, 1977).
[131] 1º de mayo: Día universal de los trabajadores," Doc. 04653, Archivo del Sindicalismo "Santiago Senén González," Universidad Torcuato di Tella (May 1, 1977).
[132] This was far from the only such example. In the same month, a meeting of 42 trade-unionists in Córdoba drafted a document to give to Liendo that expressed their fundamental concerns over the direction of the country, even as they voiced their continued commitment to "winning the peace." See "Los gremios de Córdoba realizaron un plenario," *La Nación* (May 17, 1977).
[133] See, among others, James, *Resistance and Integration*.

requires accounting for both how these actors navigated their discursive terrain and how they understood their participation in that system. In his study of Britain's Workers' Union, Richard Hyman noted that looking at only one side of this puzzle can help identify the causes of organized labor growth without truly explaining them. Thus, "it is essential to appreciate how the particular objective situation relates to the perceptions and the goals of the actors involved."[134] I would suggest that his argument applies as much to union decline and/or transformation as it does to union growth.

How does this work in practice? An examination of Catholicism's role in Argentine labor disputes from 1976 to 1983 demonstrates the value of this approach. Hyman emphasized the weight of several socio-cultural factors on organization, including religion, which he believed strongly influenced community norms by stressing "the values of loyalty and submission."[135] He saw religion as potential deterrent to union growth as it insulated workers from the "disruptive" process of collective organization. However, he also noted that an area or population that was organized in the past remained more open to similar appeals in the future—even if the initial organizational effort had since collapsed.[136] In 1955, 1966, and again in 1976, Argentina's majority-Peronist working class drew on decades of labor organizing at all levels to resist top-down efforts to break down the links between individuals and groups that were the foundation for meaningful connections. Yet Argentina remained a Catholic country, and despite the post-1954 antagonisms between Perón and the Catholic Church, much of the Peronist working class continued to consider themselves Catholic.

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[134] Richard Hyman, *The Workers' Union* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 187.
[135] Hyman, *The Workers' Union*, 190. Here, Hyman is drawing on the pioneering work of Liston Pope. See Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965).
[136] Hyman, *The Workers' Union*, 190.

The starting point, then, for better understanding union transformation is not necessarily the conflictive relationship of religion and labor organization, but rather how—and to what extent—labor organization incorporates religion. This would seem to be what Hyman himself referred to when referencing the dynamic of "objective situations" and historical actors' "perceptions and goals." The overlap between Peronism and Catholicism—perhaps best embodied in the figure of Evita, and her overtly Catholic iconography—meant that industrial workers often espoused a syncretic worldview that drew on elements of both belief structures.[137] Rank-and-file responses to the overtly Catholic, nationalist rhetoric of the PRN therefore did not have to be either anti-clerical or anti-nationalist. Existing traditions of organizing offered a different register in which to frame both acquiescence and resistance. Perhaps the most prominent example of this syncretization would be the Virgin of Luján, who was simultaneously the patron of Argentina, revered by the Church and nationalists alike, and also the protector of workers, whose cathedral was a destination for thousands of workers who marched through the streets to protest the regime's economic and labor policies in 1980. This is just one example of how the repurposing of "official discourse" could simultaneously respond to immediate need (e.g. the need to defend one's job without incurring physical retribution) and reflect longstanding working-class traditions.

3.2.3: Breakdown(s) of Legitimacy

Importantly, the breakdown of legitimacy occurred along multiple axes. The dictatorship's failure (or refusal) to consistently enforce its own laws is but one area in which the lack of a unified plan of action created increasingly grave difficulties for the realization of its objectives. Yet that does not mean that this attitude is somehow unimportant. Almost from moment they were enacted,

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[137] See, among others, Jean Graham-Jones, *Evita, Inevitably: Performing Argentina's Female Icons Before and After Eva Perón* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), esp. Chapter 2. For a fictionalized, but no less important, reading of Eva's life and its intersections with religion and labor politics, see Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995).

the regime recognized the application of the new labor legislation as a serious problem. Following waves of strikes involving power workers, railroad workers, autoworkers, and stevedores between August and November 1976, the PRN undertook a comprehensive analysis of the "motivations" for the protests.[138] Statements from Liendo that the causes were "social" and not "political" pointed to an uncertainty within the regime about how much (and what kinds) of opposition was "acceptable." Certainly, many of these strikes provoked episodes of brutal repression, with hundreds and eventually thousands of workers being disappeared. However, the security forces' extralegal violence was hardly incompatible with the enforcement of the prohibitions on all direct actions and work stoppages. In several cases, these tactics went hand-in-hand.[139] Yet the government frequently opted not to follow the letter of the law. Instead the regime pursued alternative resolutions that might include partial or targeted enforcement, but often with reduced or suspended sentences. One prominent example occurred in 1979 when the organizers of the national day of protest were arrested two days before April 27. Although they were unquestionably fomenting dissent and organizing an illegal protest, and under Law 21,400 they should have received prison terms of between six and ten years, they instead were sentenced to two months and ordered to pay fines of several hundred thousand pesos.[140] By the time spring began, they had all been released.

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[138] Horacio Daniel Rodríguez, "Analizan las motivaciones promotoras de varios paros," *La Opinión* (December 3, 1976)

[139] For example, at the Astillero Río Santiago, forty-four workers were disappeared; eleven workers were killed; 134 workers were dismissed under Law 21,274; 299 workers were dismissed under Law 21,260; and as many as 1,000 workers quit during the first two years of the dictatorship. See Ivonne Barragán, "Acción obrera durante la última dictadura militar, la represión en una empresa estatal. Astillero Río Santiago (1974-1984)", in *La clase trabajadora argentina en el Siglo XX: Experiencia de lucha y organización*, Victoria Basualdo, ed. (Buenos Aires, Cara o Ceca, 2011).

[140] "Parcial repercusión registró el paro," *La Nación* (April 28, 1979); "Prisión preventiva a seis sindicalistas," *La Nación* (May 2, 1979).

More generally, the dictatorship's commitment to their own laws was often undermined by practical necessity. The refoundational aspiration of the *Proceso* imagined a working-class community that reflected the pillars outlined by the laws and public rhetoric of the regime, but it quickly became evident that the Armed Forces would need to make concessions to the current reality. While legal and extralegal repression against shop-floor delegates and members of internal commissions was especially brutal, the security forces and management tended to immediately replace representatives who had been fired, arrested, or disappeared. This pattern undoubtedly weakened the position of organized labor in the factories and contributed an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty on the shop floor. Yet it did not prompt the desired transformation of workers' attitudes. As noted earlier, labor conflicts continued at steady, albeit reduced, levels, and other forms of resistance (trabajo a desgano, trabajo a tristeza, quites de colaboración) were widespread. Indeed, Daniel Dicósimo and Andrés Carminati have argued that the prevalence of sabotage reflected the breakdown of representative structures for workers to express their discontent through institutional means.[141] It would make sense, then, for the state and capital to attempt to reconstruct those channels as a means to reassert some semblance of control over workers' opposition. Per Roseberry, hegemony depends on precisely this capacity to funnel conflict through the appropriate institutional mechanisms.[142] However, the dictatorship's internal disarray meant that even as on one hand the security forces violently repressed elements of the rank-and-file and the Ministry of Labor produced severely restrictive labor legislation, on the other hand the regional and local agents of the Ministry, together with the industrialists and managers, sought to (re)establish

[141] Daniel Dicósimo and Andrés Carminati, "Sabotaje a la dictadura. Un estudio sobre las formas de sabotaje industrial durante la última dictadura militar en el gran Rosario y el centro sudeste bonaerense (1976-1983)," *Anuario IEHS*, No. 28 (2013).

[142] Of course, this idea is hardly unique. Christopher Tomlins, though he does not use the concept of hegemony, made a similar argument about capital and labor in the United States after the National Labor Relations Act. See Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

dialogue with the shop floor. Thus, the lack of a coherent strategy kept the regime's efforts from coming to fruition.

Conclusions

This chapter has combined an institutional history of the Ministry of Labor with a close reading of labor legislation enacted during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* to suggest the need for a thorough reconsideration of legalism and Argentina's most recent dictatorship. That the regime took the law seriously, despite oft-repeated claims about the invalidity of the country's legal structures during this period, should be clear. The amount of time and effort invested in creating and sustaining a bureaucracy charged with evaluating and ultimately enacting new legislation cannot be dismissed as mere pandering to liberal idealism toward the law. The military and their civilian allies not only believed that implementing a new legal corpus was vital to national reorganization, as this chapter has demonstrated they also understood pre-1976 laws to be juridically valid, even when those laws contradicted their objectives.[143] I have also indicated that the attempted creation of this new corpus had profound effects for workers, union leaders, industrialists, and officials at various levels of the government. That this legislation's impact was so widespread reaffirms that the law remained important throughout this period, not only as a site of potential authority for the PRN but also as a negotiating tool and a possible battleground for labor and capital across diverse circumstances. The three chapters that comprise Part II of the dissertation take up these questions in specific sites and at specific moments to deepen our understanding of how, exactly, this dynamic played out for the various actors and groups involved.

[143] At least until they could be amended or invalidated via some combination of laws, decrees, and resolutions.

Chapter 3

"In Defense of Our Livelihoods": Deutz Argentina, Labor Conflict, and the Law

> "This process of…restructuring was extremely uneven, transforming a variety of interconnected spaces over nearly an entire century. It involved considerable conflict between and among factions of capital, the state, and popular groups…The process of capitalist transformation…has been *political* at its core."
> - Steve Striffler, *In the Shadows of State and Capital*

Introduction

Just before 4:00 p.m., on the afternoon of September 17, 1980, a handful of workers strung up a crude effigy of a man in front of the main gates of the Deutz Argentina, S.A., factory, in the town of Haedo. A crowd of nearly a thousand people stood in the street, some chanting and singing, others watching calmly as the doll was lifted into the air. The figure, draped in a blue overcoat, wore on its head a sign across which was scrawled "Joe," a reference to José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, the acting Minister of Economy and one of the most powerful men in the country. Over the previous hour, a series of speeches from Deutz employees, representatives of the local chapter of the mechanics' union, and several national-level labor leaders had fiercely attacked both the dictatorship's economic policies and the company's management. The speakers condemned Deutz's decision, formally confirmed the week prior, to close its plant at the end of the year, and

lay off its 800 workers.[1] If on the one hand, the impending shutdown provoked a newfound desperation which intensified the workers' resolve, on the other hand this demonstration was merely the latest chapter in a running conflict which had evolved over several months. Against a backdrop of waving Argentine flags and large pictures of Pope John Paul II, which hung from the factory's perimeter fence, the protest culminated with the leaders setting fire to the dummy. The audience, composed of Deutz workers and their families, union representatives, sympathizers, and supporters from the neighborhood, watched as the flames consumed it.[2]

The visibility and aggression of this demonstration raises multiple important questions. Although government repression had undoubtedly declined from its high point in 1976/1977, that drop-off did not mean that the public burning of the Minister of Economy in effigy was in any way typical. Media coverage of the event described it as "without precedent."[3] Given the nature of the protest, it might be tempting to interpret this display as a reflection of the growing influence of militant elements within the Deutz workforce, or perhaps even a broader radicalization of the plant's personnel. However, the longer history of Deutz and the particular historical conjuncture should give us pause. To assume an increase in leftist activism or the evolution of a new political consciousness among the workers creates the risk of falling into the narrative of heroic resistance against oppression that has typified much of the literature on workers under the PRN. Instead, this chapter uses the conflict between labor and management at Deutz to examine how this challenge to the regime's authority developed over time, and to consider its possible meanings as part of a broader reinterpretation of the experience of private-sector industrial workers during the

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[1] CPM – Fondo DIPPBA, División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa "B," Factor Gremial [hereinafter "Archivo DIPPBA"], Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 300-302.
[2] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 294, 295-297, 299. Also see "Protestas por el anunciado cierre de Deutz Argentina," *La Prensa* (September 18, 1980); "Los obreros de Deutz realizaron una asamblea y formularon agrias críticas," *Convicción* (September 18, 1980).
[3] "Los obreros de Deutz realizaron una asamblea y formularon agrias críticas," *Convicción* (September 18, 1980).

dictatorship. I argue that workers' willingness to take direct action, even in violation of existing laws, was a product of the circumstances of the moment, and not reflective of an intrinsic class-based militancy. Not only did Deutz employees not appeal to Marxist ideology, for the most part they explicitly avoided political language of any sort. Instead, they founded their criticisms in a language of family, religion, and nationalism. I suggest that this discursive framework created space for more radical action, while simultaneously taking advantage of the accelerating breakdown of the junta's authority.

Deutz Argentina's value as a case study derives, in large measure, from its relative exceptionality within the literature on organized labor and workers' movements during the most recent dictatorship. On the eve of the coup, the company employed some 2,000 workers, who belonged to the autoworkers' union (SMATA). Despite the turmoil which affected SMATA during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the predominant political tendency on the Deutz shop floor remained an orthodox Peronism, and there exists scant evidence of radical labor militancy or challenges to the union hierarchy from the rank-and-file. Perhaps understandably, then, I have also found no evidence of violence committed by the military regime against Deutz workers. These two features mark this case as a departure from most histories of labor under the *Proceso*, and thus as an ideal starting point from which to reconsider the two historiographical narratives which dominate the study of labor during the most recent dictatorship (workers as heroes/workers as victims). This does not mean that investigations into politically-motivated opposition and/or state terrorism lack value – quite the contrary. Rather, the story of Deutz Argentina offers a different perspective on questions of repression and resistance, and acts as an important complement to much of the existing work on the complicated dynamics connecting workers, unions, management,

and the PRN. This chapter, hopefully, contributes a new element to the reconstruction of the broad panorama of labor relations during this period.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first section provides a historical overview of Deutz Argentina, S.A., tracing the company's evolution from its origins in Cologne, through the founding of the factory in Haedo, and up to the *golpe de estado* on March 24, 1976. This story highlights the centrality of the debate over developmentalism with respect to economic policy and practice, especially during the 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time, the relationship between Deutz workers and SMATA helps explain, within specific limitations, the functioning of *peronismo verticalista* within the trade-union structure. The second part picks up shortly after the advent of the *Proceso* and follows the increasingly conflictive back-and-forth between Deutz workers and company management, which came to a head over the final months of 1980. The third offers a narrative account of the daily struggle over job security and the future of the plant comprises the majority of the chapter. During the period from 1976 to 1981, the state, primarily through the Ministry of Labor, and SMATA both significantly influenced daily life on the shop floor. This quadripartite dynamic became especially pronounced after 1979, as the threat of the factory's closure galvanized all parties to new and more direct action. The final part steps away from the narrative and analyzes certain themes which ran throughout the conflicts. What role did the law play, for workers, union, and management, at various points? How did the discursive framework used by Deutz personnel take advantage of and/or exacerbate the divisions within the Armed Forces? What were the consequences of drawing on concepts of nation, family, and the Church to support their claims? The chapter closes by pointing to some of the questions that this story raises and suggests possible avenues for future research.

Part I: History of Deutz Argentina, S.A.

The history of Klöckner-Humboldt-Deutz (KHD), the parent company of Deutz Argentina, S.A., stretches back to the mid-nineteenth century. Established in 1864, Deutz claims to be the first engine factory in the world, and over the next hundred years, many of the world's foremost engineers and designers built the enterprise into a global leader in the manufacture of diesel motors and agricultural machinery, especially tractors.[4] By the 1950s, KHD sought new opportunities to expand its operations outside of Europe. The first attempts to expand into Argentina began as early as 1953, during the final years of the first Peronist period, and came to fruition towards the end of the decade. On August 19, 1959, KHD formalized a joint venture with the Argentine industrial firm Cantábrica, S.A., to produce diesel motors, tractors, and agricultural machinery in Argentina under the brand name Deutz. The new corporation, initially called DECA (from Deutz-Cantábrica), but soon formalized as Deutz Argentina, S.A., acquired a plot of land at the intersection of Valentín Gómez and Tres Arroyos, in the town of Haedo, just outside of the city limits of the federal capital.

The circumstances of the new company's birth proved fortuitous. Under President Frondizi (1958-1962), the country was making a concerted effort to stimulate development in medium and heavy industry through ISI and outreach to foreign multinationals. The laws which authorized its establishment, Laws 15.385/57 and 9.997/59, declared the factory to be of "national interest," and committed the government to not allow the importation of tractors if local capacity could satisfy domestic demand.[5] The benefits of this combination of protectionism and government backing were manifest in Deutz's impressive growth during its first years in Argentina, as the number of

[4] "Deutz AG Germany History." Available: http://www.deutz.co.za/history/deutz-ag-germany-history. Accessed March 5, 2017.
[5] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 300-302.

employees exploded from barely 100 in 1959 to more than 1,100 by 1963.[6] At the same time, the total number of tractors produced domestically jumped from 10,000 in 1958 to more than 25,000 in 1961.[7] This expansion necessitated the construction of a second, larger, facility, which was inaugurated on October 26, 1962, adjacent to the original factory, at Valentín Gómez 577.

Although Frondizi's attempt to relegalize Peronism was interrupted by another military intervention in March 1962, his economic policies remained influential throughout the decade. During this period, Deutz continued to expand, albeit at a considerably slower rate than the 1959-1963 years. Two interrelated factors contributed to the growth of the tractor industry in Argentina. On the one hand, the so-called "Green Revolution" arrived, bringing with it new seeds and new farming techniques. The promise of increased efficiency and yield prompted a greater investment in the agricultural sector. This, in turn, promoted the mass mechanization of agriculture throughout much of the interior, including in regions and sectors where machinery had previously been scarce.[8] For the first time since the immediate postwar period, when Argentine exports of wheat, beef, and other primary products benefited from the destruction of Europe's food production apparatus, the country experienced something of an agricultural boom. While farming did not regain the privileged position it had held during the first decades of the twentieth century, agriculture nevertheless solidified itself as a principal, dynamic, and increasingly modernized nexus between Argentina and the rest of the world.[9] For Deutz Argentina, together with John Deere

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[6] "Historia de Deutz Argentina." Available: http://www.autohistoria.com.ar/Historias/Deutz.htm. Accessed March 6, 2017.
[7] "Proyecto de Ley: CONMEMORACION DEL CENTESIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL NACIMIENTO DE ARTURO FRONDIZI," Cámara de Diputados de la Nación (May 15, 2007).
[8] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 313.
[9] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 313-314.

and Fiat, despite the instability produced by the frequent transfers of power between the civil sector and the Armed Forces, the 1960s were an era of steady, even at times spectacular, growth.[10]

This growth encouraged rapid expansion, and throughout the decade the tractor industry brought on thousands of new workers. The question of trade-union affiliation, however, was complicated by competition between SMATA and the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM). The production, maintenance, and repair of agricultural machinery and tractors did fit unequivocally under either organization's purview. This lack of certainty ultimately split the industry: while the shop floors of John Deere and Fiat Concord were represented by the UOM, workers at Deutz (and, after 1971, Massey Ferguson) pertained to SMATA.[11] At Deutz Argentina, however, this affiliation only encompassed those directly involved in manufacturing; it did not include the company's administrative personnel, including executives, managers, and foremen (who were, therefore, not covered by the same collective bargaining agreement). Two additional features of the relationship between the Deutz workforce and SMATA bear mentioning here. First, José Rodríguez, the secretary general of the union on the eve of the coup, was a Deutz employee. Although a military interventor replaced Rodríguez after the coup, he remained a prominent figure nationally. His personal connection to the firm undoubtedly factored into his role during the labor disputes of 1980. Second, though SMATA had become one of the most powerful unions in the country during the 1960s, the local chapter (SMATA Morón) had only one factory under its purview: Deutz Argentina. Thus, its survival depended on the fate of the plant and personnel, which must be acknowledged when considering the level of union involvement during this period.

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[10] The other major producer of agricultural machinery in Argentina at the time of the PRN, Massey Ferguson, did not begin manufacturing operations in Argentina until 1971. This, in turn, helps illustrate the belief in Argentina's potential both as a site of ISI investment for foreign multinationals, and as a future producer/exporter of agricultural goods.

[11] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 114-119.

Although the first years of the 1970s witnessed almost unprecedented levels of social, political, and economic instability, the tractor industry managed to endure the turmoil comparatively well. The growth of the 1960s proved difficult to roll back completely, despite the rapid, and somewhat chaotic, regime change(s) between 1970 and 1976. Following Perón's return from exile, the new government placed renewed emphasis on industrial exports, and fomenting ties with socialist countries as markets for the country's agricultural products.[12] However, global economic trends struck Argentina with ferocity, especially the 1973 oil crisis, contributing to rampant inflation and sharp declines in real wages. For Deutz workers, as for many across the country, this meant a contradictory situation in which, even as production increased quantitatively, the purchasing power of their salaries continued to fall. Despite this, on the eve of the *golpe* which deposed Isabel, the status of the tractor industry clearly reflected the unprecedented growth of the preceding decades. The four major manufacturers, Deutz, John Deere, Fiat Concord, and Massey Ferguson employed over 10,000 people, and produced as many as 25,000 tractors per year.[13] Its development under a series of civilian and military regimes stood as a virtually unqualified success story. Just four years later, the entire industry would find itself on the brink of disappearance.

Part II: The Beginning of the *Proceso*

2.1: Deutz, the Tractor Industry, and the PRN

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, however, there is little evidence to suggest either a significant reorganization of the productive regimen or any sort of organized response from the workforce. On the one hand, the intervention of the union, the removal of Rodríguez, and the suspension of collective bargaining, among other measures, almost certainly met with disapproval

[12] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 339-341.
[13] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 114-119; 156.

on the shop floor. However, it would take several years and the (attempted) wholesale transformation of Argentine industrial relations to spark the conflict between Deutz and its workers which came to a head during 1980. This transformation took the shape of the *plan Martínez de Hoz*, and the opening of the country's economy.

Initially, Martínez de Hoz's approach suggested a bright future for producers of agricultural machinery. In particular, the decision to steer government investment towards export agriculture and away from ISI development could have created conditions for a sharp increase in the demand for tractors. Yet as became commonplace during his time as Minister of Economy, inconsistencies and contradictions quickly arose. Two other aspects of Martínez de Hoz's broader plan complicated the potential for growth in the rural sector. First, the financial reforms of 1977 eliminated agricultural development credits, which, within two years, had crippled the purchasing power of farmers and agrarian producers. Second, the gradual phasing out of the "Régimen de Tractor" meant the reduction, and eventual elimination, of protective tariffs, opening the market to a flood of imports from the United States and Europe.[14] Taken together, these liberalization policies produced a massive crisis across the industry.

Deutz Argentina weathered the initial years of the *Proceso* better than its competitors. If before the coup the four major manufacturers employed around 10,000 people, by the first months of 1980 that number had shrunk to around 2,800. Of those, as many as 1,800 worked at Deutz.[15] In just four years, John Deere, Fiat Concord, and Massey Ferguson had collectively reduced their personnel on the order of 87%, while at Deutz the decline was closer to ten percent. This disparity in layoffs, however, did not reflect a dramatic difference in sales figures. All four companies witnessed a general collapse of demand over this period, mirrored by a similar (albeit less steep)

[14] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 120-122.
[15] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 114-119.

drop off in production.[16] Although Deutz managed to endure with fewer dismissals, the lack of sales combined with accumulation of stock created crisis conditions for the firm by the first months of 1980. The company's directors adopted a series of emergency measures, which culminated in the announcement that the Haedo facility would shut its doors permanently at the end of the year. Ultimately, this would provoke a reaction from the workforce which plunged the factory into months of chaos and turned Deutz Argentina into national news.

2.2: *Quites de colaboración*

During the winter of 1979, difficulties between labor and management became increasingly evident. Argentina's continued economic decline increased tensions on the shop floor, as management attempted to make up for the lack of sales by intensifying the productive rhythm. In response, the workers, faced with the growing pressure to work extra hours, initiated a *quite de colaboración* (withdrawal of collaboration), refusing to work past their set schedule. They also demanded an actualization of salaries to bring them into line with the cost-of-living index, which because of persistent inflation, changed almost daily. These actions, though undertaken by Deutz personnel, reflected a more general sentiment among Argentina's workers. Over the preceding three and a half years, they had borne the brunt of the supposed "reorganization" of Argentine society. The erosion of real wages and the legal assault on social rights backed them into a corner, while the extralegal repression of the Armed Forces left precious little room to maneuver. Under such conditions, even workers without an established tradition of political militancy found themselves increasingly willing to violate the *Proceso*'s labor laws and attempt a defense of their historic conquests.

[16] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 114-119.

This is precisely what happened during July, August, and September of 1979, as the Deutz workforce continuously refused management's orders to put in overtime. While their demand for the actualization of salaries fell into a legal grey area, as a case could be made that it did not actually fall into the category of collective bargaining, the *quite* fairly unequivocally went against Law 21,400, which prohibited all forms of direct action by organized labor. However, indicating what would become a general pattern, the company did not attempt to press charges, and the military regime did not intervene. After several weeks, a spokesperson from SMATA Morón evidently felt the need to publicly clarify that there was *not* a *quite de colaboración* taking place at Deutz, perhaps for this very reason.[17] However, internal reports from the Intelligence Division of the Buenos Aires police (DIPPBA) made clear that a *quite* was, in fact, ongoing, as did newspaper coverage of the conflict. The measure lasted for more than sixty days until, on September 21, in an assembly held at the plant, the Deutz workforce decided to lift the *quite* and accept the increase in salary offered by management. By the next day, evidently, operations had returned to normal.[18] This relatively minor incident is nonetheless significant, as on the one hand it provided the workers with a rough model for future conflicts, while on the other it demonstrated that neither the firm nor the government appeared eager to invoke repressive legislation to curb their action. It does not seem a stretch to assume that the lessons of this episode influenced the events of the following months.

Part III: Conflict on the Shop Floor

[17] "Desmienten conflicto en la fábrica Deutz," *Diario Popular* (September 8, 1979).
[18] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 102, 103, 105. See also "Desalojan una planta automotriz en huelga," *Clarín* (September 22, 1979).

Despite an undeniable rise in unrest on the shop floor, at the end of 1979 the company and its workers had not yet reached a point of open hostilities. In part, this was likely due to the fact that unlike its competitors, Deutz had managed to survive the first four years of the dictatorship without a substantive reduction of personnel. The figures vary somewhat according to different sources, but as late as March 1, 1980, the firm still employed as many as 1,900 people. However, by the beginning of August, that number had plummeted to 800. In just five months, Deutz had fired or forced out some 1,100 workers.[19] This dramatic overhaul brought to the fore tensions which had for some time simmered below the surface. Unsurprisingly, the firings also produced vehement criticism from the workers themselves and helped create new and unstable dynamics between the plant's personnel, SMATA, company management, and the military regime.

3.1: Layoffs and Rumors

The first evidence of mass layoffs comes from April 1980. Internal reports from the DIPPBA described the situation at the plant, noting that the ongoing crisis affecting the tractor industry —referring to the lack of sales and accumulation of stock— meant that Deutz would be firing as many as 430 workers in two waves over the next several weeks. Although the company made assurances that they would pay 100% of legally-mandated severance, it likely came as cold comfort for almost a quarter of the personnel, as they faced the prospect of unemployment in the midst of a spiraling economic decline. At the same time, management announced that a freeze of production for two months (June and July), and that during this period the shop-floor workers, though not the administrative personnel, would be suspended without pay.[20] These measures

[19] For these figures, see "Recurren a la junta," *Crónica* (September 11, 1980); "Protestas por el anunciado cierre de Deutz Argentina," *La Prensa* (September 18, 1980). See also Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 281.
[20] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 106, 108. See also "Deutz despedirá a 430 obreros," *Diario Popular* (April 25, 1980).

exacerbated the struggles and losses of the previous four years and sparked a heated and vocal reaction from the Deutz workforce and their local union leaders at SMATA.

The *quite de colaboración* from the previous year had offered Deutz workers some sense of how to mount a successful challenge, but the stakes during the winter of 1979 had not been nearly as high. Given the fate of the rest of the tractor industry, talk of layoffs and suspensions would certainly have raised concerns about the future of the factory itself. Within days of management's announcement, leaders from SMATA Morón and representatives from the shop floor sent out multiple letters petitioning the intervention of local and national authorities and seeking support for their cause. This joint response indicated how the relationship between the union and the shop floor would evolve throughout 1980. It also marked a change from, for example, the SMATA's disavowal of the workers' action some seven months earlier, which suggested at the very least some disconnect. In contrast, the company's decisions to drastically reduce personnel and interrupt operations apparently brought the two groups onto the same page.

Among the recipients of these messages was Monsignor Oscar Laguna, the Bishop of Morón. The union local wrote to Laguna on April 11, explaining the current circumstances and asking him to communicate their concerns to "the highest authorities" of the military government. Their note sharply criticized the regime's economic policies, positing that the Bishop himself could not have failed to notice the suffering of working people throughout the country. In an eloquent turn of phrase, they argued that "the economy should be planned so that it serves man, not so that man is in service to the economy."[21] Significantly, they repeatedly grounded their appeal in their Catholicism and their nationalism. The tone reflected their stated belief in a humanist and Christian worldview, where the working man could prosper and raise his family. The letter bitterly noted

[21] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 110-113. The original text reads "La economía debe planificarse de tal modo que esté al servicio del hombre, y no que el hombre esté al servicio de la economía."

that despite the sacrifices made for their beloved *patria*, "in a growing Country, as ours should be, where agriculture is fundamental to the economy, tractors are not being sold."[22] This was among the earliest efforts, but these concepts of sacrifice, justice, and nation quickly became pillars of the discursive framework used to reach out to potential allies across the country as the struggle between Deutz management and the workers continued.

On that same day, the workers themselves reached out to the highest authority they could, de facto President Videla. Their message described the company's plans and voiced their fear that these actions could be the first steps towards shutting down the factory. In addition to the families directly dependent on Deutz, they raised concerns about the thousands more who worked as suppliers and concessionaires throughout Argentina. Although not overtly disrespectful, the workers' letter grimly noted their amazement that the leaders of the nation failed to act, and unmistakably questioned Videla's fitness for the office he held. The authors insisted that he "must understand…the sacrifice and the effort of the workers through which we forge, day by day, the grandeur of our fatherland; it is not possible that our anguished and desperate situation does not deserve a response from those who have the responsibility to guide the Nation."[23] Like the note to Bishop Laguna, they framed this plea using the idea of equal sacrifice for the national good. They contended that Argentine workers had always demonstrated maturity, even in the toughest of times — before adding that this attitude was clearly not shared by all. In an interesting conclusion, they asserted their "legitimate right to petition," but instead of demanding immediate action they asked

[22] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 110-113. The original text reads "…para un País en crecimiento, como debía ser el nuestro, donde la agricultura es base de la economía, no se venden los tractores."
[23] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 138. The original text reads "Debe comprender…del sacrificio y esfuerzo de los trabajadores que día a día forjamos la grandeza de nuestra patria; no es posible que nuestra situación angustiante y desesperada no tenga una respuesta de quienes tienen la responsabilidad de conducir la Nación."

to be heard. This juxtaposition of forcefulness and caution reflected the tenuous balancing act required in criticizing the *Proceso*.

More than a week passed without response before SMATA Morón and the Deutz workers decided to try another approach. On April 19, Roberto Navarro, the Secretary General of the local chapter of the autoworkers' union, wrote directly to the company's Chief of Industrial Relations, Miguel Angel Urdinola, and copied the Board of Directors and the firm's president. Navarro's letter not only addressed the crisis affecting the tractor industry, but also offered details of possible solutions to specific problems. He very carefully stressed that responsibility for the current situation rested with the government's flawed economic strategies, and not with Deutz itself. As proof of the regime's mismanagement, he offered the paradox of Argentina's rich agricultural potential alongside a failing farm machinery industry. The solution, according to Navarro, was a cooperative effort between SMATA and Deutz to improve organization and administration while lowering costs through technification of the facility. He suggested that the primary goal of the workers and the union was the protection of the continuity and prestige of the company itself and mentioned their various communications with leaders in the government, the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Labor, and the Church, in support of that objective. Only towards the end did Navarro's immediate purpose become evident, as he argued that the complexity of the situation demanded a longer timeline, and asked Urdinola and the directors to postpone any action until May 20. He assured them that, in addition to demonstrating their good will, the delay "would not be excessively burdensome to the economy of Deutz, given the gravity and tremendous social cost that would result from the immediate execution of the announced measures."[24] The implicit threat in this

[24] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 139-140. The original text reads "Tal circunstancia, a más de demostrar la buena voluntad y predisposición de la firma, no resultaría excesivamente gravoso para la economía de Deutz dada la gravedad y el tremendo costo social que resultaría de la ejecución inmediata de las medidas anunciadas."

statement was made more explicit as Navarro warned that, without this delay, Deutz would be solely responsible for what followed.

The confrontation between management and the workforce culminated during the final week of April. Navarro's warning evidently failed to dissuade the company, as they put together a list of 124 people to be laid off at the end of the month. On the 24th, representatives from SMATA Morón and members of the plant's internal commission traveled to the Casa Rosada to deliver, in person, another appeal for government intervention to prevent the first round of dismissals.[25] They also sent a telegram to the Ministry of Labor, petitioning the application of Law 14,786, which mandated obligatory mediation during labor disputes. Meanwhile, Navarro led a group of workers to meet with Bishop Laguna, and rumors of a possible workers' protest, dubbed a "Moronazo," began to circulate. Internal memos from within the DIPPBA over the final days of the month indicated a heightened level of concern over the fallout from the layoffs and suspensions.[26] Though the exact cause is difficult to determine, some combination of these efforts bore fruit, as on the afternoon of the 28th, Deutz announced that they would delay all actions for a period of twenty days. During this time, José Rodríguez, ex-Secretary General of SMATA and Deutz employee, would travel to Deutz's corporate headquarters in Cologne to attempt to find a solution to this current set of problems.[27] The agreement, which had been negotiated by officials from the Ministry of Labor, seemed to offer a reprieve for the workers while they awaited the outcome of Rodríguez's journey.

As it turned out, however, management had little intention of waiting for news from Germany. On May 5, Deutz's Director of Commercialization, Raúl Villarino, gave an interview in

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[25] See "Deutz despedirá a 430 obreros," *Diario Popular* (April 25, 1980).
[26] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 124, 125, 129, 130.
[27] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 137. See also "Alivio en Deutz," *Diario Popular* (April 30, 1980); "Gestión por la Deutz," *Clarín* (April 30, 1980).

which he recapped the firm's problems, and sought to justify the total restructuring of operations, including the proposed layoffs and suspensions. Villarino also used the occasion to speak directly to Deutz concessionaires, promising that a shipment of motors, tractors, harvesters, and other machinery was on its way from Cologne and would soon be available for distribution and sale.[28] For Deutz personnel, his statement went a long way towards confirming their fears that, despite the postponement, the company still planned to move forward with its proposals (although they did reduce production freeze from June and July to just June). In response, workers opened discussions with Bishop Laguna about a potential march from the factory to the Cathedral of Morón, while local union leaders pressed the Ministry of Labor to mediate the conflict. The Ministry did, in fact, schedule a meeting between the parties for May 13, but management's attitude towards conciliation was made clear by their refusal to even appear. Company representatives would attend a second reunion two days later, they merely reiterated their intent to suspend operations for all of June. Members of SMATA Morón, in turn, demanded that the Ministry enforce its own laws, namely Law 21,400, which prohibited lockouts.[29] Deutz countered by pointing to Articles 18 and 19 of the workers' contract, which allowed for non-payment of salary during suspensions of activity. Though the responsibility for ruling on the law's applicability fell on the Ministry of Labor, perhaps unsurprisingly, no decision was forthcoming, essentially leaving the workers to fend for themselves.

The debate continued throughout May, but on June 1, the factory closed the doors to its workers. Over several weeks, representatives from the rank-and-file and from SMATA Morón

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[28] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 151.

[29] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 154, 169. See also "Acción para impeder más de 400 despidos," *Crónica* (May 13, 1980); "Reiteró una intimación el M. de Trabajo," *La Prensa* (May 14, 1980); "Rechazo," *Clarín* (May 14, 1980); "Deutz: Peligran 1.400 Familias; Será Tratado hoy el Problema," *Crónica* (May 15, 1980); "Deutz: 400 despedidos," *Crónica* (May 16, 1980); "Deutz: Se agrava el conflicto," *Diario Popular* (May 16, 1980).

attempted to press two different legal actions. First, they continued to argue that the suspension violated Law 21,400, and brought the case before the National Labor Relations Directorship, one of the bodies charged with evaluating precisely this type of situation. The board repeatedly excused itself from ruling, going so far as to state that establishing whether or not the law should be enforced "escapes the competency of this organism."[30] Second, during June, local union leaders filed a legal complaint seeking back wages for all Deutz employees suspended by the firm without pay. This effort, too, proved unsuccessful.[31] On the one hand, that the institutions of the military state failed to side with the plaintiffs in these actions is hardly surprising. On the other, the workers' deliberate and repeated attempts to invoke the law are noteworthy, insofar as they hint at a collective belief in their *right* to protection under the law. Of course, given the desperate straits in which the Deutz workers found themselves, it would be facile to assign too much importance to these legal endeavors. Faced with a limited number of options, workers and union members undoubtedly felt the need to pursue every possible avenue. Yet in placing their appeals before the law, they initiated a pattern which continued through the rest of the year, and ultimately raised questions about the parameters of legal recognition under the *Proceso*.

Even as management followed through on its June closure of the factory, the shop floor's fears of dismissals would prove justified. Between the end of May and the first of August, multiple rounds of mass layoffs and "voluntary" resignations reduced the number of Deutz employees to approximately 800. Villarino, meanwhile, complained publicly that "people talk about expanding agricultural production in Argentina, but then they do absolutely nothing to encourage it, but rather

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[30] See "Pedido sindical en el pleito de Deutz," *La Nación* (May 19, 1980).
[31] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 186. See also "Recurren a la justicia para cobrar sueldos," *Diario Popular* (June 17, 1980); "Situación en Deutz," *Crónica* (July 2, 1980).

the opposite: they raise taxes and they diminish the relative value of agricultural products."[32] Although Deutz's personnel likely heard echoes of their own critiques in Villarino's words, his statement almost certainly failed to allay concerns about their long-term future. Indeed, his comments sounded like preemptive justification for more drastic measures. Their distress would have been exacerbated by the Deutz exhibition at the annual convention of the *Sociedad Rural* in July, at which the company unveiled its new line of tractors and agricultural machinery, manufactured in Germany and available soon for purchase in Argentina.[33] By September, 1980, the combination of Villarino's complaints, the announcement of new imports, and the dramatic reduction in personnel had created an unsustainable level of tension among the rank-and-file. All that was missing was the spark to set it off.

An announcement from the firm on Thursday, September 11, provided that spark. Rumors of the factory's closure had circulated for several months, but they likely did not make the confirmation any easier to bear for the Deutz workers. At a meeting in the Ministry of Labor, with union delegates and representatives from the shop floor present, the company acknowledged that as of December 31, it would no longer manufacture tractors, motors, or machinery in Argentina.[34] This formal statement was accompanied by a detailed letter from Urdinola to the Morón delegation of the Ministry of Labor, which explained the rationale behind the decision. He described the collapse of the domestic market, with annual sales plummeting from 25,000 units to just 5,000, and pointed to high taxes, the uncompetitive cost of labor and materials (a consequence of uncontrolled inflation), and the untenable expense of running the plant at only 20% capacity.[35]

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[32] See "Intiman a levantar un paro y se acorta la producción," [Unknown Paper] (May 11, 1980). The original text reads "Se habla de expandir la producción agropecuaria del país argentino, pero no se hace absolutamente nada para alentarla, sino lo contrario: se aumentan los impuestos y se baja el valor relativo de los productos agropecuarios."
[33] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 171. See also "Deutz: Agravóse la situación," *Crónica* (June 27, 1980).
[34] See "Recurren a la junta," *Crónica* (September 11, 1980); "Anuncióse el cierre de la fábrica Deutz," *La Nación* (September 12, 1980).
[35] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 300-302.

Urdinola also left little doubt as to who bore responsibility for the current crisis. Following more than three years of statements and petitions to every member of the economic cabinet by members of the Association of Argentine Tractor Factories, he asserted "the decision which today our Company finds itself obligated to make can hardly be cause for surprise."[36] In spite of the fact that Deutz had invested some twenty-one million marks in the Haedo facility in 1978, betting on a rebound in the Argentine economy, after years of significant losses while waiting in vain for responses from the Armed Forces, the directors had no choice but to accept that the desired recovery had been a fantasy. At the end of the year, Deutz Argentina would shut its doors and lay off the remainder of its workforce.

Urdinola's letter presents something of a dilemma. On the one hand, to deny that Argentina's economic decline drove the company's decision would be foolish. The collapse of sales and the decision of the three other tractor manufacturers to shutter their manufacturing facilities evidenced the very real nature of the crisis. Not surprisingly, Deutz workers shared many of Urdinola's criticisms of what he saw as the regime's mismanagement of the economy. On the other, focusing too much on the consequences of Martínez de Hoz's elimination of protective tariffs and development credits for agricultural producers risks portraying Deutz Argentina's management as benevolent industrialists undermined by the military regime, as opposed to a multinational corporation whose primary concern was, always, its own profit margins. Months before giving official notice of the plan to close the plant, the firm had already started importing tractors from Germany to replace domestic production, suggesting that management's oft-stated

[36] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 300-302. The original text reads "La Asociación de Fabricas Argentinas de Tractores a [sic] presentado en innumerables audiencias y reuniones con todos los miembros del gabinete económico, a altos funcionarios militares y civiles la situación desesperante del sector, desde hace más de tres años en forma continua y persistente, de manera que no puede ser causa de sorpresa esta decisión que hoy se ve obligada a adoptar nuestra Empresa."

concerns about domestic sales were, perhaps, less than accurate. Unpacking this contradictory relationship between company and state, together with the ways in which the Deutz personnel adapted their responses to these circumstances, will be a primary objective for the remainder of this chapter.

3.2: Workers Respond

The workforce itself reacted immediately and vocally to the company's announcement. That same day, SMATA Morón issued a public condemnation of Deutz's decision, lamenting the disappearance of the only remaining facility in Argentina which manufactured tractors. At the same time, the workers called an assembly at the plant at which they approved another round of telegrams for distribution to Videla, the Ministers of Labor and Economy, and the members of the ruling junta. The messages appealed to the various authorities to intervene and prevent the closure of the factory, while also warning that a "lack of response to our demands will lead us to confront this dramatic situation with our own forces."[37] Though it would be easy to dismiss this threat as empty rhetoric, the next day (Friday, September 12) the 800 employees met again, this time to nominate some fifty people to serve as an ad-hoc "comisión de movilización," whose sole duty consisted of collaborating with the internal commission and the sectional delegates to prevent the closure of the factory. Their first public statement, issued later that afternoon, condemned the wave of bankruptcies and industrial flight under Martínez de Hoz. In a demonstration of the inconsistent relationship between labor, management, and the state, they did not directly criticize the company, but rather denounced the decision as a result of the regime's economic policies which assailed both the workers and the nation's industry.[38] They concluded with an announcement of their own,

[37] See "Recurren a la junta," *Crónica* (September 11, 1980); "Anuncióse el cierre de la fábrica Deutz," *La Nación* (September 12, 1980). The original text reads "la falta de respuesta a nuestros reclamos determinará que enfrentemos esta dramática situación con nuestras propias fuerzas."
[38] See "Los obreros rezan," *Crónica* (September 13, 1980).

scheduling a press conference and rally in front of the main gates for Wednesday, September 17, in defense of their jobs.

During the intervening five days, the Deutz rank-and-file and SMATA Morón continued their search for public support, while also preparing for the upcoming demonstration. Over the weekend of September 13-14, as thousands of Argentines made their pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Luján, workers distributed fliers at train stations along the route from Buenos Aires. The fliers sharply criticized the dire consequences of the government's economic policies for Argentina's industry and families, and for the nation itself. They reiterated the workers' Catholic faith and dedication to their homes, before asking the readers to pray for them and for the well-being of all Argentines.[39] Members of SMATA, meanwhile, pursued other avenues at the national and international levels. In a statement from September 13, the union lamented the closure of the Haedo facility after twenty-two years in operation, especially because the tractors themselves were of such high quality they were virtually indistinguishable from those manufactured in Germany. They also contacted the International Federation of Industrial Metalworkers (FITIM) and the IGEMETAL, the German metalworkers' union (which represented Deutz workers at the Cologne headquarters), asking for their backing in the ongoing struggle.[40] In anticipation of the rally, SMATA had also received commitments from delegates and trade-unionists from across Argentina who planned to attend in solidarity with the Deutz workers' plight. As the date drew closer, anticipation and desperation mixed to surround the factory in an air of uncertain expectation.

By the time September 17 arrived, a major confrontation appeared increasingly likely. The union had promoted the demonstration/press conference with force, and the national press

[39] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 288.
[40] See "Los obreros rezan," *Crónica* (September 13, 1980); "Deutz: Pedirán apoyo internacional," *Crónica* (September 16, 1980).

coverage reflected this agitation. The significance of Deutz Argentina stretched beyond the boundaries of the shop floor, as workers from across the country watched Haedo. That morning's *Crónica* suggested that given the "concerns about the difficult situations which numerous establishments are confronting, they will probably use Deutz Argentina as an epicenter or test case for a worker mobilization aimed at stopping the disappearance of sources of employment."[41] Secretaries General, union delegates, and labor leaders from throughout Argentina had descended on the town to demonstrate their support for and solidarity with the Deutz workforce. The fear that the situation could turn uncontrollable was evidenced by a number of urgent memos and communications sent between DIPPBA branches, demanding information and updates about the event and those involved.[42] That morning the police had found copies of a flier bearing the signature of the "Movimiento Peronista Montonero" (MPM) scattered in the streets near the plant, which denounced the military regime as a dictatorship and a tool of "ameriyanki" imperialism, and called for a general strike against the government on October 17.[43] While it was unclear whether this MPM flier actually reflected the views of the Deutz workers, its aggressive and overtly political tone doubtless caught the attention of the provincial police.

Starting from around 2:30 p.m., dozens and then hundreds of people began to make their way to the main gates of the plant. Waving among the crowd and hung along the factory's perimeter fence were Argentine flags, posters of Pope John Paul II, and banners with the green and white SMATA logo. Handmade signs bore slogans directed at the company and the Armed Forces, reading "Deutz don't leave the country"; "1,400 families condemned to hunger and

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[41] See "Deutz: Obreros anunciarán medidas," *Crónica* (September 17, 1980). The original text reads "La preocupación por la difícil situación que atraviesan numerosos establecimientos, probablemente tendrá a Deutz Argentina como epicentro o prueba testigo de una movilización obrera tendiente a impedir el cierre de las fuentes de trabajo."
[42] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 291, 292, 293.
[43] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 303.

poverty"; and "We the workers of Deutz Argentina demand solutions to our problems from the Armed Forces."[44] By approximately 2:50, nearly a thousand people had gathered in the streets. The assembly of Deutz workers, family members, union activists, and sympathizer from the neighborhood together opened the proceedings with a rendition of the national anthem. A series of speakers stepped to the microphone. The directors of SMATA Morón, including Horacio Román and Roberto Navarro, made the first statements, declaring that from this day the workers of Deutz had begun a fight to protect their livelihoods, and that "Deutz will not close because this time, we, the workers, are going to fight."[45] Juan Molina, the Secretary General of the CGT Morón followed Navarro, and echoed his denunciation of the regime's policies, accusing Martínez de Hoz of instituting an "economy of hunger." Molina called for solidarity across all of Morón, before threatening the authorities with a "Moronazo" if certain measures were not taken to stop the suspensions, layoffs, and closures of businesses.[46]

The crowd reserved its most enthusiastic response for their former *compañero* and ex-Secretary General of SMATA, José Rodríguez. Reminding the audience of his seventeen years with the firm, Rodríguez launched several fierce attacks at the Armed Forces, generally, and Martínez de Hoz, specifically. He challenged the Minister's recent claim that his policies were supported by the "silent majority" of Argentines, and when he asked if anyone agreed with Martínez de Hoz's assertion, they responded with shouts of "NO," "LIES," and, according to at least one article, several unprintable epithets. Rodríguez continued, somewhat wryly, stating "Well then, let the minister erase from his little book of support the names of the 800 workers of Deutz."

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[44] See "Protestas por el anunciado cierre de Deutz Argentina," *La Prensa* (September 18, 1980).
[45] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 295-297. See also "Protestas por el anunciado cierre de Deutz Argentina," *La Prensa* (September 18, 1980). Different accounts produced different figures for the total number of attendees, but between 800 and 1,000 seems most accurate.
[46] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 295-297.

Reaffirming Navarro's message, he finished with a declaration that "here we are not raising the flag to skip out on work, but rather to fight, and if we have to spend two years eating grass at the factory so that it starts to produce again, we will stay, no one is going to leave."[47] Although the ideas themselves had circulated prior to this demonstration, the visibility and assertiveness of Rodríguez's commitment and overt criticism of the *Proceso*'s economic strategies, suggested new discursive possibilities for the union and the workers moving forward.

The final speaking act consisted of several Deutz employees, who took the stage to share a statement prepared by the labor force as a whole. While they perhaps lacked the fiery rhetoric of Molina and Rodríguez, the workers made their point carefully and explicitly. They described how the closure of the factory would affect not only the 800 people at the factory, but also the hundreds of concessionaires and over a thousand suppliers who depended on Deutz as their primary provider/customer. They concluded their statement by pointing out that if the plant closed at the end of the year, of the 10,000 people employed in the tractor industry just four years earlier, not one would be left.[48] With the speeches done, the finale began, as the effigy of Martínez de Hoz was set ablaze in front of the cheering crowd. Just as their anger appeared to reach its peak, however, the audience began to disperse peacefully. Family members returned to their homes, and the members of the afternoon shift returned to their posts. Relatively quickly, calm returned to the streets.[49] This juxtaposition of blatant symbolic violence, on the one hand, and the pacific resumption of work, on the other, perfectly illustrates the paradox of the rank-and-file's attitude towards labor conflict as they fought to preserve their jobs.

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[47] See "Los obreros de Deutz realizaron una asamblea y formularon agrias críticas," *Convicción* (September 18, 1980). The original texts read "Entonces…que el ministro vaya borrando de su libretita de adhesiones los nombres de 800 trabajadores de Deutz"; and "…acá no levantamos una bandera para hacer pinta, sino para luchar, y si tenemos que estar dos años comiendo pasto en la fábrica para que esta vuelva a producir, nos vamos a quedar, nadie se va a ir."
[48] See "Los obreros de Deutz realizaron una asamblea y formularon agrias críticas," *Convicción* (September 18, 1980).
[49] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 295-297.

The demonstration produced a wave of support from around Argentina. The Morón representatives of the Christian Democrats; the CGT; the 62 Organizations; and even the ACARA (Association of Automobile Concessionaires of the Republic of Argentina) all expressed their solidarity with the Deutz workforce, as did SMATA locals across the country. The internal commissions of Borgward, Peugeot, Chrysler, and Mercedes Benz Argentina followed suit, and from the international sphere, both FITIM and IGEMETAL issued statements against the closure of the Haedo facility.[50] More significantly, the protest, together with another round of telegrams to governmental authorities, generated a concrete response from the military regime. On September 21, the Undersecretary of Labor, Colonel Ricardo Rojas, announced that the Ministry would receive a delegation of workers from Deutz Argentina the next day to discuss the future of the factory. Based on the encouragement and support arriving from local, national, and international organizations, together with the uncertain but promising possibility that the State might adopt a more active role in the proceedings, it would not seem too much to assume that, in the wake of their assembly, the Deutz workers considered it a success, albeit with qualifications. The extent to which this achievement shaped their conduct moving forward is a question requiring further investigation.

The meeting at the Ministry of Labor authorized by Rojas took place at 4:00 the following afternoon, at the main offices of the Ministry of Labor in the capital. Roberto Navarro and Horacio Román, on behalf of the local union, accompanied twelve sectional delegates from the Deutz workforce. This party, once again, formally requested the intervention of the government to prevent the plant from closing and explained that the current crisis was "not the result of bad management by the company, but rather of bad policies." They further asserted that, with or

[50] See "Protestas por el anunciado cierre de Deutz Argentina," *La Prensa* (September 18, 1980); "Movilización de los Mecánicos," *Crónica* (September 18, 1980).

without Deutz, they wanted to continue to manufacture Argentine tractors, and that with the government's support, they would be able to maintain production even if Deutz was no longer part of the operation. For what it was worth, Rojas himself appeared responsive to their appeals, promising the delegation that he would forward their concerns directly to Minister Reston. He also issued a citation for Deutz management to appear at the Ministry to examine the issue.[51] For an afternoon, at the very least, it seemed as though the Deutz workers had finally broken through with the regime.

However, despite Rojas's promise, the Deutz personnel wasted little time before taking action again. Perhaps understanding that, for the first time, they had captured some momentum, the workers sought to press the issue. On the day after the meeting with Rojas, the 400-person morning shift launched a thirty-minute wildcat strike. They marched off the shop floor and outside to the perimeter fence which surrounded the facility, carrying hand-made signs and posters decrying the impending closure of the plant. A German television crew waited on the other side of the fence, having been sent to the factory by the German embassy. This raises an interesting question about connections between the rank-and-file and the embassy. Though no sources describe any communication between them, it would seem quite improbable that a news team appeared in Haedo at the exact moment that the personnel carried out a supposedly unplanned walkout. One possible explanation is that the shop floor had been alerted that the Germans would be visiting the plant, and they felt that they had to take advantage of the opportunity. This would also explain why they might stage another demonstration, in spite of their apparent progress with the Ministry of Labor. Although the television crew was not permitted on the property itself, they

[51] See "Trabajo recibe a obreros de Deutz," *Diario Popular* (September 21, 1980); "Deutz: Analizará Trabajo el grave problema laboral," *Crónica* (September 22, 1980); "Cierre de Deutz: Operarios con autoridades de Trabajo," *Crónica* (September 23, 1980).

managed to film the protest and took statements from several people through the fence. The workers used the opportunity to appeal to both the IGEMETAL and the German government for help.[52] The reporters, for their part, evidently intended to present the workers' concerns to Deutz executives in Cologne. This episode, in which the German embassy sent a news team to the Deutz Argentina factory, and perhaps informed the plant's personnel beforehand, points to the difficulties in unraveling the motives of various parties in a moment of uncertainty and instability.

The Deutz workforce had no intention of pinning their hopes on help from Germany, though. In the week following the demonstration in front of the factory's main entrance, they issued declarations and circulated fliers expressing their anger and frustration towards the company and the government. They noted how, since Martínez de Hoz had instituted his plans for "efficiency" and "competitiveness," hundreds of businesses had shuttered their operations, and thousands of technicians, engineers, professionals, and laborers had become "beggars for work in their own country."[53] A pamphlet signed by "the Workers of Deutz Argentina" derided the economic team's incompetence, while accusing the Minister himself of colluding with multinationals for his own profit. In a particularly bitter passage, they asked Martínez de Hoz if he knew that employers demanded that any applicant not only be young and single, but also have the health of a cosmonaut before they would consider hiring him.[54] These messages, though addressed to various ministers and governmental authorities, unmistakably spoke to a broader audience consisting of the Argentine working and middle classes. Their statements sought to provoke both sympathy and solidarity and formed a critical pillar of the Deutz rank-and-file's multifaceted approach to pursuing public support.

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[52] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 308, 310, 314-315. See also "Deutz: Manifestación en fábrica para defender fuente de trabajo," *Crónica* (September 24, 1980).
[53] See "Deutz: Manifestación en fábrica para defender fuente de trabajo," *Crónica* (September 24, 1980).
[54] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 312-313.

Meanwhile, the leaders of SMATA Morón dedicated themselves to petitioning for help from whatever government officials would listen. A wave of telegrams to Videla, the members of the junta, and Martínez de Hoz eventually produced results, as they managed to schedule audiences with the military interventor of SMATA, Colonel Carlos Moratorio; representatives from the VII Air Brigade of Morón, the local military authorities; and the mayor of Morón, Dr. Ernesto Rodríguez.[55] Union members and delegates from the rank-and-file attended numerous meetings, but they seemingly met with little success. One particular example helps illustrate the frustrating nature of these interactions. As a result of their efforts, the *comisión de movilización* secured a meeting with the General Staff of the Navy for the first of October. Accompanied by representatives from SMATA Morón, they proceeded to naval headquarters in Buenos Aires that day, where, before several high-ranking naval officers, the commission presented a number of possible solutions to the current crisis, while also soliciting the intervention of the Navy to ensure the plant did not close. After the interview had concluded, they returned to Haedo where they gave a report of the encounter to an assembly of the entire workforce. In response, the workers "reaffirmed their resolve to continue their actions to assure the preservation of their livelihoods."[56] The Navy, for its part, simply issued a statement which confirmed that a delegation of workers from Deutz Argentina had been received at naval headquarters on the date in question. Based on available evidence, this appears to be the extent of their follow-up to the commission's visit. Though Deutz workers continued to pursue interviews with different local and national authorities, the lack of any concrete action, suggests their apparent futility.

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[55] See "Gestiones por Deutz," *Clarín* (September 27, 1980); "Obreros de Deutz: Via Crucis," *Crónica* (September 29, 1980).

[56] See "Deutz: Obreros van a Misa Para Implorar," *Crónica* (October 2, 1980). The original text reads "los trabajadores 'reafirmaron su firme voluntad de proseguir con sus acciones para asegurar el mantenimiento de su fuente de trabajo'."

Having received little encouragement from secular authorities, the Deutz workforce turned once again to the religious realm for support. In particular, the local church demonstrated its willingness to stand with the workers, with Bishop Laguna going so far as to approve a special mass at the Cathedral of Morón on October 2nd. On the morning of October 1, as the members of the *comisión de movilización* met with members of the Navy's General Staff in Buenos Aires, the morning shift held an assembly during their scheduled break (11:30-12:00) to finalize plans for the service scheduled for the following afternoon. These meetings, though nominally illegal under the *Proceso*'s labor policies, had become near daily occurrences over the previous weeks, providing a critical space for collective organizing.[57] The rank-and-file and Bishop Laguna had originally intended the mass to be a simple gesture of solidarity, but it had quickly transformed into a public demonstration of discontent. The event had expanded to involve family members and supporters from the community, who, together with the personnel, would march silently from the front gates of the plant through town to the church. In a curious gesture, Deutz management had even agreed to allow the afternoon shift to participate.[58] Just two weeks after the Deutz workers' first act of public protest, news organizations and the regime's security forces once again waited anxiously to see what would happen.

Minutes after 3:00 p.m., employees and their families started to congregate at the corner of Valentín Gómez and Tres Arroyos. Estimates on the size of the crowd varied widely, but at least one newspaper reported that approximately 1,000 people gathered at the plant to take part in the

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[57] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 317. The legal prohibitions on this type of collective assembly included Decreto 9/76; Law 21,261; Law 21,356; and Law 21,400.

[58] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 317, 318. See also "Deutz: Obreros van a Misa Para Implorar," *Crónica* (October 2, 1980); "Efectuóse una marcha de protesta por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 3, 1980). The rationale behind this decision is difficult to discern. One possible explanation, though perhaps not very likely, is that the firm felt that if they allowed the workers to exert enough pressure, they could potentially change the direction of the PRN's economic policy in such a way as to benefit the company.

procession.[59] At the very least, more than an hour later several hundred people undertook their slow walk to the cathedral at around 4:10, in what one source described as the first such demonstration by SMATA since the coup.[60] Regardless of the accuracy of this claim, it is true that the Deutz workers' action demonstrated a rare willingness to occupy public space as part of a labor dispute, again in spite of the dictatorship's legal prohibitions. As they marched, the participants handed out fliers which explained their need for divine protection and asked for prayers on their behalf. According to reports from both media outlets and the DIPPBA, the event proceeded in "perfect order," without violence or disruption of any kind.[61] Both the silence and the evident order of their demonstration indicated the rank-and-file's commitment to the particular collective identity which they had cultivated over the past several months. Their conduct sought to preclude the possibility of accusations of leftist activism or subversion, perhaps protecting them from state repression while also helping their cause with respect to public opinion.

The column reached the cathedral just before 4:30, and the marchers began to pack into the church. Symbolic of the connections between the factory and the community, the officiant, Monsignor Gerardo Farrell, had a family member employed at Deutz who faced unemployment at the end of the year. Farrell opened the service recognizing the efforts and struggles of the workers over the past several weeks and acknowledged them as "Christian workers," who had now turned to God to seek further help. He affirmed the church community's support for the assembled crowd and offered a prayer that they never lack for work "to provide bread for their homes." Somewhat

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[59] The figure of 1,000 participants comes from *La Prensa*. The range extended from around 250 in multiple DIPPBA reports to as many as 1,500 by the start of the service, according to *Crónica*. See Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 322, 325; "Deutz: Desfile obrero en Morón," *Diario Popular* (October 3, 1980); "Efectuóse una marcha de protesta por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 3, 1980); "Ruego de obreros a Dios," *Crónica* (October 3, 1980).
[60] See "Deutz: Desfile obrero en Morón," *Diario Popular* (October 3, 1980).
[61] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 322, 325. See also "Deutz: Desfile obrero en Morón," *Diario Popular* (October 3, 1980); "Efectuóse una marcha de protesta por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 3, 1980).

provocatively, in light of the connections between the Argentine Catholic Church and the Armed Forces, Farrell followed his benediction with a reading from Exodus, describing an angel sent by God to "protect you along the road," and to be the "enemy of your enemy, and the adversary of your adversary."[62] Though his choice of passage did not actually indicate an alliance of Church and workers against the military, the language undoubtedly pointed to an interpretation of the regime as the "enemy," suggesting that they would have God's protection. Having finished his remarks, Farrell invited a representative from the rank-and-file to deliver a prepared statement. In a fairly concise message, the speaker appealed to the Virgin of Morón for protection and prayed that the decision to close the factory would be reconsidered.[63] At 5:00 p.m., after only thirty minutes, the mass ended, and the personnel and their families began to file out of the cathedral.

The day's drama had not quite concluded, however. As the church slowly emptied, several members of the workforce stopped to give a statement regarding their future plans. They described how Deutz executives had reduced daily output to three tractors, although the plant had the capacity to turn out up to fifty. Far more significantly, they followed this lamentation with an assertion that if "by the 20th of this month, we do not receive a favorable response from the authorities in the sense of preserving our jobs, all other resources being exhausted and if it becomes necessary, we will occupy the establishment for an indeterminate amount of time."[64] While it is impossible to evaluate the actual commitment behind this dramatic pronouncement, the experiences of the preceding two weeks might easily have inspired the rank-and-file to adopt such a course. Their petitions through official channels had yielded limited results, and their overt

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[62] See "Ruego de obreros a Dios," *Crónica* (October 3, 1980).
[63] See "Efectuóse una marcha de protesta por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 3, 1980); "Ruego de obreros a Dios," *Crónica* (October 3, 1980).
[64] See "Efectuóse una marcha de protesta por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 3, 1980). The original text reads "Si hasta el 20 de este mes, no recibimos una respuesta favorable por parte de las autoridades en el sentido de mantener nuestra fuente de trabajo, agotados los recursos y si se hace necesario, ocuparemos el establecimiento por tiempo indeterminado."

transgressions of the *Proceso*'s labor laws had generated virtually no response. On the one hand, the possibility that the threat had been made primarily to force the government's hand cannot be discounted. Certainly, the proposal to occupy the plant went far beyond their previous actions and would have been a flagrant violation of Law 21,400. On the other, their increasing desperation, and lack of viable alternatives, might well have convinced enough workers that more radical measures were necessary. Regardless, the public statement of their willingness to effect this kind of action, on the steps of the Morón cathedral, in itself marked a newly aggressive approach and hinted at the extent of the impending clash.

The special mass indicated that the Deutz workforce had succeeded, to a large extent, in securing the backing of the local church. This encouragement may have contributed some impetus to their next undertaking: petitioning the Archbishop of Mendoza for his support. On October 11, SMATA Morón sent a group of representatives from the shop floor to present their case during the Congreso Mariano Nacional, a gathering of Argentina's religious leaders in Mendoza. They carried with them a letter addressed to the *congreso*'s president, Archbishop Cándido Rubiola, which gave a detailed account of the current situation at Deutz Argentina and asked for his intercession on their behalf. Their message spoke to both the sacred and the secular, emphasizing the workers' deep commitment to the Catholic family and describing several possible solutions to the economic crises they faced.[65] Though he received their letter respectfully, Rubiola's response, when it finally arrived, likely came as something of a disappointment. Ten days after the committee had traveled to Mendoza, the Archbishop informed them that he had reviewed their appeal and elevated their concerns to the *Equipo Episcopal de Pastoral Social*, the branch of the Church dedicated to problems of this sort. He added, "I will pray for you and the just solutions that you

[65] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 338-339. See also "Personal de Deutz apela al Congreso Mariano," *La Nación* (October 12 1980); "Nuevas gestiones por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 12, 1980).

need, and recommend you maintain a firm faith in the Lord, since He is our aid and strength."[66] Rubiola's stance, while not an outright refusal, fell far short of the support which the Deutz personnel had received from Bishop Laguna. Though perhaps not surprising, the Church's social authorities took no further action on behalf of the workers.

In the interim between the Congreso Mariano and Rubiola's response, the union and the rank-and-file continued to seek possible allies. In the middle of October, they turned to the business community. Leaders of SMATA Morón drafted a short form letter which they distributed to all concessionaires of Deutz products in Argentina. Their message explained the circumstances facing the employees at the Haedo plant and invoked a spirit of cooperation. They asked the concessionaires to take part in a day-long summit of all those with an interest in the future of Deutz Argentina (the workforce, mechanics, suppliers, and salespersons) to discuss possible resolutions to the threat facing the factory.[67] On October 18, a delegation of Deutz workers took this approach one step further, attending the *Convocatoria Nacional Empresaria* in Rosario. That evening, they presented a document to the convention which lamented their impending unemployment and included a passionate call for the defense of Argentina's national industry.

Much of their declaration echoed earlier positions, but one passage demonstrated, again, the dramatic change in their attitude. Having placed responsibility for the country's economic crisis at the feet of Martínez de Hoz, they demanded "an immediate return to a state of law, in which social justice, and the protection of powerful industries, and thriving agriculture and commerce, can serve as an essential foundation so that the worker can grow in peace together with

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[66] See "Preocupación en Deutz: Anticiparían Despidos," *Crónica* (October 21, 1980). The original text reads "oraré por ustedes y las soluciones justas que necesitan y recomendarles el mantenimiento firme de la fe en la providencia del Señor, ya que El es nuestra ayuda y fortaleza."
[67] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 334-337.

his children."[68] The call for the return of the rule of law is significant as one of the first moments (if not the very first) in which the rank-and-file moved past criticism of the regime's economic policies to a more general advocacy of the restoration of democracy. They concluded with an assertion of their right to make their case to the national Congress (even though it had been intervened for more than four years). These ideas pointed to an explicit condemnation, and an implicit invalidation, of the authority of the Armed Forces. Like the threat to occupy the factory, the deadline for which was rapidly approaching, this statement reflected the continuing evolution of the Deutz workers' political commitments.

3.3: The Factory Occupied

The various efforts undertaken by the Deutz workers and SMATA Morón during October evidently failed to sway Deutz management. On October 24, the company sent out 120 *telegramas de despido*, initiating the proposed reduction of personnel which would eventually eliminate more than 600 of the 800 remaining jobs. The company simultaneously managed to convince thirty employees to accept "voluntarily" resignation, meaning that in one day they cut nearly twenty percent of the workforce. As in the past, Deutz took great pains to stress the legal foundation for their decision and highlighted the fulfillment of their legal obligations with respect to severance. They explained the justification(s) for the dismissals (plummeting sales, accumulation of stock) and made clear that they had gone above and beyond the conditions specified in the most recent collective bargaining agreement.[69] Management intended to use this format as a model for future layoffs in November and December.

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[68] See "'En Pocos Días Seremos Desocupados'," *Crónica* (October 19, 1980). The original text reads "exigimos que se vuelva inmediatamente a un estado de derecho, en donde la justicia social, el amparo de industrias poderosas, del agro y del comercio pujantes, pueda servir como base indispensable para que el trabajador se desarrolle en paz junto a sus hijos."

[69] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 347-348, 349, 352-353, 354. Because, on assuming power, the *Proceso* prohibited all collective bargaining, the most recent agreement was Convención Colectiva Nº 8/75 "E," which, like all such agreements, dated from before the coup. Management gave the dismissed workers not only their full

The apparent generosity of the company's severance packages could not hide the fact that these dismissals were a critical step towards the permanent closure of the factory at the end of the year. In response, the Deutz rank-and-file sought, once again, an ally willing to take up their cause and help preserve their jobs. They turned to Jorge Antonio, a prominent businessman who had been a close advisor and friend to Perón. During the 1940s and 1950s, Antonio had been responsible for helping to establish Argentine subsidiaries of several foreign corporations, most of them German. Among his positions, he had served as the first president of the board of directors of Deutz Argentina. Following a meeting with representatives from the shop floor, Antonio expressed both enthusiasm and optimism about the problems they faced, and offered to act as a mediator in future conversations between the workforce and the firm.[70] Within days, he had departed for Cologne, to meet personally with company executives and discuss possible avenues to prevent the shutdown of the plant.

Antonio's involvement coincided with a predictable escalation of friction between personnel and management. The increasingly aggressive attitude displayed by the workers over the previous weeks combined with the first round of mass layoffs to create an atmosphere of heightened tension at the facility. The DIPPBA requested regular updates three times a day; according to their reports, the threatened takeover of the plant was no longer a question of "if," but of "when."[71] On October 25, the internal commission made a final appeal to the government intervention with telegrams to Videla, the members of the junta, and the Ministry of Labor. Their messages asked for help from the regime, but also warned that "[g]iven this situation…we hold

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indemnification, under the terms of the agreement, but also their *aguinaldo* (year-end bonus), any unsued vacation time they had accrued, and 100 additional "pre-vacation" hours.

[70] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 359-360. See also "Gestiones por el conflicto en la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 25, 1980).

[71] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 346, 347-348, 349, 351, 352-353.

that the only guilty [parties] for what happens from now on are the National Government for having turned a deaf ear to our just demands, and the directors of Deutz, for having boycotted, with this measure, any probable solution that we the workers had been seeking."[72] Their threat, however, like their petitions, failed to generate a response from the national authorities, virtually ensuring the promised confrontation between Deutz and its workers.

That confrontation would arrive quickly. At 6:00 on the morning of October 27, in front of the plant's main entrance, members of the morning shift staged an impromptu assembly. As they gathered outside the factory, Roberto Navarro of SMATA Morón called for a general strike in solidarity with their recently fired coworkers, and in defense of their own jobs. The workers responded with enthusiasm, but rather than disperse, Navarro told them to wait until 8:00 a.m., when the administrative personnel arrived. When, two hours later, the managers, foremen, and supervisors showed up, in a significant gesture of cross-workplace solidarity, they unanimously voted to join ranks with the strikers.[73] The *comisión de movilización* released a statement to the press declaring that their hand had been forced by the government's continued lack of response, and blaming the regime for the morning's events. They announced that the strike would continue for twenty-four hours, and that the following morning the entire workforce would assemble to evaluate the situation and decide what measures it required.[74] The workers' anger and frustration, which had been simmering for months, had finally reached a boiling point.

At 5:30 a.m. the following day, the rank-and-file and the administrators congregated on the shop floor, with José Rodríguez presiding over the discussion. All of the employees, including the

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[72] See "Gremialistas denuncian despidos en Deutz," *Convicción* (October 26, 1980). The original text reads "'Ante esta situación…responsabilizamos como único culpable de lo que suceda de ahora en más, al Gobierno Nacional por haber hecho oídos sordos a nuestros justos reclamos, y a los directivos de Deutz, por haber boicoteado, con esta medida, cualquier probable solución que veníamos buscando los trabajadores."
[73] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 358.
[74] See "Cumple un Paro de 24 Horas Como Protesta el Personal de Deutz," *La Razón* (October 27, 1980).

approximately 100 people dismissed by the company days prior, decided to resume their production, but that they would work "a tristeza" in response to the firings.[75] They also declared that, once each shift finished, the workers would remain in the factory, effecting a virtual occupation until, according to a statement from the *comisión de movilización*, they reached a solution to the problems generated by the announced closure of the plant. This resolution applied not only to the rank-and-file but also to the administrative personnel, who, although they carried out their duties normally (as opposed to "a tristeza"), finished their shifts and joined the occupiers rather than leaving for home at the end of the day. The only exception to this pattern involved the female employees who, at 7:00 p.m., left without incident.[76] During the first day of the takeover, the workers hung banners throughout the interior and around the exterior of the facility, some of which read "The Workers of Deutz in defense of our livelihood," while others asked sarcastically "Is there sovereignty in closing factories?"[77] As the day drew to a close, the personnel settled in for the evening.

The occupation soon fell into a sort of rhythm. On Wednesday, the 29th, the morning shift resumed their work "a tristeza," while conditions on the shop floor remained peaceful. Although at any given time there were hundreds of people not actively working, they evidently made no effort to disrupt those who were on duty. The firm's female employees came into work each day and left without problems at 7:00 each night. Friends, family members, and trade unionists stopped by regularly to deliver food and other necessities. Meanwhile, Haedo became a flash point for

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[75] The actual number of workers "fired" by Deutz turned out to be considerably lower than the initial reports. Of the 120 *telegramas de despido* which the company issued, only 94 were "effectivized." Of those, approximately 50 eventually accepted their severance and left, while the remainder rejected their dismissal and continued to demand reincorporation. The thirty voluntary resignations apparently proceeded without incident. See Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 377-378.

[76] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 368, 371. See also "Deutz ocupada por los obreros," *Diario Popular* (October 29, 1980); "Ocuparon los obreros de Deutz la fábrica de Haedo," *El Día* (October 29, 1980); "La fábrica Deutz sigue ocupada," *Diario Popular* (October 30, 1980).

[77] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 368. 369, 389-390.

labor organizations from across Argentina. One evening saw delegates from several national unions (the taxi drivers, the teamsters, the oil workers) come together with members of the UOM's Lista Naranja and the leaders of various SMATA locals to stage an impromptu demonstration at the factory. The next night representatives from the CGT Morón and other local organizations dropped off supplies, which included a donation of cigarettes from from the Union of Tobacco Employees.[78] Declarations of solidarity came from groups around the country, many of which took advantage of the opportunity to include denunciations of the PRN's policies which they claimed had led to this situation. In spite of the growing national attention focused on the plant, though, daily activity continued, "a tristeza," with little variation, as the workforce continued their occupation.

The relative calm of the shop floor, however, did not reflect a lack of developments away from the factory, with both the workers and management attempting to use the federal government to their advantage. While, following the twenty-four strike, production had not technically stopped, the firm pressed hard for the Armed Forces to intercede. The board of directors held multiple meetings from the 28th to the 30th, trying to come up with a response, but their deliberations proved relatively unproductive due to a disagreement over the company's long-term plans: some members favored shutting down operations at the end of the year, while others hoped to keep the plant open.[79] Independent of this discrepancy, the board agreed that the occupation had to be curtailed. On October 29, Deutz executives filed a formal complaint with the federal judiciary about the "illegal takeover" of the facility, accusing the workers of violating Law 21,400.[80] At the same time

[78] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 382-383. See also "Deutz: Recurren a Viola," *Crónica* (October 30, 1980).
[79] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 380-381.
[80] Somewhat ironically, this was the same law that the workers had invoked months prior when the company suspended production for the month of June and locked out the workforce.

that the company placed the case before the courts, the union continued to try to involve the national authorities. Navarro wrote directly to General Roberto Viola, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and the incoming president, petitioning him for an urgent meeting to inform him, as the "future President of all Argentines," about the problems afflicting workers at Deutz, specifically, and throughout the country, generally.[81] If Viola ever responded, his answer has been lost to the historical record.

The role of law enforcement during this incident deserves consideration here, as it relates to the dynamics between the shop floor and the military regime. On the first evening of the occupation, the local police threatened to evict the workers by force. Indeed, at approximately 10:30 p.m., three patrol cars and a paddy wagon arrived at the plant for that express purpose. Although an official guaranteed them that if they left of their own volition there would be no reprisal, the employees chose to remain in the factory, but made it clear that they would offer no resistance if the police attempted to forcibly remove them. Instead of a confrontation, however, this decision led to a conversation between personnel, management, and the police, in which the parties agreed to try to resolve the situation without violence, and the police withdrew.[82] During the days which followed, while security forces kept a close watch on conditions at the plant, they did not directly intervene again.

Their reserve, it turned out, was the result of orders from the local military commander, Brigadier Siegfried Plessel, who determined that they would not evict the occupiers by force. Plessel even attempted to mediate the conflict, but his efforts failed due to the disorganization on the shop floor, with hundreds of workers from different shifts commingling with delegates and

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[81] See also "Deutz: Recurren a Viola," *Crónica* (October 30, 1980).
[82] See "Procura la Policía el Desalojo de la Planta Ocupada de la Deutz," *La Razón* (October 29, 1980); "La fábrica Deutz sigue ocupada," *Diario Popular* (October 30, 1980).

labor leaders from other unions and other factories. This led to the institution of new screening procedures starting at 5:00 a.m. on October 30, in which the local police and Deutz security began checking identifications to prevent anyone not affiliated with the company from entering.[83] In the midst of the bloodiest and most repressive dictatorship in Argentine history, the fact that the security forces essentially chose to facilitate the illegal takeover of a factory by regulating the flow of its personnel, without ever seeking to dislodge them, gives some indication of the peculiarity of this situation.

Despite the restraint exhibited by the police and the military, after more than forty-eight hours labor and management seemed no closer to a resolution. It would take the involvement of the federal judiciary to bring the two sides to the bargaining table. The firm's legal complaint, and the invocation of Law 21,400, landed before Dr. Moritan, a magistrate from San Martín. Moritan wasted little time involving himself in the details of the case. On October 30, the day after the initial filing, he visited the factory and interviewed workers, employees, and delegates from SMATA Morón at length, while also speaking with company executives. That afternoon, he organized a reunion between the various parties, at which each party presented its arguments. Moritan issued a stay until 11:00 a.m. the following day, assuring them that he would have a decision by then. With this temporary resolution in place, the judge left the plant, while the workforce, displaying signs of exhaustion after more than three days of occupation, remained to await his ruling.[84]

The next morning Moritan returned to the plant and called a meeting of management, workers, and local union officials. After what he termed an "exhaustive analysis" of the case, the

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[83] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 385-386. See also "La fábrica Deutz sigue ocupada," *Diario Popular* (October 30, 1980).
[84] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 377-378, 380-381.

judge ruled against applying Law 21,400. He determined that, despite the takeover, because personnel had kept up production, they had sufficiently fulfilled their obligations under the law.[85] The decision, however, did not signify the end of Moritan's involvement. Instead, he set himself to mediate the conflict. Following more than two hours of deliberations, the company and the workers reached an agreement. The contract, signed by Urdinola on behalf of Deutz; Navarro, Román, and several members of SMATA Morón for the union; and the internal commission representing the workers, consisted of five items. The first three described the firm's position. They specified the terms for the reincorporation of the approximately 40 workers who had been laid off but had not accepted their severance and made clear that the totality of the personnel would return to their normal duties, respecting the terms of their contracts. Management also emphasized the temporary nature of this reprieve, reaffirming that the factory would close at the end of the year, and that the workers would accept the measure. This was contradicted by the fourth clause, however, inserted by the union and the internal commission. It read "those that sign the present document in representation of the workers of Deutz Argentina state clearly for the record that they will continue with the effort undertaken aimed at ensuring that Deutz Argentina continues to realize productive activity in our country."[86] Thus, in an interesting legal paradox, labor's representatives formally consented to accepting the shutdown of the facility while simultaneously reserving the right to continue to resist that outcome.

The negotiations finished just after 1:00 p.m., at which point the judge left the factory. The internal commission and leaders of SMATA Morón called an assembly of the approximately 800

[85] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 380-381. See also "Cesó la ocupación de Deutz," *Clarín* (November 1, 1980).

[86] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 421-422. The original quote reads "Los que suscriben la presente en representación de los trabajadores de Deutz Argentina dejan expresa constancia que proseguirán con la gestión emprendida tendiente a lograr que Deutz Argentina siga realizando actividad productiva en nuestro país."

workers and employees and explained the resolution they had reached. Although only a partial victory, after about two hours of discussion, the personnel agreed to end the occupation and normalize production. The posters and banners hung throughout the factory came down amid a general clean-up of the shop floor. By 4:30, the machinery and installations had been restored, and the firm's directors had reviewed and reset everyone's time-punch cards. After more than eighty hours, the morning- and night-shift workers finally went home, while the afternoon shift took up their regular posts.[87] Although the takeover had concluded, the discrepancy between the objectives of management and those of labor, a discrepancy built into the contract which they had signed, suggested that this truce would be temporary.

In fact, mere hours separated the departure of personnel from the plant and the next attack. That same evening, Navarro and the *comisión de movilización* issued a scathing public statement, accusing the firm of obstructionism and lack of concern for their employees. They praised the "iron will" of the occupiers during four days of "heroic resistance," and declared "LET THE COUNTRY KNOW: The workers of Deutz Argentina, in self-defense, with unity, solidarity, and organization, have given this first exhibition of their unbreakable resolve to defend their livelihoods."[88] The combination of aggressive and celebratory language almost certainly reflected the perceived need to capitalize on their (partial) success in backing down the company regarding the firings. In both tone and content, their message seemed to undermine the recent agreement, and left little doubt as to their intention for the immediate future.

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[87] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 394, 395, 404-405. See also "Arreglo en Deutz," *Crónica* (November 1, 1980).

[88] See "Los obreros de Deutz desalojaron la fábrica," *Diario Popular* (November 1, 1980); "Arreglo en Deutz," *Crónica* (November 1, 1980). The original text reads "QUE SEPA EL PAIS: Que los trabajadores de Deutz Argentina, en defensa propia, con unidad, solidaridad y organización, han dado esta primera muestra de su decisión inquebrantable de defender su fuente de trabajo."

One of the first steps taken by the union and the workers was to check on the progress of Jorge Antonio. During the occupation, Antonio had been negotiating with executives from Deutz's corporate headquarters in Cologne to keep the factory open past December. At 11:30 a.m. on November 4, he held a meeting in his Buenos Aires office with members of SMATA Morón to discuss the results of his conversations, and to try to outline a strategy for moving forward. Though just days had passed since the normalization of production in Haedo, two factors contributed to a growing sense of urgency. First, rumors had begun to circulate that the firm might move up its timeline and shut down the facility at the end of November. Second, a party of three Deutz directors, led by the company's head of operations for Latin America, had been sent from Germany to evaluate the situation on the ground, and would arrive within days.[89] The back-and-forth of the previous ten months had led the rank-and-file to conclude that local management felt indifferent at best about the future of the plant. Their best chance for success, it appeared, would be to build on Antonio's efforts and attempt to win the support of the visiting executives.

This proved a difficult task, however. On November 5, representatives from SMATA Morón visited the German embassy in Buenos Aires to set up an audience with the group from Cologne, only to be told that such a meeting would be impossible. The President of Deutz Argentina, Ernesto Schwarzbock, had given explicit instructions that the trade-unionists were not to be allowed to meet with the members of what he labeled the German "business mission." Under Schwarzbock's direction, the firm put up a solidly obstructionist front, arguing that because the visitors were technicians and economists they should presumably be kept apart from the dispute over the factory, and, in response to a request from SMATA, claimed that they could not facilitate a meeting because they did not know when the executives would arrive in Argentina. Neither of

[89] See "Deutz: Gestiones del gremio para evitar que la cierren," *Crónica* (November 4, 1980); "Deutz cerraría la planta," *Crónica* (November 5, 1980).

these tactics convinced Deutz workers or unionists, and Navarro answered the company's evasions with a declaration that "if they refuse to meet with us here, we will go to Germany." The SMATA leader also expressed his surprise and concern over the continued recalcitrance of Deutz's local directorate, especially given that during October they had sold 262 units, the record for the year, and more than double the total for previous months.[90] Navarro's statement raised the question of why, if the market might be turning around, management continued to fight to close the plant.

The next day saw the introduction of a new wrinkle. Schwarzbock, in a public statement, confirmed that the factory would shut its doors at the end of the year, but called the measure a "congelamiento" as opposed to a permanent closure. He restated the argument that, at present, the country evidently could not support a tractor industry, but said that all of the machines would be kept "well-oiled and all the equipment in good condition."[91] The implication (that the facility might "unfreeze" at any given moment and resume manufacturing) was doubtless intended to placate personnel and the union, and, for a moment, it seemed to have worked. SMATA Morón responded that they would need more time to consider this development. Initial media coverage suggested that the rank-and-file might acquiesce to Schwarzbock's idea if they were given a formal commitment that should the company require more manpower in the future, former Deutz workers would have priority. A compromise seemed, at the very least, possible.

The following morning, however, the *comisión de movilización* issued their own declaration which made their position very clear. Opening with the question "why is the President of Deutz Argentina lying?" they condemned Schwarzbock's proposed freezing and the motivations behind it. The *comisión* asserted that "this man does not care about the Country or the 800 fired workers, or anything that is not in his own interests," and lamented that, apparently, the

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[90] See "Deutz: Fracasan Negociaciones," *Crónica* (November 6, 1980).
[91] See "Deutz: 'Congelamiento'," *Crónica* (November 7, 1980).

government also did not care to find a solution to this crisis.[92] They noted that this *congelamiento* evidently entailed freezing them and their families, as well, and they sharply denounced Schwarzbock, accusing him of closing the plant to line his own pockets. The solutions which they had repeatedly proposed, including finding new investors and negotiating direct-purchasing agreements with agricultural producers, had been met with silence. They concluded with an affirmation that "[w]e the workers have always repudiated this economic policy, but we cannot help seeing in this present moment the direct complicity of the president of DEUTZ with Dr. Martínez de Hoz and his Machiavellian plan, both of them being responsible for the destruction of the national industry, which is a form of overwhelming our economic sovereignty."[93] Negotiations between labor and management continued in spite of the vehemence of the workers' reaction, but their hostility evidently convinced Schwarzbock not to pursue this particular avenue, as there seem to be no more mentions of any sort of *congelamiento*.

3.4: Saving the Plant

Although the *congelamiento* effort was swiftly abandoned, intense negotiations between labor and management continued. The arrival of the delegation from Cologne on November 10, headed by a Mr. Reuber, injected new urgency into the situation, with the rank-and-file viewing their visit as the last best chance to make their case to keep the factory open into the new year. Despite Schwarzbock's efforts, representatives from the union and the workforce did manage to schedule an audience with the company directors for Monday the 17th. Several members of SMATA were also able to meet with high-ranking diplomatic personnel at the German embassy

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[92] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 415-416. The original quote reads "a dicho señor, no le interesa ni el País ni los 800 trabajadores despedidos ni nada que no sean sus propios intereses."

[93] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 415-416. The original text reads "Los trabajadores siempre hemos repudiado esta política económica pero no dejamos de ver en la actualidad el presidente de DEUTZ una complicidad directa con el Dr. Martínez de Hoz y su maquiavélico plan, siendo ambos responsables de destruir la industria nacional, que es una manera de avasallar nuestra soberanía económica."

itself, including the economic advisor and the labor attaché, who promised to pass their concerns along to their superiors in Germany.[94] Meanwhile, with the meeting between the internal commission, union leaders, and the visiting executives set to take place at the plant, the workers spent the weekend waiting for their opportunity to make a final appeal.

The management of Deutz Argentina, however, did not sit idle as the date approached. In a long letter addressed to both the local military authorities and a federal judge, Urdinola described an increasingly precarious situation at the factory, citing as evidence various fliers and pamphlets circulated by different leftist organizations over the previous weeks. Faced with this influx of propaganda, he expressed an explicit concern for the physical well-being of the facility and its personnel. He also reiterated that the decisions of Deutz Argentina had been made in response to economic realities and had followed the letter of the law. In language not dissimilar to that used by the workers at various points during the previous months, Urdinola invoked, yet again, the assistance of "those that have the obligation to guarantee social peace and the legitimate exercise of the rights established under the current legislation."[95] According to reports from within the DIPPBA, however, Urdinola's complaints were met with relative skepticism. Several memos noted that the Deutz shop floor and SMATA Morón were relative bastions of *Peronismo Verticalista*, and expressed doubts about infiltration by leftist activists. Indeed, during this period the security forces seemed far more concerned about the potential outcomes of Reuber's visit than over the possible threat from subversives.[96]

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[94] See "Deutz: Hicieron gestiones en la embajada alemana," *Crónica* (November 14, 1980).
[95] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 423, 431-432. The original text reads "…requerimos una vez más a quienes tienen la obligación de garantizar la paz social y el ejercicio legítimo de los derechos consagrados por la legislación vigente."
[96] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 419-420, 423, 430, 431-432, 440.

On Monday afternoon, the local board of directors, the German executive Reuber, Roberto Navarro and Horacio Román from SMATA Morón, and the internal commission met at the factory. Though not without difficulty, the parties emerged from their negotiation with an agreement to keep Deutz Argentina operating for the foreseeable future. On the one hand, between November 26 and December 31, the firm would dismiss approximately 550 employees, reducing the total personnel to some 250 people. Manufacturing would also be interrupted temporarily from the final week of November, until further notice. On the other, the plant would continue to offer maintenance and repair services, regardless of the pause in production. Further, the firm promised that there would be no more layoffs until at least April 1981. Finally, as in previous instances, both sides agreed that, should demand increase necessitating more labor, any former Deutz Argentina workers would be given priority in the hiring process.[97] While various accounts of the meeting noted the sharp condemnation of the regime's economic policies by management, labor, and the union, more interesting is the physical agreement itself, signed on November 19 by all parties. In it, the company explicitly lamented the conditions which made such a move necessary, while SMATA used the opportunity to include, in writing, its continued objection to, but reluctant acceptance of, these measures.[98] Although, after more than eight months of open conflict and dispute, the sides appeared to have finally reached a stable resolution, the actual text of that resolution made clear that no one felt especially positive about the circumstances.

This agreement did not bring permanent peace to Deutz Argentina, but it does serve as a suitable endpoint for the story of the struggle to save the factory. The remaining years of the *Proceso* saw the union and the workforce confront management at various points, but never again

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[97] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 443, 448, 450-451, 456-458. See also "Deutz no se va, pero reducirá al personal, *La Prensa* (November 18, 1980); "Deutz," *La Razón* (November 18, 1980); "Quedarán cesantes en Deutz 550 trabajadores," *Crónica* (November 19, 1980).
[98] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 456-458.

did the company threaten to shut down the plant. Over the final six weeks of 1980, the firm proceeded to layoff several hundred people, but unlike the previous dismissals, these occurred in perfect order and without resistance. Though, by the end of the year, nearly 1,600 jobs had been lost, the Deutz rank-and-file, together with the local chapter of SMATA, had managed to preserve some semblance of their *fuente de trabajo*.

Part IV: Analysis

This episode, with all its twists and turns, presents a fascinating counterpoint to much of the historical literature on labor relations during Argentina's most recent dictatorship. Questions of law and legality; nationalism and citizenship; representation and representativity; and even global economic transformation are all part of this narrative. During the remainder of this chapter, we will analyze these themes as they (re)surfaced throughout this conflict and consider what they might add to the general understanding of the PRN and its relationship to organized labor.

4.1: Labor Conflict and the Law

One of the most enduring historiographical myths related to the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* has been the argument that between 1976 and 1983, the institutions of the law ceased to function. The previous two chapters questioned this belief from a top-down perspective, focusing on the internal dynamics of the regime, generally, and the Ministry of Labor, specifically. The story of Deutz Argentina provides a critical complement to these investigations, offering a case study with which to trace the ways in which the law, even though limited in its reach and significance, continued to play a critical role in how labor relations functioned on the shop floor. From April through December 1980, the rank-and-file, the local chapter of the autoworkers' union,

and Deutz management all tried to use labor legislation to their advantage in different ways, and with varying degrees of success.

As a starting point, Law 21,400 proves interesting because of its invocation by both sides at different moments. Its informal title, the "Law of Industrial Security," hints at its superficial objective, to safeguard industrial production from interruptions, while the text makes clear that, at least formally, both employer and worker were considered equally capable of disruption. Even assuming that its "true" intent was to expand and reinforce the prohibition of direct actions by organized labor, this nominal equality within the text remains significant. Certainly, SMATA Morón knew of the provisions barring lock-outs and thought it worth their effort to appeal to the Ministry of Labor to enforce the law against Deutz management during June 1980. We can only guess at whether they actually believed the government would side with the workers in that moment, but in some sense, their expectations are unimportant. More importantly, their attempted recourse to the law served as a reminder of the PRN's supposed principles and challenged the regime to put those principles into action. The uncertainty and ultimate impotence of the body charged with deciding on the enforcement of these laws, the National Labor Relations Directorate, which did not even issue a ruling, meant that although the union's petition failed in its immediate purpose, it nonetheless exposed a crack between the letter of the law and its application which, even if only slightly, undermined the Armed Forces' authority.

This apparent inability (or unwillingness) to enforce Law 21,400 arose again during the strike and takeover by the rank-and-file over the final days of October. The firm's formal complaint introduced the federal judiciary to the situation. Despite the overwhelming evidence of violations (the strike on October 27, the admitted "trabajo a tristeza," the occupation itself), Judge Moritan ruled against the company's request for the application of Law 21,400. Following Moritan's

decision and the subsequent negotiation, no governmental authority sought to gainsay the ruling or enforce, post facto, either this law or any of the other laws which the workers' action contravened.[99] While, once again, we cannot speak to intentions with total conviction, this likely did not enhance management's confidence in the regime's capacity to manage labor conflict, and, perhaps, would have contributed to the company's willingness to resolve such conflicts directly with the workers rather than involve the Armed Forces. This failure to enforce Law 21,400 in either June or October, though hardly representative of its status during the dictatorship as a whole, does suggest the limitations, self-imposed or otherwise, of the military government's authority within the legislative sphere. If neither the workers nor management could successfully petition for aid using the *Proceso*'s own policy, we must ask who or what was this law for?

It was not only new labor legislation enacted by the *Proceso* which played a role in the negotiations between the labor and management, however. Throughout 1980, both sides turned to the most recent collective bargaining agreement, *convenio colectivo* (8/75 "E"), albeit with different intentions. On the one hand, the company repeatedly emphasized its compliance with the obligations set forth in the *convenio*, especially with respect to dismissals and indemnification. This remained true even during the most acrimonious moments of the conflict, e.g. following the September 17 demonstration or during the plant occupation. Indeed, management took great pains to stress how their severance packages went above and beyond the requirements of the *convenio*. On the other, the rank-and-file also invoked the contract which they had signed prior to the coup, though with less frequency. For the most part, they used the agreement to reaffirm rights related to workplace duties and, occasionally, those related to negotiation and bargaining. The workers

[99] Indeed, various other governmental authorities (the Ministry of Labor, the National Labor Relations Directorate, the local security forces) actively abdicated responsibility, evidently preferring to allow Moritan to decide. See Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 377-378.

understood their refusal to acquiesce to management's demand that they work extra hours as being grounded, in part, in the language of the *convenio* and the specifics of their obligations as described in their contract.

This reliance on previous contracts points to one of the central contradictions of the PRN's legislative projects, and one of the hardest aspects to unravel. Though the Armed Forces declared a state of exception and enacted/decreed what ultimately amounted to an entire legal corpus, it frequently sat uneasily alongside preexisting laws and policies. Deutz management not only used the 1975 *convenio* as a guideline for layoffs, they frequently pointed to their observance of the letter of the contract as proof of the legality of their actions. Of course, the suspension of the *fuero sindical* under Law 21,263 had not invalidated the previous *convenios*. But, as the history of Deutz demonstrates, their continued *vigencia* gave rise to a number of contradictions and grey areas. The frequent recourse to contracts and agreements signed before 1976 functioned as a continual reminder of an alternative locus of legal authority which existed outside the dictatorship's attempts to create new power structures. In this way, too, the history of Deutz Argentina illustrates the limits of the military's project to reorganize the nation.

Nor were the *convenios* themselves the only important legal holdover from the pre-coup era. Despite the prohibition on collective bargaining, at different points during the arc of the conflict between labor and the union, on one side, and Deutz management on the other, written contracts, often formalized with the auspices of the Ministry of Labor, played a critical role in the resolution of particular incidents. Two examples suffice here to illustrate this point.

First, the takeover of the factory from October 28 to 31 concluded with the signing of an agreement by Urdinola, the internal commission, and leaders of SMATA Morón. Although, at best, it represented a partial victory for the workforce, the fact that they successfully brought the

firm to the bargaining table and forced recognition of their right to not only negotiate collectively but also, implicitly, to occupy the factory itself and interrupt the normal productive rhythm. The contract represented the company's acknowledgment of the workers' rights, irrespective of the letter of the law. Having failed in their petition for the application of Law 21,400, management evidently decided that, despite the policies and legislation which the military regime had enacted to tip the scales in favor of industry and against labor, their best course of action for resolving the immediate problem was to return to a pre-coup model of labor relations and deal directly with the local union chapter and the rank-and-file themselves.

Second, on November 19, just three weeks later, under guidance from corporate executives from Cologne, Deutz Argentina's directorate once more sat down with SMATA Morón and the workers' representatives to formalize a legal contract. This time, the company acquiesced to the demand not to shut down the plan. Once again, the agreement did not constitute an unconditional success for the employees, as evidenced by the text of the contract itself, which described their reluctant acceptance of the terms. However, it nevertheless reaffirmed the legitimacy of their standing vis-à-vis the firm, and, insofar as they had reached the agreement via a series of formally illegal actions and statements, indicated additional cracks and inconsistencies within the Armed Forces. Without taking away from the sacrifices and efforts of the Deutz workers throughout this period, their ability to negotiate collectively, in spite of the legal prohibitions, in an important sense reflected management's willingness to deal with them as such. Thought the company filed a formal complaint against its workers at the end of October and appeared to call for more direct government intervention to combat suspected "leftists" in November, neither the federal judiciary nor the regime's security forces came to their aid. This left Deutz on its own to find the most advantageous direction, which ultimately meant recognizing the rank-and-file's status and falling back into

precisely the patterns of negotiation and interaction that the junta had initially targeted for elimination.

Finally, the military government's refusal to take a more active role, despite undeniable provocation from the Deutz workers, also demands some explanation. Although the indiscriminate use of violence by the security forces had waned by the final months of 1980, the country was certainly not long removed from an era characterized by disappearances and murders. Thus, one might reasonably expect a public demonstration in the street which culminated with the burning of a prominent government official in effigy to have provoked some sort of response from law enforcement or the military. Instead, although the DIPPBA clearly kept close tabs on the September 17 protest, media coverage repeatedly noted the conspicuous absence of police throughout the afternoon.[100] Similarly, something as dramatic as a multi-day factory takeover might reasonably be expected to produce a reaction from law enforcement. Instead, for more than four days (including the strike on October 27), the local police and military displayed an almost incomprehensible reserve in the face of overt defiance of the law. It bears repeating here that, as best as can be established, during 1980 not a single Deutz employee was arrested or detained (legally or extra-legally) for their participation in the series of conflicts with management. The question is why.

At best, we can offer several hypotheses. In the first place, the local military authorities under the command of Brigadier Plessel evidently exerted some control over the police on at least one occasion. That the Armed Forces wanted to avoid an intensification of the struggle on the shop floor at Deutz could potentially be explained by the historical conjuncture at which the struggle

[100] For evidence of the DIPPBA's presence, see Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 292, 293, 294, 295-297, 299. For the news media's frequent mentions of the lack of police, see "Reclamos de los obreros de Deutz," *La Nación* (September 18, 1980); "Protesta en la Deutz," *Diario Popular* (September 18, 1980); "Movilización de los Mecánicos," *Crónica* (September 18, 1980).

itself occurred. Most importantly, by 1980 indiscriminate repression had declined considerably. Not only had the past twelve months witnessed a significant increase in international focus on human rights violations, the looming transition of power (from Videla to Viola) created uncertainty with respect to the future direction of the country. Simultaneously, the skepticism and even outright disapproval of important sectors of the Armed Forces towards Martínez de Hoz's policies had continued to grow. In a general sense not all factions within the *Proceso* agreed with the privileging of the financial sector as the cornerstone of the nation's economy. In the context of Deutz Argentina, this developmentalist mentality found an important, if complicated outlet. While not strictly a defense industry, as Deutz workers themselves pointed out there were obvious situations in which the military had relied on tractors in the past and would likely need to again in the future. Finally, though the regime had certainly found occasion to use extreme violence against autoworkers during the first four years of the PRN, even the DIPPBA's own analysis noted that the probability of leftist infiltration among the Deutz personnel was slim, given the plant's historically orthodox Peronist orientation. Thus, on the one hand, there existed a confluence of global factors that might have contributed to an attenuation of police repression at this particular moment. On the other hand, the circumstances of this specific case might well have led the military and the security forces, at the local and national levels, to respond with less hostility than they might have done in a different situation.

What Deutz Argentina illustrates is that the idea that the law somehow ceased to matter after March 24, 1976, simply does not correspond to the evidence. Workers, union officials, and company executives all turned to legislation with great frequency, including both policies from before the coup and those enacted by the Armed Forces, presumably as part of their reorganizational project. As the previous chapter suggested, the local delegation of the Ministry of

Labor remained a functional body, albeit one whose authority had been markedly reduced. At the same time, it would be an overreach to claim that the law mattered in the same way as it had prior to the dictatorship. We cannot know how much faith workers or management actually had in the new legal structures established under the PRN. Their invocations of certain legislation perhaps gave some legitimacy to the military's project, insofar as they suggested a broader recognition and acceptance of the Armed Forces' ability to create law, and the authority behind that law. However, and again this holds for both the Deutz workers and the company itself, the fluidity of their appeals (to figures and authorities from a diverse cross-section of Argentine society) together with the variety of tactics simultaneously suggests the limitations of

4.2: Nationalism and the Worker

Another feature of the conflicts at Deutz Argentina deserving of further analysis relates to the discursive framework that the union and the workers constructed via their fliers, pamphlets, and public statements. The idea of nationalism played a prominent role within these efforts. Significantly, however, it was not the nationalism of "the Left" which the Deutz rank-and-file drew on, but rather a Catholic, family-oriented, patriarchal nationalism which articulated a particular vision of Argentina and what it meant to be Argentine. Whether because these positions reflected their innate beliefs or because they felt that this rhetoric provided a safer form of challenging the dictatorship, SMATA Morón and Deutz personnel couched their criticisms in a language which emphasized developmentalism for the country and privileged the figure of the male worker-citizen as the head of the family and the backbone of national well-being.

From the firm's announcement of the first mass layoffs in April 1980, the union and the workers understood the importance of publicizing the threats they faced and took advantage of every opportunity to do so. The letter from SMATA Morón to Bishop Laguna stressed their belief

in a humanist and Christian doctrine, within which the working man could prosper and raise his family. They grounded their appeal for help in their Catholicism and their nationalism, introducing a trope that would become a key rhetorical point with their argument that "the economy should be planned so that it serves man, not so that man is in service to the economy."[101] At the same time that they denounced the military's handling of the economy, they also maintained that "believe fervently that the healthy conjunction of Capital and labor is the only way to generate wealth for all. WE REPEAT: FOR ALL, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE OF US WHO, IN THEIR SALARY, HAVE NOT SIMPLY A RENT, BUT THE ONLY VALID TOOL FOR SUSTAINING OUR FAMILIES."[102] As the dispute intensified over the next eight months, the workers frequently returned to this idea that their demands revolved around providing for their families as opposed to trying to overthrow the capitalist system of production. Another phrase which first appeared in April but would be reused following the September 17 demonstration read "Whoever does not want to understand that the Argentine workers know perfectly well the role that we occupy within society, is mistaken: not above the rest, but never below a few."[103] Regardless of the extent to which these statements reflected the beliefs of SMATA Morón and the Deutz workers, they served to create distance between the labor conflict at Deutz and accusations of subversion or association with the "radical" Left.

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[101] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 110-113. The original text reads "La economía debe planificarse de tal modo que esté al servicio del hombre, y no que el hombre esté al servicio de la economía."

[102] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 110-113. The original text reads "Creemos fervientemente en que la sana conjunción del Capital y el trabajo es la única manera de generar riquezas para todos. REPETIMOS: PARA TODOS ESPECIALMENTE PARA LOS QUE TENEMOS EN EL SALARIO, NO UNA RENTA, SINO LA UNICA HERRAMIENTA VALIDA PARA SOSTENER A NUESTRAS FAMILIAS." Emphasis in the orginial.

[103] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 312-313. The original text reads "QUIEN NO QUIERA ENTENDER QUE LOS TRABAJADORES ARGENTINOS SABEMOS PERFECTAMENTE EL ROL QUE OCUPAMOS DENTRO DE LA SOCIEDAD, SE EQUIVOCA: NI MAS ARRIBA QUE LOS DEMAS, PERO NUNCA DEBAJO DE UNOS POCOS." See also p. 110-113.

Central to this effort was the idea of sacrifice for the good of the nation. In their letter to Videla from April, 1980, the workers insisted that "You must understand, Señor President, the sacrifice and the effort of the workers through which we forge, day by day, the grandeur of our fatherland; it is not possible that our anguished and despairing situation does not deserve a response from those who have the responsibility to guide the Nation."[104] Their message reiterated this notion of shared sacrifice, and noted that the Argentine workers had always demonstrated maturity in the face of difficult. This question of responsibility resurfaced regularly during the rest of the year. For example, the flier which the Deutz workers issued as part of the demonstration on September 17 included a reminder to "those who occupy public positions and who were not elected to them by the people…that those positions carry with them an obligation of service for the good of the Nation," not to simply play around with the destiny of the country for personal gain.[105] The closed with the assertion that "THE RESPONSIBILITY IS OF THE GOVERNORS, WHO MUST RESOLVE THESE GRAVE PROBLEMS WHICH AFFECT THE WORKERS AND THE ENTIRE COUNTRY."[106] Although the workers directed their criticisms against the authorities of the military regime, it is not difficult to see how these accusations were intended to resonate with the general public. The logic of sacrifice and responsibility together with their condemnations against the perceived selfishness of many within the government (often, in particular, Martínez de

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[104] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 138. The original text reads "Debe comprender, Señor Presidente, del sacrificio y esfuerzo de los trabajadores que día a día forjamos la grandeza de nuestra patria; no es posible que nuestra situación angustiante y desesperada no tenga una respuesta de quienes tienen la responsabilidad de conducir la Nación."

[105] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 304-305. The original text reads "Como argentinos y como trabajadores, les recordamos a quienes ocupan cargos públicos, y que no fueron elegidos por el pueblo para ellos, deben tomar conciencia que esos cargos comportan una obligación de servicio a favor de la Nación, y no un conchabo personal para seguir jugando con el destino del país de por medio."

[106] Archivo DIPPA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 304-305. The original text reads "LA RESPONSABILIDAD ES DE LOS GOBERNANTES, QUIENES DEBEN SOLUCIONAR ESTOS GRAVES PROBLEMAS QUE AFECTAN A LOS TRABAJADORES Y EL PAIS TODO."

Hoz) seem to have aimed at winning over public opinion as opposed to necessarily influencing the behavior of individual members of the regime.

Religion, predictably, also featured prominently in many of these communications. The pamphlet which the workers distributed as part of their silent march on October 2 bore the title "Sharing our Anguish" (referring once again to the idea of responsibility) and stressed the rank-and-file's devotion to and dependence on the Church. It described both the march and the special mass as acts of faith, "of that Christian faith to which we subscribe, which we nourish day by day, in ourselves and in our children, demonstrating with our honored work, with our love for our families and with constant sacrifice, that we the workers ARE CLOSER THAN EVER TO GOD AND THUS, FULL OF HOPE AND HUMILITY, WE PRAY ASKING FOR PROTECTION."[107] The handout asked the reader to pray for them, and for all workers throughout Argentina. At other moments, their appeals to Laguna and later to the Archbishop of Mendoza expressed their "fervent adherence" to the teachings of the Church and their hope that through their faith in the Virgin Mary would be strengthened a "sincere and authentic love in all families and in all homes" across the country.[108] This overlap between religion and family formed a pillar of the rhetorical structures which the union and the workers drew on to articulate their claims.

Finally, to return to the concept of the nation, the Deutz rank-and-file utilized the twin specters of colonialism and imperialism as an integral aspect of the defense of the factory. However, they did not use the words themselves in their statements, instead allowing the implicit association of certain sectors of Argentine society with international finance speak for itself.

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[107] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 332. The original text reads "…de esa fe cristiana a la que pertenecemos a la cual alimentamos día a día, en nosotros y en nuestros hijos, demostrando con nuestro trabajo honrado, con el amor a nuestra familia y con un constante sacrificio, que los trabajadores ESTAMOS MAS CERCA QUENUNCA DE DIOS Y POR ELLO, LLENOS DE ESPERANZA Y HUMILDAD, ORAMOS PIDIENDO PROTECCION."

[108] See "Nuevas gestiones por el cierre de la empresa Deutz," *La Prensa* (October 12, 1980).

Predictably, Martínez de Hoz was a favorite target. The union and the workforce denounced him as a servant of foreign capital and multinational banking interests, and accused him of collusion with U.S. and European corporations for personal gain at the expense of the nation and its people.[109] At the same time, they repeatedly appealed to an overtly patriotic nationalism, perhaps attempting to make inroads with those sectors of the Armed Forces who disapproved of Martínez de Hoz's plans. In a pamphlet from late September, the workers noted that "it is sad, for those of us who have a deeply-ingrained nationalist spirit, to see the 'MADE IN' instead of the 'INDUSTRIA ARGENTINA.'"[110] They even included a reference to the physical defense of national boundaries, referencing the territorial dispute with Chile over the Beagle Channel. They lamented "[h]ow much we would have loved it if the national governors could have seen with enthusiasm how we the workers and employees of Deutz prepared tractors for the Armed Forces, when they asked for help in defending our sovereignty in the 'BEAGLE' affair."[111] Their message reinforced the primacy of the defense of the sovereign nation within their discursive framework. It also, paradoxically, stressed the workers' commitment to the defense of the nation as a possible common ground with the military, while subtly questioning the regime's dedication to that goal.

The continual emphasis on commitment to family, Catholic faith, and active sacrifice for and defense of the national good often served two purposes. First, they acted as a form of implicit criticism of the military regime and specifically of its economic leadership by contrasting an idealized figure of the Argentine worker-citizen with the self-interest and antinationalist stances

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[109] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 169, 288, 304-305, 312-313, 415-416. See also "'En Pocos Días Seremos Desocupados'," *Crónica* (October 19, 1980); "El Episcopado analiza el cierre de Deutz," *Diario Popular* (October 22, 1980).

[110] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 312-313. The original text reads "Es triste, para los que tenemos un espíritu nacionalista bien arraigado, ver el 'MADE IN' en lugar del 'INDUSTRIA ARGENTINA'."

[111] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 312-313. The original text reads "Cuanto nos hubiera gustado que los gobernantes nacionales hubieran visto con entusiasmo los obreros y empleados de Deutz preparábamos tractores para las Fuerzas Armadas, cuando estas lo solicitaron para ayudar a defender nuestra soberanía en el caso 'BEAGLE'."

of certain high-ranking government officials. Second, because their rhetoric evoked the ideas which Videla and the members of the junta had publicly advocated during the first days of the PRN, I argue that it allowed the workers more room to maneuver in their conflict with management. Whether this was a conscious choice or an "accurate" reflection of their values is both impossible to assess and largely moot. It was likely a combination of the two. Regardless, by keeping to this discursive framework, the rank-and-file found themselves able to maintain their critical stance while also guarding against accusations of subversion.

One way to evaluate this idea is to set the statements signed by the workers of Deutz and/or SMATA Morón alongside various fliers distributed by leftist groups in and around Haedo during 1980. As has been made clear, the conflict at Deutz Argentina garnered a considerable amount of attention across the country. Beyond the surveillance by the DIPPBA and the regular coverage from the national media, following the September 17 demonstration, the factory became an important rallying point for labor and political activism. Several groups of different ideological tendencies sought to take advantage of the workers' struggle to advance their own agenda. Although the positions of these organizations varied, they shared several characteristics: they claimed to speak for the militant left; they tended to act anonymously; and they all endorsed direct action aimed at overthrowing the government.

The language of these pamphlets contrasted sharply with that of the Deutz workers themselves. In the first sentence of a document bearing the signature of the "Movimiento Peronista Montonero" (MPM), found near the plant in mid-September, the authors labeled the *Proceso* a dictatorship and drew connections across the political landscape of the Southern Cone by referring to the military governments of Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia. A week later, a group called the "Mecánicos Socialistas" repeatedly used the term "dictatorship" and called for a mass

movement within SMATA to fight against the regime's economic policies, including a general strike in support of Deutz.[112] While these statements, together with others from similar organizations, also drew on anti-imperialism as a discursive pillar, their denunciations were considerably more pointed and, as opposed to those from the Deutz personnel, attacked the structures of capitalism itself. Where the Deutz workers took great pains to stress their belief in a healthy conjuncture of capital and labor, the MPM railed against the "ameriyanki" imperialism which sought to reduce Argentina to poverty while the Socialist Mechanics demanded the nationalization of not only Deutz, but all industries threatened by the prospect of capital flight.[113]

In addition to frequent calls for direct action against the government, including proposals of nationwide strikes and mass mobilizations, these declarations incorporated broad lists of demands which ranged from freedom for all union and political prisoners, to information regarding the whereabouts of disappeared citizens, to the free exercise of labor rights. They proposed not only the elimination of all "anti-national" and "anti-popular" economic policies, but also the convening of free elections for March 1981.[114] These demands, though perhaps supported by the Deutz rank-and-file, never appeared in any communication which they signed. The same is true for the term "dictatorship," as well as the explicit condemnation of imperialism. And, while representatives the Deutz shop floor did suggest a return to "the rule of law" when meeting with the *Convocatoria Nacional Empresaria* in Rosario, the tenor of their comments differed considerably from the aggression which the MPM, the Socialist Mechanics, and other leftist groups used as part of their message.

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[112] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 303, 307.
[113] For statements from Deutz workers about the healthy conjuncture of capital and labor, see Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 245, 312-313. For the positions of the MPM and the Mecánicos Socialistas, see p. 303, 307.
[114] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 303.

Indeed, even as their disapproval became increasingly open, SMATA Morón and the Deutz rank-and-file rarely, if ever, transgressed what we might term the invisible line between economic and social well-being, on the one side, and overt political participation on the other. Even if a convincing argument could be made that this line is illusory (after all, when and how is economics not political?), it remains an important illusion. This is doubly true at a moment of authoritarian rule, in which politics carries additional risks to both financial and physical security. Their frequent challenges to the dictatorship notwithstanding, the Deutz workers were clearly cognizant of the dangers they faced. A statement from September 17, signed by the workers, acknowledged that their protest "…is dangerous and carries with it a risk which we are willing to assume. We know also that to many ears our truth will sound like a grievance and that we will continue to be the targets of hidden or sneaky attacks from those who do not accept the truth, which although hard, is reality. It does not worry us that they attack us because we are committed to our Patria, and because our strength comes from our goal: to protect our livelihoods."[115] This, ultimately, was the cornerstone of their militancy, and helps illustrate both the significance of their objective to their actions as well as the difference between their discourse and that of the different leftist groups who saw the conflict as a rallying point. Though it risks the charge of oversimplification, for the Deutz workforce this conflict was not part of a larger war against capitalism, but rather centered on their jobs, and the status as worker-citizens which those jobs conveyed. Their ability to clearly and consistently emphasize this point is a key feature of this episode, and one that deserves further consideration within the conversation about labor relations during the PRN.

[115] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 304-305. The original quote reads "es peligrosa y comporta un riesgo que estamos dispuestos asumir. Sabemos también que para muchos oídos nuestra verdad sonará como un agravio y que seguiremos siendo el blanco de los ataques embozados o arteros de quienes no aceptan la verdad, que aunque dura, es la realidad. No nos preocupa que nos ataquen porque estamos jugado con nuestra Patria y porque nuestra fortaleza surge de nuestro objetivo: proteger nuestra fuente de trabajo." Emphasis in original.

Conclusions

The agreement to keep the factory in Haedo provides an appropriate stopping point for the primary analysis of this chapter, but it did not mean the end of negotiation and disputes between labor, management, and the government. Though the firm did not threaten to shut down the plant again, the workers nevertheless confronted a number of challenges during the years that followed. In September 1981, having experienced a small reactivation of the market and three months of increasing sales, Deutz personnel sharply criticized the Armed Forces for allowing the importation of tractors from other countries. Again, their statement drew heavily on nationalist rhetoric, as they argued that not only was the Deutz factory uniquely suited to address domestic demand for agricultural machinery, but it signified "a true national production, which allows us to be a great Nation without exploiters or exploited, to live in peace but with dignity, like the human beings we are and protected by Article 14 of Our National Constitution."[116] By May 1983, following two years of slow but steady recovery, the battle had come to focus on the reincorporation of ex-employees, as per the terms of the agreement which the union, the workers, and management had signed in November, 1980. In the midst of a dispute over salaries and extra hours, the company announced its intention to hire contract labor to meet their need for additional manpower, as retaliation for a *quite de colaboración* by the rank-and-file. This proposed violation of their deal prompted the workforce, now numbering over 700, to threaten more drastic measures. After a stand-off of several weeks, Deutz backed down, offering a larger raise and promising to honor the

[116] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 477. The original text reads "…para una verdadera producción nacional, que nos permita llegar a ser una gran Nación sin explotadores ni explotados, para vivir en paz pero con dignidad, como seres humanos que somos y amparados en el Artículo 14 bis de Nuestra Constitución Nacional." Emphasis in original.

terms of the contract.[117] While the workers had ensured that the facility itself would remain, during the next three years, conflicts revolving around the well-being of national industry, the role of government protection, and the power of the rank-and-file to defend their gains on the shop floor persisted.

Acknowledging these continuities raises the question: what, then, does the history of Deutz Argentina from April to December 1980, actually offer? In response, I would argue that it provides a new and significant perspective on labor relations and labor conflict during the *Proceso*. In contrast to much of the literature on the topic, this story is not about workers' opposition and/or to the regime, nor is it about workers as victims of state violence.[118] It is also not about the tensions between the union hierarchy and the rank-and-file, which simply did not have the same import in this case.[119] Rather, these eight months of conflict at Deutz Argentina suggest the need to (re)consider in more detail certain questions which have, until now, received scant attention. One of these, certainly, deals with the role of the law and law enforcement during the dictatorship. The extensive, if at times contradictory, engagement with legal structures, both those from before the coup and those created by the Armed Forces themselves, serves as further evidence that we should not be so quick to equate the concept of "state of exception" with suspension of legality. Another conversation to which this case hopefully contributes in some way, is the issue of why certain worker actions provoked violent and repressive reactions while others evidently did not. There are several hypotheses here as to military's reluctance to use force against the Deutz workers, but they are, of course, incomplete. Third, there is the question of how the workers themselves understood

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[117] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 82, Legajo 32, p. 480-483, 485, 487-488, 491.
[118] Lorenz, *Los zapatos de Carlito: una historia de los trabajadores navales de Tigre en la década del setenta*; Pozzi, "Argentina 1976-1982: Labour Leadership and Military Government"; Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura (1976-1982)*.
[119] Pozzi, "Argentina 1976-1982: Labour Leadership and Military Government"; Senén González, *Diez años del sindicalismo*.

their changing relationship to the state. While they undeniably fought to preserve certain privileges and rights which had come to them as part of a longer history of labor activism since Perón, only very occasionally did they directly challenge the authority of the government or question its legitimacy. What exactly were they fighting for?

In the following chapters, I take up these questions from different angles to construct a multifaceted set of possible responses, without making any claim for their comprehensiveness. Indeed, the point of these three case studies is not to argue for a single answer to any of these inquiries, but rather to point out that the experiences of Argentine workers under the PRN were wide-ranging, complicated, and often paradoxical. The next chapter, looking at a far more (in)famous case (Mercedes Benz Argentina), offers a dramatically different point of view onto these issues, but one which appropriately complements the story of Deutz Argentina.

Chapter 4

Struggles on the Shop Floor: Mercedes Benz Argentina during the PRN

> "…toda persona, en la intimidad, es repulsivamente débil,
> pero también por los compromisos de vivir y morir, valiente."
> – Adolfo Bioy Casares, *El diario de la guerra de los cerdos*

Introduction

During the first week of October 1975, a wave of protests shut down production at the Mercedes Benz Argentina (MBA) factory in the town of González Catán, approximately twenty-five miles southwest of the federal capital of Buenos Aires. According to most accounts, the strikes involved the entirety of the plant's workforce, totaling more than 4,000 people. The demonstrations marked the culmination of a series of conflicts over conditions on the shop floor and the workers' ability to freely choose their union representatives. Since 1974, the autoworkers' union (*Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines de Transporte Automotor*, or SMATA), which had represented most autoworkers in Argentina since the 1950s, had controlled the commission, largely without the input of the Mercedes workers themselves. Just days after the strikes began, thousands of employees ~~now~~ assembled throughout the factory to elect a new internal commission (*comisión interna*),

eventually choosing nine delegates who came to be known as "el grupo de los nueve" ("the group of nine").[1]

The firing of 117 workers in mid-October, most of them identified by management as activists, only intensified the struggle. For more than two weeks, the two sides sat in stalemate. The conflict came to a head with the kidnapping of Mercedes executive Heinrich Metz by the *Montoneros* (a Peronist left-wing guerrilla organization), after Metz had been sent from Germany to try to broker an agreement. Faced with the continued intransigence of the 4,000 employees, in addition to the threat to Metz's life, Daimler-Chrysler, MBA's parent corporation, gave in to the strikers' demands, formally recognizing the "grupo de los nueve," reincorporating the fired workers, authorizing the payment of a one-time bonus, and promising not to seek reprisal against the strikers.[2] By the first week of November, the plant had resumed normal operations, with the newly-elected delegates representing the workers to management and the state.

The victory won by the Mercedes workers, though hard-fought, proved fleeting. Less than six months later, the *golpe* initiated a period of unprecedented repression, which struck MBA especially hard. Between March 24, 1976 and the end of 1977, the regime's security forces kidnapped at least nineteen people associated with the factory; at least fifteen remain disappeared.[3] In many cases, the company's directors provided the names and/or addresses of employees they deemed trouble-makers to the military. In others, workers were disappeared directly from the shop

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[1] For accounts of the 1975 strike, see *Evita Montonera*, Nos. 8 and 9 (October and November 1975); *Nuestra Palabra*, No. 119 (October 29, 1975). See also "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, Tomo 1, 491-537 (Editorial Ministerio de Justicia: Buenos Aires, 2015); Florencia Rodríguez, "Las prácticas sindicales y políticas de los obreros de la empresa Mercedes Benz durante 1969-1976: Tensiones, contradicciones, y síntesis," presented at the 10th National Congress for the Study of Labor, Buenos Aires (August 2011).
[2] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 503.
[3] These figures come from "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, esp. 505-511. See also Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina"; and Gaby Weber, *Milagros no hay: Los desaparecidos de Mercedes Benz*, BETACAM (2003).

floor.[4] The scale of the violence committed against Mercedes employees, coupled with the exceptionally rich documentary evidence and the global recognition of the brand, has made this case the object of considerable scholarly attention.[5] Beyond the academic sphere, legal proceedings against the company for their complicity (or participation) in the disappearances of workers from the MBA factory have been pursued in Argentina, Germany, and the United States, albeit with limited success. This, too, has created a high level of public awareness. Indeed, between judicial and scholarly investigations, the approximately fifteen months from March 1976 through August 1977, during which the majority of the kidnappings occurred, have been extensively examined, principally in connection with the ongoing justice projects in Argentina.

Less clear, however, is what happened *after* the disappearances. If most of the overt repression carried out by the military state occurred within the first two years of the *Proceso*, as was the case at MBA, how, then, did daily life continue and/or change on the shop floor? In this chapter, I address this question using Mercedes Benz Argentina to explore how (and whether) the relationships between rank-and-file workers, national trade-union leadership, corporate management, and representatives of the state changed during the remainder of General Videla's de facto presidency. This history sheds light on multiple competing attempts to establish new paradigms of labor relations, on the one hand, or to reconstitute previously existing patterns, on the other. The Mercedes labor force, confronting new legislation, a more interventionist (and anti-Peronist) state, and the ever-present threat of physical violence, nevertheless continued to find

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[4] See "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*. See also Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar"; and Weber, *Milagros no hay*.

[5] In addition to Basualdo (2006) and Weber (2005), see also, among others, Pozzi, *La oposición obrera a la dictadura*; Ianina Harari and Sebastián Guevara, "Los efectos de la política represiva de la dictadura militar sobre la acción obrera: un análisis de los conflictos en Mercedes-Benz entre 1973 y 1983," *e-l@tina*, Vol. 13, No. 50 (January-March 2015); Rodríguez, "Las prácticas sindicales y políticas de los obreros de la empresa Mercedes Benz durante 1969-1976"; Florencia Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI. Un análisis a partir del estudio de caso de Mercedes Benz Argentina," *La clase trabajadora argentina en el siglo XX: Experiencias de lucha y organización*, ed. Victoria Basualdo (Buenos Aires: Cara o Ceca, 2011).

spaces in which to voice their opposition to the company's intensification of production, and to the regime's dismantling of the country's welfare system. While the significance of these efforts cannot be overlooked, I argue that confining the MBA workers to one of the two historiographical tropes which dominate accounts from this period (workers as either heroic revolutionaries or passive victims) is an unproductive framework for making sense of this story. Instead, I suggest that the complex quadripartite dynamic at play here provides invaluable evidence for a rethinking of the fluid and unstable conjunctures between the law, citizenship, and the nation. Looking, once again, to Mason's example, the variety of experiences on the shop floor of Mercedes Benz Argentina oblige us to (re)consider how we understand the practice of "normal" politics in abnormal times.

Before proceeding further, the question of "why Mercedes" deserves a brief exploration. If, in many ways, Mercedes Benz Argentina exemplifies the basic story of mid-century ISI development in Argentina, it nevertheless presents many unique, and valuable, historical features. First, the opening of the archive of the intelligence division of the Buenos Aires provincial police department (cited throughout as Archivo DIPPBA) in the mid-2000s has meant access to a unique collection of documentary evidence for most research sites in the province, including MBA. Second, the international notoriety of the disappearances at Mercedes provides a two-fold benefit. The prominence of the case (and the brand) has meant that the ongoing work of scholars and investigators continues to make new material available. At the same time, the emphasis within the existing historiography on the repression carried out against MBA employees by the security apparatus makes this an excellent case for examining more "mundane" issues of labor policy and labor relations that have, to this point, remained generally unexplored. Its exceptionality as a site of extreme repression suggests that the arguments made here concerning shop-floor practices might, perhaps, resonate with other examples where the violence was less intense. Finally, even

its relative representativity as a “typical” ISI operation can be viewed as a positive. The story of Mercedes should not, by any means, serve as a metonym for the experiences of Argentine industry in general. But the broad similarities between MBA and other auto manufacturers (Chrysler, Fiat, Ford) that established operations in Argentina during the mid-twentieth century may, hopefully, prompt further research into the everyday life on the shop floor during the dictatorship, beyond those moments of critical, and often deadly, confrontation between workers and the military.

This chapter uses a structure similar to the previous chapter. It begins with an overview of the history of Mercedes Benz Argentina, from its founding through the first years of the dictatorship. The focus then narrows to the plant's internal commission, as I trace the history of this body during the period immediately preceding the 1976 coup, and up until early 1978. The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to a narrative account of the negotiations and conflicts from 1978 through the first months of 1981 between the Mercedes workers and their representatives, on the one hand, and the company's managers and directorate, on the other. At several points, officials from both SMATA and the Ministry of Labor enter the story, attempting, with varying degrees of success, to guide events in different directions. Having reached the end of Videla's tenure as president, the emphasis turns to a summary analysis of two major themes exposed by the history of labor relations at Mercedes: first, the role and limitations of the law under authoritarian rule; and second, the contest between multiple parties over the ideological concept of "the nation" and ideas of nationalism. I conclude with some final thoughts about what MBA, as a case study, can (and cannot) do for historians as we attempt to develop new and alternative perspectives on the era of the *Proceso*.

Part I: The History of MBA

The first Mercedes Benz manufacturing facility to be built outside of Germany opened on Thursday, September 6, 1951 in the town of San Martín, approximately a mile northwest of the city limits of Buenos Aires. Within a year, trucks and cars began rolling off the assembly line, most of which were destined for purchase by the Argentine government. Demand quickly outstripped the productive capacities of the San Martín facility, obliging the company to seek out another location for the establishment of a larger operation. In 1953, Mercedes purchased a parcel a parcel of land along Route 3, in González Catán, and started drafting plans for a new factory capable of manufacturing a wider range of trucks, vans, and buses. The following year witnessed the opening of Mercedes's Argentine headquarters in the federal capital, along the prestigious Avenida Libertadora. By 1956, the original San Martín plant had been shuttered, and the new González Catán location became the site of all MBA productive activity. Although construction would not be officially completed until 1959, throughout the rest of the decade output continued to grow, as buses for municipal governments, trucks for the Argentine military, and, to a lesser extent, vans and automobiles for private consumption, were shipped around the country.[6]

During the 1960s, political, social, and economic instability brought a series of ups and downs for MBA. In 1963, the ten thousandth unit produced in Argentina, an L 312 truck, marked a milestone for the company. That same year, Mercedes inaugurated a technical school adjacent to the factory, which, by 1965, was co-directed by MBA and the National Council for Technical Education. Its intention was to train mechanics and machine-parts technicians, many of whom, upon graduation, wound up employed at Mercedes.[7] This school typified the relatively unique relationship between corporation and personnel. Since the 1950s, management's strategy for

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[6] This overview draws heavily on Mercedes Benz Argentina's own official history, accessible via the company's website. Available: http://www.mercedes-benz.com.ar. Accessed March 6, 2017. Additional details come from "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*.

[7] Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI," 128.

maintaining harmony on the shop floor revolved around an aggressively paternalistic interpretation of Fordist labor relations. While autoworkers generally received higher salaries than workers in other industries, MBA attempted to make sure that its employees received the best pay even within this comparatively privileged subgroup, as well as various additional economic incentives.[8] Besides the provision of a private school for technical training at the factory, the company also offered workers preferential housing options in a nearby neighborhood, Barrio Jardín.[9] This level of involvement in the day-to-day existence of employees was atypical for foreign (or domestic) corporations in Argentina. The aim, per an internal report ordered by the firm in 2003, was to foster the concept of a "Mercedes Benz family," in which someone who worked there would have a lifelong connection to the company.[10]

At the same time, however, programs like the technical school also deepened the divisions between workers within the factory, by creating heterogeneity with respect to expertise and training. The shop floor was hardly a standardized space—skilled mechanical engineers labored besides semi-skilled technicians and less-skilled workers. There was a significant gap between the work done in the Motors Section and that of the Sheet Metal Section, for example. This stratification of the labor force was an intentional outcome of MBA's management paradigm. The company fostered the development of these three interrelated tendencies, high salaries, highly-skilled labor, and high levels of heterogeneity, in part to preclude the exercise of intraplant solidarity within the workforce.[11] While these factors perhaps help explain the relative lack of

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[8] For a more detailed engagement with autoworkers as a privileged subgroup, see Elizabeth Jelin and Juan Carlos Torre, "Los nuevos trabajadores en América Latina: una reflexión sobre la tesis de la aristocracia obrera," *Desarrollo Económico*, Vol. 22, No. 85, (April-June, 1982). For more on the MBA policy of paying wages above industry average, see Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI," 128-129.
[9] Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI," 130.
[10] This information is from a report authored by Christian Tomuschat at the instruction of Mercedes Benz in 2003. This quote is found in Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI," 130.
[11] For a more detailed analysis of these trends, and of management's positions, see Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI," esp. 128-132.

overt conflict on the shop floor until the mid-1960s, the final years of the decade witnessed a definitive escalation of tensions. The growth in output, together with the corresponding rise in the intensity and pace of production, strained the increasingly fragile peace between workers and management.

The waves of social, political, and economic turmoil which swept over the country in 1968 and 1969 had a profound effect on labor relations at Mercedes. On the one hand, the company's economic prospects looked promising. Not only did MBA continue to expand its domestic market share for buses and trucks, but in 1968 they began production of a new vehicle, the Unimog, a specialized truck for the Argentine Armed Forces. This meant both a unique product with a guaranteed consumer, and also a deepening of the existing relationship between Mercedes and the military.[12] On the other hand, labor conflict finally came to González Catán. The politicization of autoworkers, exemplified by 1969's *Cordobazo*, became a point of contention at MBA between employees and management, but also between the rank-and-file and SMATA leadership.[13] Grievances about the temperatures on the shop floor, the quality of food in the plant's cafeteria, overtime hours, and the company's attempted implementation of a piece-rate production system caused vehement disagreements over the first years of the 1970s.[14] Younger, more activist workers accused SMATA of maintaining too close a relationship with Mercedes. State security forces escalated the level of surveillance on the factory, as fears of subversion and leftist politics worried the government and management alike.

By 1974, discontent among the MBA rank-and-file over working conditions and the attitude of the union had reached such a point that an oppositional slate, led by militants from the

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[12] Rodríguez, "Estrategias de lucha en industrias dinámicas durante la segunda ISI."
[13] See Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba*.
[14] For a more detailed examination of these complaints and grievances, see *Responsabilidad empresarial delitos en delitos de lesa humanidad*, Tomo 1, esp. 493-498.

Juventud Trabajadora Peronista (JTP, or Peronist Worker Youth) managed to win internal elections at the plant. The gulf between the workers and their elected representatives, on the one side, and the institutional structure of SMATA, personified by its Secretary General, José Rodríguez (of Deutz Argentina), on the other, had become apparent to all. However, fearful of their activist politics and desirous of a more malleable internal commission, Mercedes fired the majority of the new representatives. This allowed the union to declare the factory without representation, and intervene the commission, appointing its own delegates without holding elections.[15] That SMATA's national leadership sided with MBA management against its own members is hardly surprising, in light of the similar actions taken at Fiat, Ford, and several other auto factories during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[16] It does, though, help explain the further radicalization of the workforce, leading to the mass strikes of October, 1975.

In the midst of this growing conflict, Mercedes sought to gain more control over shop floor relations as well as intensify production. The 1975 *convenio colectivo* included clauses which established the company's ability to require employees to work overtime, while also banning any political activity within the factory. It even contained an article which mandated the withholding of 1% of the sale of each vehicle for a special fund dedicated to the "eradication of negative elements" from the plant, a fund to be administered by SMATA without any oversight.[17] Faced with this latest offensive by management, on October 8, 1975, approximately 4,000 MBA workers assembled at the factory, stopping production, and elected a new internal commission composed of nine members. The company, perhaps concerned about prolonging the interruption, began negotiating with the "grupo de los 9," without participation (or approval) from SMATA's

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[15] *Responsabilidad empresarial delitos en delitos de lesa humanidad*, Tomo 1, 498.
[16] For more, see Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba*. See also Torre, *El gigante invertebrado*.
[17] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 499.

leadership. This provoked a strident criticism from Rodríguez over the recognition of an "illegal" representative body. Rodríguez contacted the Ministries of Justice, Labor, and Economy, requesting that the state intervene the firm. In response, the Ministry of Labor declared a "state of exception," and ruled the strike illegal, before appointing a "normalizing" delegate to take control of the situation.[18] These maneuvers culminated in the firing of 117 people on October 14.

From the perspective of the government, the union, and the company, the firings failed to produce the desired effect. The employees maintained their strike for twenty-two days, and might well have continued into the foreseeable future, if not for the kidnapping of Metz by the *Montoneros*. Although we should not assume that all members of the labor force shared the same politics, especially those of the more activist delegates of the "grupo de los 9," the level of solidarity during this episode is both notable and significant. Responding to the firings, the workers proclaimed, "Four thousand inside or four thousand outside," constructing an important rhetorical unanimity in support of their dismissed colleagues.[19] Into the final week of October, conciliatory negotiations arranged by the Ministry of Labor failed to produce results. The cause was likely not helped by SMATA's intransigence, evidenced by their statement to the Ministry during a meeting that they did not know the reasons behind the protest.[20] The eventual resolution, favoring the workers, was finalized on October 29, at the Mercedes Benz headquarters in the federal capital.

The new commission's tenure lasted approximately five months, during which they were able to achieve several positive results. Perhaps most importantly, the commission managed to roll back some aspects of the intensification of the productive regime, and successfully lobbied for

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[18] For more detail, see the account of this strike in "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, esp. 498-500.
[19] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 502.
[20] "Inquietud laboral en el sector automotriz," *Clarín* (October 24, 1975).

improvements in working conditions.[21] Management, though, had not simply surrendered. The March 24 *golpe* gave the company new leverage in their dealings with the labor force, leverage which they were quick to recognize and utilize. The full magnitude of the looming violence was not initially clear, though even for workers it was evident that the situation had changed. One former MBA worker recalled how the coup produced a moment of self-reflection within the plant, noting that the workers were not going to allow their salaries be worth less and less, nor tolerate boots stomping out the workers' struggle. However, they had to seek out new forms of organization, as street protests and assemblies in the factory were no longer options.[22] It is precisely these new forms of organization - their composition, their frequency, their success, their failure, and their relationship to the law - that this chapter will explore.

Part II: Repression and the Grupo de los 9 (1976-1977)

The approximately twenty months between March 24, 1976 and the final months of 1977 constitute the period during which repression at the factory was fiercest, and for which documentary evidence is most limited. Most of what we know about conditions on the shop floor during this span comes from academic and judicial investigations into corporate complicity and human rights violations. A small assortment of government records, interviews with ex-MBA workers conducted by filmmaker and journalist Gaby Weber, and the report produced by German legal scholar Christian Tomuschat in 2003, all help to shed light on this period.[23] In addition to these resources, the investigation of crimes against humanity committed at/by Mercedes Benz

[21] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 503.
[22] This information comes from a quote by an former MBA worker, cited in "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 504.
[23] See Weber, *Milagros no hay*; Christian Tomuschat, *Mercedes-Benz Argentina durante la dictadura militar (1976-1983)* (Berlin, 2003).

Argentina, carried out under the auspices of the Argentine Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and published in 2015, has also made a significant contribution to this reconstruction.

As the post-*golpe* era began, Mercedes was fully aware of the opportunity at hand. In the early going, management noted a "general improvement in performance" among the workers.[24] The day following the coup, the "grupo de los 9" received a summons from the *Estado Mayor del Ejército* to appear on March 29. Less than two weeks later, on April 11, the company communicated to the members of the commission that their services in this capacity were no longer required, and that they should return to their regular posts.[25] By this point, at least two workers had already been kidnapped by the military, and as the winter progressed, the situation in the factory became increasingly grim. Several members of the former "grupo de los 9," having received threats and feeling like marked men, quit their jobs.[26] Despite the threat, and occasional execution, of violence, the workers still managed, at times, to resist management's incursions. After management ignored the supplementary wage for night work, the personnel resolved to refuse to work extra hours. Following the suspension of one worker and the firing of another in August on charges of sabotage, there was a plant-wide mobilization, and, within hours, the two employees had been reinstated.[27] Sabotage of machinery and parts did happen with some frequency, but other methods like the *quites de colaboracion* and *trabajo a desgano*/*trabajo a tristeza* appear to have been more popular.

In December 1976, after several months without an internal commission, the employees voted in ten new delegates from various sections. That month also witnessed several disappearances, which perhaps contributed to driving the new commission to the bargaining table,

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[24] See Tomuschat, *Mercedes-Benz Argentina durante la dictadura militar*.
[25] See Tomuschat, *Mercedes-Benz Argentina durante la dictadura militar*.
[26] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, esp. 505-507.
[27] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 505, 507.

where they agreed to peg bonuses to production, something management had been after for a long time.[28] The escalation of repression during the first half of 1977 allowed the company to push its agenda with more force. A report from August of that year noted that relations between the company and the internal commission had become increasingly tense as workers continued to refuse to work extra hours.[29] This concern on the part of Mercedes was followed by the most brutal outburst of violence against the workers, as over the next two weeks ten people were detained and/or disappeared. On the shop floor, production was normalized following the disappearances.[30] The final months of 1977 were characterized by further attempts to speed up production and the dismissal of those workers who complained.

Part III: The Shop Floor (1978-1981)

3.1: May 1978

By the start of 1978, however, circumstances had changed. On the one hand, it seems likely that, following the repression of the previous months, management could have assumed that opposition from the workers had been sufficiently checked. On the other, while the most vocal and powerful demonstrations of protest were no longer viable options, this did not prevent the internal commission from pursuing alternative avenues in trying to defend their salaries and their jobs. Undoubtedly, the MBA workers found themselves in a far weaker position than ever before, faced with a new juridical framework that severely curtailed their ability to organize, and with the memory of the violence committed against their coworkers fresh in their minds. Yet, as 1978

[28] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 507-508.
[29] "Mercedes Benz," *Responsabilidad empresarial en delitos de lesa humanidad*, 510.
[30] Recognition of this normalization was central to the judicial proceedings against Mercedes Benz Argentina for their complicity in the disappearances at the factory. When asked about the connection between the repression and the improvement in production, Juan Tasselkraut, an MBA manager, responded "Milagros no hay." For the original footage of this exchange, see Weber, *Milagros no hay*.

progressed, the internal commission, having been elected by the workers, and presumably with their backing, sought to preserve as many practices and protections from the previous era as they could.

Unsurprisingly, during the first months of the New Year, the most frequent point of contention between the commission and management was the question of wages. While there are mentions of conflicts at the Mercedes plant as early as January of 1978, the evidence suggests that organized actions did not become a regular occurrence until sometime in late April or early May of that year.[31] Indeed, from January through March, company-mandated slowdowns related to vacation for employees and an overaccumulation of stock led to planned reductions in output and suspensions of production, one of which lasted for two weeks in mid-February.[32] Brief interruptions because of lack of sales would continue throughout April and May, affecting all of the plant's employees, and contributing to the growing tension between workers and management over wages and hours.[33]

One of the first hints of renewed efforts on the part of the commission to negotiate as representatives of the rank-and-file, in violation of the regime's labor laws, took place over several days during the first week of May. On May 1, in the midst of ongoing discussions about salaries, MBA workers rejected a proposal by management for a two-part wage increase, in which salaries would go up 15% starting May 1, and an additional 12% from June 15.[34] The workforce followed their refusal with a brief work stoppage on May 4, which shut down production for two hours starting at 11:00 in the morning.[35] During the week, as the situation at the factory became

[31] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, Tomo 1, Localidad Matanza Sección 4ta, p. 27.
[32] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, Tomo 1, Localidad Matanza Sección 4ta, p. 40.
[33] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, Tomo 1, Localidad Matanza Sección 4ta, p. 41.
[34] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, Tomo 1, Localidad Matanza Sección 4ta, p. 36.
[35] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 1.

increasingly tense, the recently-elected internal commission negotiated with management for a larger raise, arguing that what had been offered would not even keep pace with the sharp spike in cost-of-living brought about by the general inflationary trend, which the dictatorship had managed to slow temporarily but not stop. On May 6, the plant's personnel initiated a *quite de colaboración*, refusing to work overtime.[36] A week after the commission rejected the company's offer, they demanded a meeting with the corporate directorship, to be held at the Mercedes headquarters in the federal capital – a demand to which Mercedes acquiesced.[37]

At the same time, this back-and-forth had attracted the attention of the state's security forces, who continued to keep a close watch over the MBA shop floor. An internal report, circulated on May 8, 1978, evidenced the concerns of the Buenos Aires provincial police over the level of worker activity at the plant. As these disagreements over salaries increasingly became both protracted and public, the security forces grew worried about the possibility of another mass strike, involving all 4,000 of the factory's employees.[38] That no strike occurred at this moment is perhaps less significant than the fear that such a thing was possible. Indeed, if the police believed that a strike *could* happen in mid-1978, at the height of the military's control over the country, that should give us pause for thought. Here, we must resist the temptation to read past events with known outcomes in mind and recognize what these internal memos suggest. Emergent cracks in the regime's authority become clear through the very acknowledgment of those cracks by the security forces. In considering the uneven application of labor laws and the creation of spaces of opposition for workers, this fear is undoubtedly worth remembering.

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[36] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 1.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

The absence of a plant-wide walkout should not be taken as evidence of resolution of the disagreement at hand. On the day after the meeting between the internal commission and Mercedes' directors, the members of the commission returned to the plant and reported to each of the sectional delegates on what had happened the previous day. Together, the sectional delegates and the internal commission, with the backing of the rank-and-file, decided to suspend scheduled negotiations with management, and continue, instead, with their *quite de colaboración*.[39]

This episode may appear tame at first glance, but in fact demands careful attention. First, the internal commission's decision, evidently with the support of the rank-and-file, to refuse to work overtime points to one critical area where MBA employees, despite the repression of the previous eighteen months, still exercised some form of control over (or at least an important check on) the productive process. Second, the dialogue between the commission and management indicates that the legal suspension of collective bargaining did not always, in practice, eliminate the possibility of negotiation. Indeed, in an echo of the events of October, 1975, the company recognized the worker-elected internal commission as a legitimate authority, even without the participation or sanction of SMATA's national leadership. Here, again, the extent of the disconnect between the shop floor and the institutional order of the national-level union at Mercedes becomes clear. While the structure of SMATA allowed for some diffusion of authority, under "normal" conditions, local chapters rarely, if ever, had the power to negotiate independent contracts. In almost all cases, such an arrangement would almost certainly have proved too destabilizing to the centralized hierarchy of the union. That it occurred at this moment and under these circumstances points to the attempted restoration of certain aspects of pre-coup labor relations (evidenced by the

[39] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, Folios 17-18.

tone and content of negotiations, and the attitude and actions of the workforce), as well as the limits on that restoration.

Third, this conflict indicates that the relationship between Mercedes and the dictatorship was not without its difficulties. That the company's directorate would sit down with the internal commission under these circumstances has a broader significance beyond the immediate implications for MBA workers. The private-sector wage control policies enacted by the Ministry of Economy were intended to prevent precisely this situation, as part of Martínez de Hoz's efforts to control inflation.[40] However, management apparently believed its interests better served by dealing directly with the workers, circumventing the "official channels" of both the union hierarchy and the military regime's regulations. This decision implies, perhaps, industry's lack of faith in the Armed Forces' ability to resolve critical problems related to labor.[41] Finally, the internal commission's ability to circulate throughout the plant and gather input directly from sectional delegates with respect to management's offer gives some confirmation of their status as representatives of the rank-and-file. This communication among factory personnel shows that even under difficult conditions, often represented as the nadir of worker power and autonomy, the possibilities for organization and even resistance may have been greater than initially presumed.

The winter witnessed several more incidents of small-scale protest. The employees went long periods refusing to work overtime, often as a means of forcing management to address

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[40] "Argentina's budget sets difficult targets," *LAER*, Vol. 5, No. 13 (April 1, 1977). See also Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, esp. Chap. 8.

[41] As previously suggested, this lack of faith (or unwillingness to follow Martínez de Hoz's prescriptions) was most likely compounded by a general unhappiness with the direction of the Argentine economy, at least among major industrial and manufacturing concerns. Martínez de Hoz's decision to refocus economic policy on the promotion of export agriculture and divest from domestic industrial production alienated not only workers and certain sectors of the Armed Forces, but also numerous industrialists. Chronic complaints about limited export growth at the expense of considerable industrial deterioration further emphasized this discontent with the Ministry of Economy's overall strategy. See "Argentine economy still in the melting pot," *LAER*, Vol. 5, No. 28 (July 22, 1977); "Argentine external sector gains at the cost of inflation," *LAER*, Vol. 5, No. 33 (August 26, 1977).

specific concerns related to wages or working conditions.[42] Although the new internal commission led most of these actions, on occasion workers took matters into their own hands. On the morning of July 27, the *operarios* of the Motor Section launched a wildcat strike, shutting down their area for two hours. Motivating the *medida de fuerza* were complaints against excessive controls on the part of the foremen.[43] The strikers asked to speak with the production manager, and eventually met with the division head, to whom they expressed their concerns related to working conditions. However, in contrast to the protest of early May, this action provoked a firmer response from the company. Invoking labor legislation enacted by the dictatorship, they declared the work stoppage illegal, and that same day fired sixteen people who had participated in the strike.[44] Interestingly, management also met with the internal commission *before* dismissing the workers, and apparently informed them of what was about to happen. This suggests, once again, the company's recognition of the commission as exercising some form of legitimate, if de facto, authority on the shop floor.

3.2: October and November 1978

This acknowledgment of the commission, however, did not put an end to the conflict between labor and management, which came to a head once again a few months later. In October of 1978, the company announced plans for multiple rounds of layoffs, totaling several hundred people, as part of a broader rationalization strategy.[45] In spite of the ever-present threat of repression (both legal and extra-legal), the internal commission responded quickly and visibly. An article in the daily *Crónica* on October 4, 1978, detailed the proposed firing of 400 Mercedes *operarios*, explained by management as a purely economic decision resulting from falling sales.

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[42] See for example Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 11, which describes the lifting of a *quite de colaboración* which originated with a disagreement about salaries.
[43] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 14, 21.
[44] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 14, 21.
[45] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 12.

The workers, however, in a statement issued directly to the newspaper, challenged this logic on several points. They noted not only that MBA continued to figure among the industry leaders across Latin America, but also that monthly sales had increased from 640 units before the coup to 840 units by October, 1978.[46] They also claimed that the machinery at the González Catán facility had not been repaired or renovated in more than twenty-five years, and that the tools they had to use were "totally obsolete." The most damning accusation appeared at the end of the article. It said:

> The delegation of workers reported that "the company plans to reduce personnel and to entrust these jobs to third parties, which is to say the suppliers, arguing a false rationalization of expenses with the added cost of maintaining the factory's obsolete machinery, in order to be the recipients of industrial credits for the renovation of said machinery, which, instead of using them to this end, they distribute for other intentions which we understand should be investigated by the national authorities." "With the pretext of renovating the machinery --they [the workers] concluded-- they receive money, then they use it for other purposes and on top of that they continuously fire the workers who are the real victims of these maneuverings by management."[47]

However, the commission's statement failed to produce results. Mercedes proceeded with the plan, over the employees' objections and their request for help from the military regime. Internal DIPPBA communications tracked the firings throughout October, noting towards the end of the month that 86 people had already been laid off, and that the dismissals would continue each Friday through November 11, until they reached the company's stated target of 300.[48]

Despite the (somewhat unsurprising) lack of response from the military government, the internal commission did not abandon its efforts. Following remarks from MBA directors that the

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[46] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 13.

[47] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 23. The original text reads: "Asimismo, la delegación de trabajadores informó que la empresa pretende reducir personal y encomendar el trabajo a terceros, es decir a los proveedores, argumentando una falsa racionalización de costos con el agravante de mantener un sistema de maquinaria obsoleto en fábrica para ser beneficiarios de los créditos industriales para renovación de maquinarias, que en vez de utilizarlos con ese fin distraen los fondos para otras actividades que entendemos deben ser investigadas por las autoridades nacionales'. 'Con el pretexto de renovar maquinaria --finalizan-- consiguen dinero, lo utilizan con otro fin y encima despiden continuamente a obreros, que son las verdaderas víctimas de todas estas maniobras patronales'."

[48] Archivo DIPPBA, Legajo 1, Tomo 1, Localidad Matanza Seccion 4ta, p. 28.

rationalization process would be carried out "as painlessly as possible," the commission responded with a declaration charged the company with using the layoffs as a form of revenge not only against workers' representatives, but also against the gains made during the preceding years.[49] The same document described "disloyal efforts" to impede unity and stop the independent organization of Mercedes employees. Significantly, the statement also made oblique references to the disappearances at the factory, something which does not appear in other documentary evidence from this period. Even as the demands made here are specific to salaries and the protection of jobs, the commission also included lines reading "And if this Internal Commission is destroyed, [we must] elect another Commission"; and "This is a difficult moment for the workers of MBA. Many *compañeros* are no longer with us. The company has punished them for having concerns about the union."[50] The commission next sent a telegram directly to the Minister of Labor, General Liendo, denouncing Mercedes management for carrying out a "limpieza" of unionists, and petitioning the Armed Forces to step in and protect their jobs. As during the incident from weeks prior, the commission once again introduced the issue of nationalism, raising concerns about Argentina's status as a manufacturer within the Southern Cone. The authors noted that at MBA "we see coming into the plant trucks from Brazil, which unload parts, which in turn are reexported to Bolivia and to the Pacto Andino countries. This means that the export contracts for Mercedes Benz are being filled by foreign labor, supplanting ours, which had made the company into a leader of non-agricultural exports."[51] Even as the statement closed with a criticism of the regime's economic policy, the members of the commission invoked the wellbeing of national industry as something the government needed to save.

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[49] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 8.
[50] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 8.
[51] "Denuncia: En Mercedes Benz se hace 'limpieza' de gremialistas," *Crónica* (November 28, 1978).

This type of public disagreement, generally, and the idea Mercedes workers would repeatedly call on the "national authorities," meaning the Armed Forces, to investigate the company's use (or misuse) of industrial credits, specifically, raise multiple significant points. First, in the October statement, by emphasizing the increase in production and sales over the past two years, the workers' statement challenges MBA management's control over the productive practice of the factory. As with the refusal to work overtime from May of the same year, here we see the rank-and-file attempting to (re)establish (or reinforce) their authority over the shop floor, this time through the public display of knowledge that management either lacked or had chosen to omit. At the same time, the focus on the plant's substandard machinery and tools served to further highlight the skill and importance of the labor force, as they not only kept up production, but, even in a moment of economic decline, increased output. Their closing argument indicated a broader commitment to the concept of "the worker" as both the backbone of Argentine society as well as the true victim of foreign exploitation.

Second, the discursive frame employed by the workers to voice their challenge centers on the linked concepts of nationalism and “the nation.” In contrast to the statement made by MBA management, which claimed its objective was to "structurally and financially consolidate the business," and to "stabilize job opportunity in the immediate and intermediate future," the employees articulated their position vis-à-vis the idea of national well-being by accusing the company of intentionally diverting development credits for profit.[52] This argument could be read as an attempted reaffirmation of an earlier Peronist identity that linked worker, citizen, and the good of the nation. Requesting that "national authorities" investigate the business raised not only the question of legality (implying, or perhaps outright stating, that MBA's practices were not above

[52] For the statement from MBA, see Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 24. See also p. 23.

board), but also of nationalism, essentially accusing a foreign company of stealing from the Argentine government, at the expense of the "real victims," the workers. At the same time, invoking fears about Argentine manufacturing losing ground to its neighbor countries (specifically Brazil) reflected broader concerns about the health and status of the nation. The workers described here a specific vision of Argentina, one in which industrial development was understood as a critical component of, or perhaps even synonymous with, the national good. Doubtless, this perspective resonated with a considerable sector of the Armed Forces, as well.[53] The extent to which Mercedes workers understood the divisions within the regime, and sought to consciously exploit them, seems impossible to reconstruct. However, we can suggest that, intentionally or not, this type of language likely exacerbated tensions between rival factions and contributed to the lack of cohesion within the military.

Reading this incident "against the grain," so to speak, introduces a third facet which merits consideration. Although the Argentine state, and especially the Armed Forces, had long been Mercedes' most important customer, this episode again hints at friction between MBA management and the leadership of the PRN. Highlighting the country's declining economy and the regime's economic policy allowed for a subtle shift of responsibility from the company to the dictatorship. In its public statement announcing the layoffs, a company spokesperson affirmed that they would not become a second GM, referencing the recent decision by General Motors to shut down its Argentine operations.[54] In their November letter to the Ministry of Labor, the workers, too, pointed to the general crisis affecting the automotive industry, with layoffs and plant closures around the country. Martínez de Hoz's strategy of deemphasizing industrial production, together

[53] For example, the Minister of Planning, General Ramón Díaz-Bessone, appointed in October 1976, espoused a distinctly "developmentalist" ideology, and clashed frequently with Martínez de Hoz's free-market approach.
[54] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 24.

with rising inflation, provided both workers and certain industrialists with an easy target for their frustrations. As will become clear in the following chapter, Mercedes was not alone in attempting to place the blame for layoffs at the feet of the government. By the final years of the 1970s, manufacturers across various industries had begun to express their discontent in language ranging from implicit critique to overt statement. Certainly, this case is more the former than the latter, yet it remains significant as another marker of the often-overlooked complexity of relationships between industry and the dictatorship.

3.3: Another Internal Commission

Over the next twelve months, the González Catán factory saw a growing number of minor disruptions by the labor force. This trend reflected a more general development across Argentina. As the political project of the PRN began to come apart, both trade-union leaders and shop-floor activists adopted more aggressive stances towards the regime's labor and economic policies. At Mercedes, the end of the 1970s was marked by two related trends. First, a more explicitly political discourse centered on human rights violations and the disappearances of MBA workers since 1976 gradually gained traction with some workers on the shop floor. Second, negotiation and conflict between the internal commission(s) and the rank-and-file, on the one hand, and MBA management, on the other, continued to intensify, to the point that smaller acts of resistance, exemplified by practices like the *quites de colaboración* and *trabajo a tristeza*, became more regular occurrences. A series of incidents from the spring of 1979 helps to explore both of these developments.

During August and September of 1979, several fliers circulated through not only the Mercedes plant, but the larger western industrial zone of Greater Buenos Aires. One, titled "For the Life and Liberty of the Kidnapped Political and Labor Prisoners," reflected this newly overt

political engagement.[55] Signed by "Política Obrera," it sharply challenged the Armed Forces on questions related to the economy, but also on state repression and human rights violations. The rhetoric used here, including direct references to the regime as a dictatorship, differed markedly from the language of previous episodes, so often focused on salaries and working conditions. Unsurprisingly, these pamphlets caught the attention of the State's security forces, which attempted to find the authors. Within days, they identified a group calling itself the "Coordinadora Zona Oeste" as responsible for their distribution. Although the organization included people from numerous worksites, at least two MBA employees held positions of some significance. Indeed, the group's president, Carlos González, would, by November, be a member of the internal commission at Mercedes.[56] González represented precisely this increasing overlap between an activist political approach and shop-floor representation at MBA.

Almost simultaneously, on the twentieth of September, a *solicitada* addressed to both "Public Opinion" and to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (*Comisión interamericana de derechos humanos*, or CIDH), at that moment visiting Argentina to investigate accusations against the PRN, appeared in several national newspapers.[57] Affirming "We want peace; we ask for justice," the advertisement listed the names of nine Mercedes Benz workers disappeared by the regime during 1976 and 1977. It expressed the hope that they would be returned, alive, "in accordance with the guarantees that our Constitution establishes."[58] A small line at the base stated that the *solicitada* had been paid for by workers from Mercedes Benz Argentina.

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[55] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 39-40. The title in Spanish reads "Por la vida y libertad de presos y secuestrados políticos y gremiales."
[56] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 48.
[57] "Solicitada," *Clarín* (September 20, 1979); see also Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 50.
[58] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 48. The original text reads, "...de acuerdo con las garantías que concede nuestra Constitución."

These documents are significant generally for what they demonstrate about the evolving political climate in Argentina in late-1979, but here they provide evidence for the emergence of more activist leftist tendencies on the MBA shop floor. A former Ministry of Labor during the *Onganiato*, Rubens San Sebastián, further supported this notion with a detailed analysis of the current state of the labor movement, written for the Argentine security forces. The report covered the current state of affairs, generally, but also specifically mentioned that at Mercedes, *clasista* elements had been brought into the workforce, and it suggested that the company was dealing with these new activists instead of with the internal commission.[59] In a series of internal communications from early October, the Buenos Aires provincial police expressed fears that MBA had been infiltrated by leftists, and ordered increased surveillance of individuals identified as potential activists.[60] With respect to carrying out these operations at the factory, one memo noted that the factory authorities were perfectly conscious of the situation, and willing to collaborate with governmental authorities to "unmask and nullify any subversive intent within the industrial sphere."[61] This memo suggests at least two things. One, it gives credence to the notion that the level of politicization of the MBA workforce had changed. Two, it speaks to the depths of the relationship between the company and the Armed Forces. In spite of the oblique criticism towards the PRN's economic policies, Mercedes management maintained close ties to the security apparatus, actively collaborating in the surveillance of its own employees, and allowing troops to move about the factory.

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[59] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 35-37.
[60] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 42, 43, 44, and 45, among others.
[61] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 43. The original text reads "las autoridades fabriles se hallan perfectamente concientizadas y propugnan colaborar con las autoridades gubernativas para desenmascarar y anular todo intento subversivo en el campo industrial."

It would be tempting, given this evidence, to assume that a wholesale political awakening was underway at Mercedes during the spring of 1979. However, two pieces of evidence complicate that interpretation. The first is another flier, published as a direct response to the *solicitada* and the Política Obrera pamphlets. Distributed on official SMATA letterhead, and signed by "Workers of Mercedes Benz Argentina," it strongly criticized the September 20th advertisement, raising doubts about who actually financed it, and denying that Mercedes workers had paid for it. It stated that while the plant's employees had taken up a collection to help the families of the disappeared workers with basic necessities, that solidarity should not be used to support "obscure and perverse interest."[62] The flier also noted similarities between the language of the *solicitada* addressed to the CIDH, and the "Marxist pamphlets" flooding the factory. It closed by declaring that "[w]e want our companions to appear but we will not allow Marxists...to use us. We have contributed for solidarity, not for leftist propaganda."[63] Again, this document demands a cautious reading. On the one hand, it calls into question the extent of shop-floor support for the activist trend described by the fliers and public statements of September. The suggestion that these positions do not accurately reflect the beliefs of the majority of the MBA workforce should not be readily dismissed. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that MBA workers would turn to SMATA to help issue a statement of this nature, especially given the fractious history between the union's leadership and the rank-and-file at Mercedes. This, in turn, introduces the possibility that the flier was, itself, merely a piece of counter-propaganda.

Without being able to prove who authored this statement, a definitive answer likely remains impossible. However, additional evidence related to the composition of the MBA workforce

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[62] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 41.

[63] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 41. The original text reads: "Queremos que aparezcan nuestros compañeros pero no admitiremos que nos utilicen los marxistas o los idiotas útiles de turno que les sirven dentro de planta. Hemos aportado por solidaridad, pero no para solicitadas zurdas."

provides, perhaps, further support for the idea that these more overtly political documents were outliers, as opposed to characteristic of a broader tendency. Although concerns about the infiltration of the plant by leftist elements led to increased surveillance at the plant, the conclusions reached by the security forces strongly indicated that these fears were unfounded. Reports from October 15 and 16 stated that, following investigations of the automotive sector throughout this industrial zone, there were no indications of subversive elements among the autoworkers.[64] One detailed communication explained that since 1976, new hiring policies had made the process considerably more rigorous through the consideration of additional factors, including the work history, ideological antecedents, and past involvement in union activity of potential employees.[65] This scrutiny evidently made it unlikely that any "leftists" could successfully find work in the auto industry. Yet, just to further complicate matters, the very next day, October 17th, the provincial police issued two requests for more information about the "Coordinadora Zona Oeste" and its members, including those with ties to MBA.[66] This seems to imply that at least two "activists" (those involved with the Coordinadora) *had* found employment at Mercedes.

These contradictions highlight the fluid and complex dynamics at play on the shop floor of a single factory. Reconstructing a coherent picture of conditions at the factory can be a frustrating endeavor. I suggest, though, that despite this ambiguity, we can reach valuable conclusions from this evidence. Most significantly, the discrepancies within the historical record related to the ideological tendencies of the MBA labor force support the idea that during this time there existed differing, and even oppositional, positions among the workers. At first glance, this hardly appears to be an important argument. However, acknowledging the disparate social and political tendencies

[64] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 42, 43, 44.
[65] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 43.
[66] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 45, 46-47.

within a group so often homogenized under a singular label ("the working class") does have merit. Such recognition does not mean that the employees at Mercedes, or workers more generally, were incapable of coming together and carrying out coordinated mass actions, under specific circumstances. But, it perhaps indicates that condensing their professional and personal lives into those actions risks overlooking the complexities of their everyday experiences on the shop floor. Thus, the expressions of a more overt political agenda discussed here, and the tensions they provoked, might require a more nuanced reading of organized actions in the factory, before and after spring 1979.

At the same time, the responses to this new activism from Mercedes management and from the Armed Forces support the idea that by late 1979, something had shifted with respect to organized labor and the repression. The general strike in April 1979, and the relatively lenient punishments handed down to its organizers, together suggest a different approach from the more indiscriminate use of violence and terror so prevalent during the initial years of the *Proceso*. As seen in previous chapters, the argument for a multiphase periodization of the PRN is hardly novel, though that does not diminish its significance. Yet these temporal divisions must also be understood as fuzzy and permeable. That the provincial police kept a close eye on emergent activism among MBA workers, but did not use violence or terror as tactics, should not be confused with a wholesale abandonment of repression. Firings and blacklistings were common, and the state continued to disappear citizens, albeit with less frequency.[67] Still, to distinguish between moments within the 1976-1983 time frame by looking at the approaches, beliefs, and conduct of the different actors involved is a valuable step in breaking down monolithic portrayals of the dictatorship, and in providing alternatives to accepted narratives about how these different actors engaged with one

[67] See, for example, "Diez desaparaciones," *Clarín* (September 1, 1979), which notes that during August 1979, at least ten people were disappeared by armed groups linked to the state's security forces.

another. The tensions within the rank-and-file at Mercedes over involvement in particular forms of politics provide further evidence for these important historiographical projects.

Uncertainties over the extent of political activism among MBA employees did not inhibit the proliferation of more general expressions of discontent related to their financial well-being. That fliers addressed to the CIDH and pamphlets calling for a return to democracy appeared on the shop floor with increasing regularity should not distract from the fact that the most common causes of worker activity were still wages and job security.

3.4: Wage Negotiations (1980-1981)

The fitful decline of the Argentine economy continued to erode the real value of salaries, and left workers struggling to keep up with spiraling inflation. As the *plan Martínez de Hoz* came apart in the midst of a massive banking crisis, the common joke on the streets of Buenos Aires became "the poor go on vacation in Uruguay, the middle class goes to Brazil, and only the wealthy can stay here."[68] For the employees at MBA, this meant an increasingly desperate push to maintain their salaries in relation to the always-climbing cost-of-living; for management, it meant attempting to hold onto some semblance of control over an increasingly unruly shop floor.

These competing objectives clashed, once again, in the winter of 1980. The firing of sixteen people during the first week of June provoked fears among management and the security forces of a possible strike - and, indeed, a work stoppage and brief plant occupation did occur just days later, on June 13th. However, while the internal commission used the dismissals as a nominal justification their action, the issue being negotiated with management was salaries.[69] The day before the strike, Thursday the 12th, in a meeting between the commission and Mercedes directors

[68] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, p. 366. See Chapter 8, as a whole, for more detail on the collapse of the Argentine economy.
[69] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 26, 30-31.

at the corporate headquarters in the federal capital, the discussion centered on a proposal for monthly wage increases in accordance with the cost-of-living index provided through the INDEC. Trying to understand the outcome of the meeting again demonstrates the unavoidable ambiguities of historical reconstruction.

In a communication from June 13th, issued by MBA and addressed to SMATA personnel, the company stated that the monthly raises would continue throughout the year, starting with a 5.8% increase for June.[70] The statement also explained that, given the economic circumstances facing the country, the company considered it essential to first, maintain the stability of employment, avoiding mass suspensions and layoffs; and second, maintain wages and salaries for MBA personnel at the highest level in the industry (above what other companies paid).[71] However, an internal police report from the same day claimed that in the Thursday meeting, corporate directors had refused to agree to tie salaries to the INDEC.[72] This, the report indicated, was the primary cause for the disruptions at the factory which manifested on the following day.

Given what followed, it would seem that any deal struck on the 12th was tenuous, at best. On Friday morning, the members of the commission returned to González Catán, to meet with the sectional delegates of the factory. The majority of the representatives, unsatisfied with the direction of negotiations, decided at noon to initiate a work stoppage, with employees abandoning their posts throughout the plant. Some 200 people gathered together and marched through the factory, congregating outside the personnel office. During this impromptu assembly, multiple people spoke about the current situation, before a proposal arose to occupy the space until they received a concrete response from management. However, when put to a vote, only a handful of the workers

[70] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 29.
[71] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 29.
[72] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 30.

raised their hands in support. Instead, they decided that the workforce would maintain a plant-wide "state of alert" until Wednesday the 18th, at the latest, effectively giving the company a deadline for responding to the employees' demands for a regular system of salary increases.[73] Another meeting between management and the commission at corporate headquarters was tentatively scheduled for the coming week. The company would eventually approve pegging raises to cost-of-living statistics, though its implementation proved more complicated than one might expect.

By the spring, tensions on the shop floor again boiled over. On October 1, the entire workforce launched a *quite de colaboración*, refusing to work extra hours, claiming that management had not held up its side of the deal with respect to the monthly salary adjustments meant to keep pace with the rise in the cost-of-living.[74] This withdrawal of cooperation lasted nearly three weeks, before the two sides came to an understanding. The company agreed to continue to adjust employees' salaries in accordance with the statistics from the INDEC, but those adjustments became bimonthly, presumably due to the rapid fluctuation and growing instability of the Argentine economy towards the end of 1980.[75] As part of these negotiations, management also allocated an additional 13% raise as a "bonificación aparte." Reports form the factory indicated that by the next day, operations had returned to normal.[76] However, by mid-November, the agreed-upon raises had still not been distributed, and once again, the MBA workers, led by the internal commission, found themselves fighting to maintain their livelihoods.

In the second week of November, as they continued to wait for the promised raise, Mercedes workers appealed directly to the Ministry of Labor, accusing the company of failing to

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[73] This episode is described in detail in at least two reports from the DIPPBA. See Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 27-28, 30-31.
[74] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 54.
[75] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 55. For more on the Argentine economy at this moment, see Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, Chapter 8.
[76] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 55.

meet the commitments made in October. In the wake of this complaint, the Ministry organized a conciliatory audience between the shop-floor delegates and members of the internal commission, on the one hand, and representatives from Mercedes Benz, on the other, with the objective of coming to some sort of lasting resolution. In this meeting, the Mercedes spokespeople again pointed to the general economic panorama, noting that times were difficult in the auto industry, and that these steps were an attempt to avoid those more dire measures that SMATA had denounced, like mass layoffs and plant closures. The spokespeople further noted that did not want to create "social destabilization," and that their primary obligation remained preserving the stability of their personnel.[77] This explanation, though perhaps containing some truth, largely failed to sway workers. An offer from MBA to pay out the raises owed from October and November was rejected, with the workers' representatives adding a vague threat to the effect that the company would be responsible for the eventual reaction of the plant's labor force.[78] The negotiation having reached an impasse, the internal commission scheduled an emergency gathering at the factory for November 10th to inform the workers of the situation, only for the company to prohibit them from meeting.[79]

In response to this action by management, the workers again initiated a *quite de colaboración*, starting November 17th. The next day, following a meeting of the different sections to discuss the *quite* and salaries, the company adopted a different tactic. They issued a firm statement that they would not raise wages, due to the current lack of sales. However, they would possibly reconsider that position if the workers could increase total production before the end of the year 500 units above what had been previously established.[80] At the same time, as rumors of

[77] "Denuncia en M. Benz," *La Prensa* (November 13, 1980).
[78] "Denuncia en M. Benz," *La Prensa* (November 13, 1980).
[79] "Denuncia en M. Benz," *La Prensa* (November 13, 1980).
[80] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 58.

layoffs and suspensions increased, management also stated that should the low sales figures continue, such measures might become necessary. Having failed to reach a lasting solution with the labor force via negotiation during the previous months, Mercedes adopted a more aggressive approach, essentially attempting to blackmail employees into increasing production, at the risk of losing their jobs if they were to refuse. In spite of this thinly-veiled threat, though, it is significant that the proliferation of small-scale activity and the increasingly public displeasure voiced by the internal commission on behalf of workers, did not prompt, in this instance, the application of repressive labor laws. That the workers' actions were "illegal," in accordance with the legislation enacted since 1976, is indisputable. Yet even as this struggle intensified, management rarely turned to the legal framework which had been presumably been established to help industry limit workers' oppositional power. Instead, the company appears to have sought other solutions outside of the State, which ranged from negotiation with the internal commission, to layoffs and suspensions.

To further evidence this back-and-forth, on Friday morning, November 21, an article in *Crónica* described Mercedes' workers "state of mobilization," which had been declared by the internal commission following the firing of 15 workers. According to union spokesmen, most of those laid off had more than nine years' seniority at the plant, and several of them had either been injured or had contracted some sort of illness on the job, as a result of the work they engaged in.[81] While they were paid their full severance package, in accordance with the law, the employees found themselves once again on high alert. Management, apparently growing frustrated with the workers' continued refusal to cooperate, and still facing declining sales, decided at the end of November to investigate the feasibility of mass suspensions and layoffs for the first days of

[81] "4.000 Obreros de Mercedes en Alerta y Movilización," *Crónica*, Morning Edition (November 21, 1980).

December.[82] Initially, this decision did not incline Mercedes employees to cede their position, as they continued to work "*a tristeza*," in addition to refusing extra hours. Nearly three weeks later, on December 18th, the workers decided to adopt a different tactic, lifting the *quite* in order to facilitate the conversations with the company.[83] Though the two sides appear to have reached an uneasy truce towards the end of the year, whatever peace was gained proved, predictably, to be short-lived.

As sales continued to decline and unsold stock piled up, Mercedes opted at the beginning of February to initiate the long-threatened layoffs. Within the first week, nearly 120 people were fired, while an additional 20 voluntarily resigned. The San Justo delegation of SMATA responded immediately, calling the dismissals "unjustified," and accusing the company of having deliberately waited until most of the plant had taken their summer vacation before making the announcement, in order to avoid the possibility of any sort of organized response.[84] MBA explained this as an unavoidable consequence of the downturn affecting the auto industry, even suggesting in a memo to employees that this action had been taken in order to prevent more drastic measures.[85] However, a report from February 4th concerning the layoffs complicates that reasoning. This report maintained that while the company planned to resume full operations in June, the rehiring of the dismissed personnel remained doubtful - most of those fired had worked in the sheet metal section, and, going forward, Mercedes had arranged to import their sheet metal from Brazil.[86] Given this information, it appears that MBA took advantage of the intensification of economic instability at

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[82] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 61. An internal DIPPBA report from November 28 noted that the "decline in sales" was equivalent to two trucks less per week. See Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 64.
[83] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 68.
[84] "Suspensiones en Mercedes Benz," *Clarín* (February 5, 1981).
[85] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 75.
[86] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 73.

the end of 1980 to adjust its methods of production and reduce labor costs, before returning to the original regimen without those workers that had been laid off.

The internal commission, evidently unconvinced by management's claims of financial difficulty, reached a similar conclusion. A flier authored by the commission on February 10th, accused the company of hiding behind the country's economic situation and noting that January and February were always the slowest months of the year.[87] The pamphlet expanded this attack to include the military regime, as well, saying that while MBA had naturally used the existing laws as a shield, "the current Government had apparently conceded [those laws] with the goal of provoking terrifying unemployment, the destruction of the NATIONAL INDUSTRY, starvation-level salaries and an obsolete Obra Social, all of which only has one final result, SOCIAL CHAOS."[88] The flier focused on the immediate economic well-being of the Mercedes personnel, emphasizing salaries and job security throughout, but it closed with a more overtly political list of demands, including the normalization of union relations, the restoration of collective bargaining agreements, free union elections, and the publication of a list of all political and union prisoners.[89] While this sort of rhetoric had already appeared among MBA workers, I argue that the synthesis of accusations made here by the internal commission, covering the betrayal of the national good, the impoverishment of the workers, violations of national law, and the illegal imprisonment of Argentine citizens evidences a new tenor and approach to labor conflict from the internal commission.

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[87] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 77.
[88] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 77. The original text reads "Naturalmente M.B.A., escuda su proceder en las Leyes Vigentes, que el actual Gobierno pareciera haber concedido con el objeto de provocar una pavorosa desocupación, la destrucción de la INDUSTRIA NACIONAL, un nivel Salarial de hambre y una Obra Social obsoleta, todo esto solo tiene un resultado final, el CAOS SOCIAL."
[89] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 77.

One final detail of this back-and-forth remains to be unpacked. Although Mercedes likely used the crisis in the auto industry to shed what it considered unnecessary labor costs, its concerns over the future were not, evidently, a mere façade. Among the many tenets of the *plan Martínez de Hoz* was the eventual removal of protective tariffs, and the opening of Argentine markets to foreign imports. At the same moment that the company eliminated 140 positions, Werner Lechtner, the president of Mercedes Benz, was on his way to Buenos Aires from Germany to argue against the elimination of the tariffs. With a changing of the national authorities on the immediate horizon, as General Videla stepped down and General Viola assumed the presidency, Lechtner arrived in Argentina pressing the new government to modify its policies and prevent the importation of Mazda vehicles from Japan, which, due to their superior quality and price, would cripple Mercedes' operations.[90] The buses, in fact, were already waiting at the port of Buenos Aires, where they had been held up by customs at the insistence of MBA. Here, then, is yet another twist in the relationship between industry and the State, as the head of a multinational corporation sought to prevent the enactment of free-market policy championed by the domestic Minister of Economy. This paradox not only raises questions about the relationship between the Armed Forces and Mercedes Benz, but also complicates the assumed links between the PRN and the spread of free-market reforms.

Conclusions

The battle for control of the shop floor at Mercedes Benz Argentina claimed more than a dozen lives during the *Proceso*. But to assume clear and fixed battle lines throughout these years, pitting the rank-and-file and SMATA leadership against MBA management and the Armed Forces,

[90] Archivo DIPPBA, Carpeta 78, Legajo No. 1, p. 73-74.

would mean overlooking a far more complex and fluid situation, in which this quadripartite dynamic shifted and changed with surprising regularity. The period under consideration here also marked the high-water mark of the military's power. By the time that Viola assumed the presidency in March, 1981, the collapsing economy together with the increasingly vocal accusations of human rights abuses had considerably undermined the dictatorship's authority. The four years from March, 1976 to March 1981, had been the regime's window of opportunity, and if they failed to meet their own lofty expectations for the total reorganization of Argentine society, that does not mean that we can afford to dismiss their effort out of hand.

What, then, can the history of Mercedes do for us in (re)considering the legacy of this period? I argue that this case shows at least two things clearly. First, it reaffirms the wild inconsistency of the enforcement of the PRN's new labor legislation. Throughout the dictatorship, but especially after 1977, MBA workers increasingly founds spaces to articulate limited forms of opposition towards management and the state. These tactics, which ranged from sabotage to various work stoppages and slowdowns, and even an occasional strike, were all "illegal," under one or more laws. Yet management repeatedly chose not to use these same laws as tools for negotiating with their employees. It is worth noting that the justification for the firings and layoffs which occurred with increasing regularity at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s was almost always economic. The law of industrial security and the law prohibiting collective bargaining were invoked only sparingly. The wildcat strike from July, 1978, which resulted in the firing of sixteen people for an illegal industrial action, is notable in its very exceptionality. To assume that the company's public explanations accurately reflected their private objectives would be naïve. Yet the fact that management so rarely asked the state to step in and enforce the existing

labor law suggests some disconnect between what the Armed Forces hoped to accomplish for the nation, and what industrial leaders believed best for their own bottom lines.

At the same time, the suspension of the *fuero sindical* and Law 14,250, which regulated collective bargaining, together with the nominal invalidation of the *convenios colectivos*, did not prevent workers, union leaders, management, and even state officials from turning to these agreements as tools to mediate conflict. This is most prominently evidenced by the fact that even as Mercedes laid off hundreds of workers between 1978 and 1981, the vast majority of them were paid a full severance package in accordance with the stipulations set forth in the most recent collective bargaining agreement, which had been negotiated *before* the onset of the military dictatorship. Apart from those rare cases of firings with legal cause (with reference to labor policies enacted by the Armed Forces), the normal course of action for dismissals appears to have included the observation of the 1975 *convenio*, at least insofar as the issue of severance and indemnification was concerned.

Recognizing this incongruence is not an attempt to mitigate the severity of the loss of a good income and one's status as a worker. The firing of workers during the late 1970s and early 1980s upended people's lives, to say nothing of the very real physical violence of kidnappings, torture, and disappearances committed against members of the MBA labor force. It would be foolish and irresponsible to overlook that reality. But we can, perhaps, posit that the lack of consistency with respect to the enforcement of labor policies was something that Mercedes workers saw and understood. Disagreements within the dictatorship over how to best reshape the Argentine labor movement created the conditions for unpredictable application of laws, as factions within the Armed Forces pursued their own agendas, while corporate management, national-level union leaders, and various elements of the rank-and-file also sought to take advantage of the

uncertain conditions. I argue that the inability of the military to follow a singular plan of action for reshaping the Argentina labor movement created the spaces necessary for the survival, and eventual flourishing, of particular forms of resistance, especially those related to economics and job security, among MBA workers. By allowing Mercedes workers and management, not to mention the Ministry of Labor, to fall back on legal structures from the pre-coup era, the junta offered an alternative locus of juridical power which predated (and, in practice, often superseded) the institutional framework that the military had tried to construct after March 24, 1976.

The PRN's internal strife, and the competing legal structures, lead to the second important feature of the history of Mercedes. As suggested by the title which the Armed Forces gave to their endeavor, at the heart of this story lies the struggle over the reorganization of the nation. Competition between different concepts of nationalism and national well-being provided the rhetorical platforms for the MBA internal commission to articulate their claims, and demand certain rights. The regularity with which the commission invoked the good of the nation, and grounded that idea in the economic stability of the Argentine industrial worker, evidences the legacy of Peronist developmentalist thought in their worldview. However, as examined in the first chapter, this perspective was hardly limited to workers. High-ranking members of the Armed Forces shared a commitment to developmentalism, and many, including Admiral Massera, maintained close ties to Peronist organizations even in the midst of the *Proceso*. The discourse used by the internal commission in their running conflict with management spoke directly to this broader disagreement within the dictatorship over what the nation should be. As Minister of Economy, Martínez de Hoz enjoyed the support of Videla and Viola, but he clashed frequently with other military leaders, who saw his free-market reforms as crippling to the national good.

Again, the extent to which the workers at MBA understood these divisions and sought to consciously exploit them is, at least here, largely irrelevant. Their insistence on framing their complaints against Mercedes in a language centered around their rights as worker-citizens and the protection of the Argentine nation from foreign threats undoubtedly appealed to certain sectors of the Armed Forces. Reinforcing this, Mercedes Benz management used similar rhetoric in dealing with its employees and with the state. The company's public justification for suspensions and layoffs of its workforce, repeated time and again, was the continuing economic decline, and, by extension, the policies responsible for it. If some among the military heard and acknowledged complaints from workers, similar attitudes from industrial leaders resonated to an even greater extent. While most of the Armed Forces, with some notable exceptions, hoped to rid Argentina of Peronism through this process of national reorganization, the junta found that to do so would mean to eliminate societal structures and practices that many in the military still clung to as symbols of modern development. Martínez de Hoz's divestment from industry and turn towards the agricultural and finance sectors contradicted the mid-century belief that the good of the nation depended on a strong industrial sector to keep Argentina economically independent, especially in the radicalized Cold War world. The history of Mercedes shows how different groups, including the rank-and-file and management, drew on aspects of this developmentalist perspective to communicate their own conceptualizations of the Argentine nation.

In considering the question of *why* certain worker mobilizations at MBA provoked a violent reaction from the state while others went observed but unpunished, I suggest that these two factors, the inconsistent application of labor law and the struggle between competing nationalisms can serve as partial explanations. Certainly, other factors influenced responses from the military and the company. The corporate culture of MBA and the fact that the company continued to pay the

salaries of disappeared workers to their families for years afterwards implies that a sense of collective responsibility, even guilt, on the part of management could be part of the reason for the decline in violence after 1977, and the hesitancy to utilize the new labor laws. At the same time, if the Armed Forces reached the high point of their power in mid-1978 with the Argentine triumph in the World Cup, from that moment their authority steadily waned, as the downward trajectory of the economy and the increased pressure from internal and external human rights advocates eroded the regime's control. Another part of the explanation for the disparity in responses, the, clearly has to do with the broader evolution of the PRN and its ability to set and achieve goals as the 1970s came to a close. Yet as the following chapters demonstrate, it is the first two elements, the uneven enforcement of the law and the competing ideas of nationalism, that recur in different cases throughout this period. It is with these arguments in mind that we now proceed to the next story.

Chapter 5

Public Industry in Times of Privatization: ENTel in La Pampa

> "…don't let anybody kid you. It's all personal, every bit of business."
> - Mario Puzo, *The Godfather*

> "Yo anduve trabajando con los militares dentro de la Compañía 131 y a mí me trataban, pero de diez e incluso acá a mi jefe superior, el jefe de zona, le mando una nota al ejercito felicitándome por la actuación mía en la construcción de las líneas y la organización de los pueblos."
> - Interview with AR

Introduction

On March 20, 1976, as whispers of a military coup grew louder, the telephone workers of La Pampa and western Buenos Aires province gathered in General Pico to celebrate the "Día del Trabajador Telefónico." Local and national dignitaries attended the event, including Julio Guillán, the Secretary General of FOETRA, the national *telefónicos* union, and the Governor of La Pampa province, Aquíles José Regazzoli. During a lunch at the Chapel of Our Lady of Luján, Regazzoli addressed the assembled workers and their families, praising their service to the province and the country. Throughout the day, attendees played football, bocce, and *truco*. A switchboard operator

from Santa Rosa, the provincial capital, won the crown of "Reina de los Telefónicos," beating out a local *piquense* woman, who came in second. Workers and management mingled contentedly as the afternoon wore on. The one discordant note came during remarks by Lucio Martín Suárez, the Secretary General of FOETRA General Pico, the local chapter of the telephone workers' union. In front of Guillán and the Adjunct Secretary of FOETRA, also present for the festivities, Suárez dismissed the notion that the national union leadership would intervene the local, stating that Pico would handle any problems it faced internally.[1] Suárez's comments indicated that behind the light-hearted façade of the party lurked significant tensions at the local *central* of the telephone company. Apart from this momentary interjection of politics, however, the rest of the Saturday proved a pleasant occasion. As became clear just days later, the celebration had been merely the calm before the storm.

The coup brought immediate changes to ENTel (the *Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones*) and FOETRA (the *Federación de Obreros y Empleados Telefónicos de la República Argentina*). The military removed the company's administrators from their posts, replacing them with members of the Armed Forces. The union was intervened and Guillán, who since the late 1960s had been prominent in the combative faction of Argentina's organized labor movement, spent the next seven years in prison. Within days, Videla and Martínez de Hoz outlined their ambitious plans to usher in a new cycle of Argentine history, including the somewhat paradoxical twin goals of government-driven modernization and broad rationalization and privatization. This lofty rhetoric, however, did not necessarily translate into concrete changes for the *telefónicos* of General Pico. Though aspects of the day-to-day operations of ENTel Pico undeniably differed post-March 24, the extent to which these developments reflected the objectives

[1] See "Celebración de Telefónicos en General Pico. Asistirá Regazzoli," *La Reforma* (March 20, 1976); "Fue celebrado el Día de Trabajador Telefónico en Pico," *La Reforma* (March 22, 1976).

of the dictatorship remains an open question. For many of General Pico's telephone workers, the 1976 coup was not an especially profound rupture, but rather marked another phase in a longer history which began well before 1976 and continued past 1983.

This chapter argues that the relative continuity at ENTel General Pico offers a valuable complement to the predominant narratives regarding the upheaval of labor relations during the *Proceso*. Despite the transformation of the political order, at the national, provincial, and even municipal levels, interactions between *telefónicos* and management in Pico showed an unexpected consistency. As shown in previous chapters, the effects of the regime's new labor and economic policies on daily work-life were far from consistent. The Armed Forces consistently faced problems implementing their project across Argentina, and those hurdles tended to increase farther from urban areas. While ENTel Pico workers occasionally encountered new difficulties on the job after March 24, many of the tactics from the previous era for addressing such problems remained viable. At the same time, the shifting relationship between work and identity, together with emergent notions of self—which were not necessarily reflective of the regime's aspirations—did impact many of Pico's telephone workers during this period. Beyond the attempted institutional changes at ENTel, structural changes drove the evolution of a new, and increasingly individualist, attitude. Recognizing these features indicates the need to reevaluate March 24, 1976 as a before/after moment and to question the consequences of not only the regime's policies, but also other social, economic, and cultural factors of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The history of ENTel General Pico addresses two issues related to labor relations during Argentina's most recent dictatorship. First, this study expands the analysis of labor politics and practices beyond the industrial corridor that stretches from greater Buenos Aires northwest to Córdoba. While this area has traditionally dominated the country's economic, social, and political

life, for millions of Argentines living in villages, towns, and cities throughout the provinces, the influence of this "center" has often been inconsistent. Recent scholarship has increasingly considered these "peripheral" areas as starting points for rethinking processes of nation formation and the evolution of collective identities and narratives.[2] However, the historiography of labor during the PRN has focused almost exclusively on the experiences of industrial workers in Argentina's urban centers.[3] Given that the Armed Forces took power in 1976 seeking to reorganize the nation as a whole, their project must also be examined at the so-called margins. This chapter offers a unique perspective on how—and to what extent—the regime's legislative project changed the daily realities for provincial workers far from the oversight of governmental authorities in Buenos Aires.

Second, this focus on Pico's *telefónicos* also introduces the question of differences between the experiences of private- and public-sector workers during this period. Labor history in Argentina has long revolved around specific ideas of "industry" and "worker." Light-medium and medium industries, such as meatpacking, mining, automobiles, and steel, generally dominated by private capital, have often served as paradigmatic settings for analyzing labor relations.[4] Simultaneously, studies of Argentine workers have frequently assumed a particular object of inquiry, usually male, urban, and employed in one of these industries. ENTel General Pico complements this research by integrating another sector of Argentina's working population. In

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[2] Mark Healey, *The Ruins of the New Argentina: Peronism and the Remaking of San Juan after the 1944 Earthquake* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority*. For an example of this trend in Latin America more broadly, see Aviva Chomsky and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State: The Laboring Peoples of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

[3] See, among others, Abós, *Las organizaciones sindicales y el poder militar*; Pozzi, O*posición obrera a la dictadura*; Lorenz, *Los zapatos de Carlito*; Basualdo, "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina."

[4] See, among others, James, *Resistance and Integration*; Lobato, *La vida en las fábricas*; Dicósimo, "Dirigentes sindicales, racionalización y conflictos durante la última dictadura militar"; Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba*; Jelin and Torre, "Los nuevos trabajadores en América Latina"; Basualdo "Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina."

1980 approximately 1.6 million people worked for some level of the Argentine government or for a government-owned business, making the state the single largest employer in the country, by a wide margin.[5] As explored in the Chapters 1 and 2, the *plan Martínez de Hoz*, with its emphasis on the dramatic reduction of state employment, ran into a number of problems, both ideological and structural. Revisiting these obstacles through the lens of public telephone workers in La Pampa contributes to discussions around public/private divisions and the advent of new forms of capital accumulation in Argentina from the mid-1970s into the early 1980s.

This chapter proceeds in four sections. It begins with the history of the *Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* from its origins up to the *Proceso*. I place special emphasis on the firm's nationalization under Perón and the period of expansion during the 1960s, as these developments are critical for understanding the form of labor relations at ENTel Pico in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This part also describes the nature of work at ENTel and how something resembling a "shop floor" culture emerged, despite the absence of the shared space of a physical shop floor. The second section analyzes the regime's attitude towards telecommunications and gives an overview of the changes that it attempted to implement after 1976. It also explores how these projects affected ENTel General Pico and points to employees' reactions. The second half of the chapter relies heavily on interviews, requiring a reflection on oral historical practice that prefaces the third part. Section III recovers workers' experiences from different sectors of ENTel Pico during the dictatorship. These testimonies call into question the idea of March 24 as a rupture point and suggest the need to reconsider potential continuities during these years. My argument is not that

[5] These numbers are from INDEC statistics consulted through the Library of the Ministry of Economy. Although obvious, it bears mentioning here that the Argentine state sector was phenomenally diverse, and therefore the experiences of telephone workers in La Pampa do not necessarily share much with those of municipal employees in San Carlos de Bariloche, for example. However, bringing these experiences into the discussion around labor and labor relations during the PRN will, hopefully, encourage further research into other areas of the public sector.

nothing changed, but instead that we must thoroughly engage with the meaning of those changes to better understand the historical processes. The final section highlights three themes that cut across the personal histories and help to think about what the story of ENTel Pico can contribute to a broader conversation around labor law and labor relations during the most recent dictatorship. These themes interrogate processes of nation-making (or, in this case, nation-reorganizing) at the margins and how different factors affect the constant (re)construction of personal identities. I conclude by thinking about how the sale of ENTel in 1990 shaped these stories. Specifically, I address what privatization contributes to our reading of labor relations during the PRN and how this event helps situate the dictatorship within the longer arc of Argentine history.

Part I: Historical Context

1.1: ENTel and FOETRA

The experiences of General Pico's *telefónicos* require some general context related to ENTel as a company and La Pampa as a region. While not comprehensive, this section offers a brief overview of relevant information, beginning with the installation of the first Argentine telephones and continuing through the privatization of ENTel in 1990 under then-President Carlos Menem. While the privatization of the company falls outside the temporal scope of this project, it is important to outline that development here, given its significance across my interviews with former ENTel Pico workers. Making sense of the relationship between work and identity during the dictatorship necessitates a return to this question of privatization, which is why I include a short summary here.

The story of telecommunications in Argentina stretches back almost as far as the invention of the telephone itself. Just five years after the first telephonic communication in Boston in 1876,

subsidiaries of the Bell Telephone Company installed twenty phone lines in the city of Buenos Aires. With significant support from foreign capital (first French and later British), the country's telephone network experienced considerable growth over the next four decades, such that by 1913 the country accounted for more than a third of all phone lines in Latin America, and by 1939 Argentine ranked seventeenth in the world in terms of telephones per capita, just behind France.[6] By 1929, the U.S.-based International Telephone and Telegraph Company (ITT) had consolidated more than 90% of Argentina's telephone operations, creating a virtual monopoly. ITT's control remained intact until the presidential elections of 1946 brought Perón to power.[7] The next three years witnessed the incremental nationalization of the telecommunications industry, culminating in the establishment of *Teléfonos del Estado* in 1949.[8]

Perón promoted the rapid expansion of the country's telecommunications network throughout the early 1950s and, following the 1955 coup that removed him from power, the *Revolución Libertadora* reaffirmed Perón's nationalization by creating the *Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* (ENTel) in January 1956. Although a state enterprise for nearly thirty-five years, ENTel relied heavily on agreements with foreign multinationals, especially Siemens and Standard Electric (a filial of ITT).[9] From the 1950s through the 1980s, Argentina experienced consistent political instability, but this upheaval did not dislodge Argentina from its position as a telecommunications leader in Latin America. Rumors around privatization began circulating as early as the 1970s, but it was not until Carlos Menem took power in 1989 that the state took concrete steps to make those plans a reality. In November 1990, the Menem government finalized

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[6] Claudio Belini, "Peronismo, nacionalizaciones y sociedades mixtas: El fracaso de la Empresa Mixta Telefónica Argentina, 1946-1948," *Revista de Historia Iberoamericana*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), 13-14.
[7] Belini, "Peronismo, nacionalizaciones y sociedades mixtas," 14.
[8] The nationalization of the telecommunications industry was part of a broader Peronist strategy to reassert control over key sectors of the Argentine economy, which included nationalizing the railroads, public utilities, the Central Bank, and the major oil companies, among other industrial and commercial concerns.
[9] Schvarzer, "Cambios en el liderazgo industrial argentino en el período de Martínez de Hoz."

the sale of ENTel to two European telecommunications firms, the French Télécom and the Spanish Telefónica, which led to a dramatic reduction of company personnel and a sharp rise in the cost of service.[10] The privatization of ENTel remains emblematic of Argentina's so-called "neoliberal" era during the 1990s, and I ultimately suggest is a traumatic memory for many former employees.

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Alongside the growth of Argentine telecommunications, the telephone workers forged their own history through their steady effort to organize for better conditions and better pay. The first *telefónicos* association, the *Federación Argentina de Telefonistas*, formed in Buenos Aires on February 2, 1919 as a vehicle for demanding better salaries and formal recognition. The telephone company responded by firing sixty people, provoking a multiweek strike that resulted in the union gaining formal acknowledgment. However, the Federation would be short-lived, as pressure from management would cause the movement dissolution just months later.[11] ITT continued to consolidate its authority during the 1920s, before a push by Luis Gay led to the creation of the *Federación de Obreros y Empleados Telefónicos* (FOET), the precursor to FOETRA. FOET played a key role in the growth of workers' movements during the 1930s and 1940s, and Gay was a prominent supporter of Perón during his rise to power.[12] In 1944, Gay established the *Federación Obrera de Telecomunicaciones de la República Argentina* to unite the country's disparate telecommunications workers, and on April 20, 1950, this organization became FOETRA.

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[10] Andrea Goldstein, "The Politics and Economics of Privatization: The Case of Argentina," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 45 (1998).

[11] See Joel Horowitz, *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2011), esp. Chapter 5; and Leónidas Ceruti, "La formación del gremio de los telefónicos (Parte II)," *La izquierda diario* (February 3, 2016).

[12] Gay would later break with Perón, and after successfully challenging Peronist domination of the CGT in 1946, would be forced to resign his post as Secretary General under pressure from Perón and Evita, amid accusations that he was collaborating with foreign interests. See Juan Carlos Torre, "La caída de Luis Gay," *TEH*, No. 89 (October 1974).

Following the 1955 coup and the proscription of Peronism, the telephone workers' political weight gradually increased. FOETRA supported the Peronist *Resistencia* throughout the early 1960s, even as the union experienced growing factionalization with the foundation of new unions for administrative personnel and supervisors in 1958 and 1962, respectively.[13] The decade saw a steady rise in worker militancy, however, and in 1968 Julio Guillán, the 34-year-old Secretary General from FOETRA Buenos Aires, assumed a key role in the CGT de los Argentinos, the combative wing of the labor movement led by Raimondo Ongaro and Agustín Tosco.[14] Yet like many trade unions, there existed considerable geographic and ideological differences between ENTel's chapters, and some locals in the interior maintained a more traditional Peronist orientation. While Lucio Suárez, FOETRA Pico's Secretary General, supported Guillán, few members recalled holding strong political beliefs of any sort during the 1960s and 1970s.[15]

1.2: General Pico

Founded in 1905 and settled by recently-arrived European immigrants, General Pico lies some 600 miles west of the city of Buenos Aires. The separation between Pico and Argentina's urban centers, however, is defined by more than simply distance. Through the first half of the twentieth century, the region, situated between the fertile plains to the north and east and the vast emptiness of Patagonia to the south, remained unincorporated national territory. It gained provincial status in 1951 as "Provincia Eva Perón," in homage to the then-First Lady, before the de facto President Eduardo Lonardi renamed it "La Pampa" in September 1955.[16] Over the

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[13] Cecilia Senén González and Alvaro Orsatti, "Confronting the Social and Labour Challenges of Privatisation: Multinational Enterprises in Telecommunications in the 1990s," Working Paper No. 90, ILO (2002).
[14] Julieta Bartoletti, "La CGT de los argentinos y los dilemas de la izquierda peronista," *Revista Escuela de Historia*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (June-December, 2011).
[15] Interviews with author, 2015, 2017. These will be unpacked in more depth later in the chapter.
[16] Miguel Palazzani, "Evolución constitucional de La Pampa," in *Estudios sobre el primer peronismo en La Pampa. Aspectos históricos, políticos, culturales, económicos y legislativos*, eds. Jorge Luis Ferrari and Helga María Lell (Madrid: Editorial Académica Española, 2012).

subsequent decades, the province remained among Argentina's most isolated and uninhabited. General Pico, La Pampa's second largest city, had a population of less than 22,000 in 1970, before a decade of significant internal migration increased that number to just over 30,000 by 1980.[17] Though less remote than smaller towns further south, Pico existed at a considerable remove from the influence of Buenos Aires. Agriculture dominated the local economy into the 1970s, while transportation and communication even within the province itself could be difficult and uncertain.

Yet its relative isolation could not protect the region from the political and social upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s. On the one hand, the developmentalism of the 1955-1966 years continued during the *Revolución Argentina*, bringing new economic opportunities to La Pampa, generally, and to General Pico, specifically. The provincial constitution, approved in 1960, articulated a "progresista" vision for the province. Ismael Amit, of the Unión Cívica Radical, served as governor of La Pampa from 1958-1962 and 1963-1966, and steadfastly advocated the ability of "progress" to bring about modernization and "lift the country out of stagnation."[18] In 1970, the *Corporación Industrial, Comercial, Agropecuaria Revional* (CICAR), a collection of industrial, commercial, and agricultural interests, proposed constructing a new industrial park, evidencing an ideological shift toward investment in modern technologies and commitment to the progressive discourses which had dominated the 1950s and 1960s.[19] Though a decade would pass before the park came to fruition, this support from local leaders over several years indicated changing perspectives. Improving connections across the province—transportation, commercial, and communication—drove and reflected these changes.

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[17] These statistics come from INDEC census data for the region.
[18] Mirta Zink, Marisa Moroni, Norberto G. Asquini, and María Ester Folco, "Historia política, orden institucional y construcción de ciudadanía en La Pampa," in *Historia de La Pampa II: Sociedad, Política, y Economía de la crisis del treinta al inicio del nuevo siglo*, eds. Andrea Lluch and María Silvia Di Liscia (Santa Rosa, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, 2011), 103.
[19] Zink et al., "Historia política, orden institucional y construcción de ciudadanía en La Pampa."

On the other hand, the national turmoil of the late 1960s combined with growing economic uncertainty after 1970 brought significant change to La Pampa. The popular uprisings of 1969-1972 reverberated throughout the country and had particularly strong effects for university students. Increasingly, militant leftism gained ground among the province's youth, bringing them into conflict with the region's traditional conservatism, and opening generational rifts.[20] Students in Santa Rosa and General Pico pushed for the radical transformation of social, political, and economic conditions through their participation in national movements. This period also saw the emergence of provincial chapters of armed guerrilla organizations espousing Marxist and/or revolutionary Peronist positions.[21] Although these divisions and struggles were perhaps less hostile and less violent than contemporaneous happenings in other major cities, they nonetheless had a profound impact on La Pampa's social landscape. By March 24, 1976, daily life in General Pico had undeniably become fractured and contentious.

ENTel General Pico was no exception to these broader political and economic trends during the 1960s and 1970s. The telephone industry had come to General Pico during the early decades of the twentieth century, but during this phase service remained intermittent and unreliable. The first major advance came in June 1930, when the *Compañía Argentina de Teléfonos*, one of the few non-ITT subsidiaries, opened the first automatic *central* (call center) in Pico, helping facilitate communication not only throughout the region, but also between La Pampa and the rest of the country.[22] ENTel's establishment in the mid-1950s mean the formalization of the *zonas de actuación* (areas of operation). General Pico became the hub for a vast swath of territory encompassing the newly formalized province of La Pampa and a considerable portion of

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[20] Norberto G. Asquini, *Crónicas del fuego: luchas populares, peronismo y militancia revolucionaria en La Pampa de los '70* (Santa Rosa, Argentina: Ediciones Amerindia, 2005).
[21] Asquini, *Crónicas del fuego*. AO interview with author, April 3, 2015; May 28, 2015.
[22] *Reseña Geográfica-Histórica de General Pico en su 75º Aniversario* (1980), 143.

western Buenos Aires province. Although the provincial capital, Santa Rosa, had nearly double the population, Pico remained the headquarters for ENTel.[23] By the 1960s, demand for new phone lines regularly outpaced the company's ability to supply them, and the waiting list for a new line could be several years. At the same time, connections to major cities like Córdoba or Buenos Aires often took hours to establish and remained somewhat unreliable into the 1970s. The modernizing impulses of both the 1966 and 1976 dictatorships aimed to correct precisely these inefficiencies.

During the twentieth century, telecommunications relied on specific divisions of labor to carry out the diverse tasks necessary for maintaining a functional communications network. ENTel was no different, with workers being grouped into four main categories. The first included supervisors and technicians; the second, administrative employees; the third, switchboard operators; and the fourth, workers and maintenance personnel.[24] These categories roughly corresponded to an inside/outside separation of responsibilities, with administrative employees and operators working primarily at company offices, and workers and maintenance personnel working mainly in the field, either installing telephones, repairing connections, or erecting posts and telephone lines to link different areas. The first category, supervisors and technicians, bridged this gap, spending part of their time in the offices and part of their time in the field. In General Pico, as elsewhere, these categories broke down along gendered lines: women were the majority of "inside" employees, while "outside" work was almost exclusively the purview of men.[25] Some 300-400 people worked at ENTel Pico during the 1970s, most of them either switchboard operators

[23] The rationale for this is unclear, but it likely reflected (in part) continuity, given that General Pico had been the *central* for the previous regional telecommunications company, as well as geographic convenience, as Pico lies closer to the areas of western Buenos Aires province that are included in the *zona de actuación*.
[24] This division came out in interviews and is also described in ENTel's annual reports from the 1960s through the 1980s.
[25] This question of gender will be revisited later in the chapter, as it bears on the personal narratives of former ENTel workers and how we might interpret those stories.

or installation and maintenance workers.[26] Despite these divisions in daily duties and workforce composition, some semblance of a "shop-floor" culture emerged at ENTel Pico, sustained primarily through employees' personal relationships. The apparent limitation of daily professional interactions between "inside" and "outside" workers did not prevent the development of a robust sense of comradery and mutual respect, as will become clear later in the chapter. This is, perhaps, atypical for this kind of work, but speaks to the small-town reality of General Pico. Thus, while no physical space stood in for the shop floor, a similar—though by no means identical—ethos existed that linked ENTel Pico employees together in the work they did and in their understanding of themselves as engaged in a single project vis-à-vis the company itself.

This ethos did not necessarily extend to politics. The *telefónicos* of La Pampa never matched the militancy of FOETRA Buenos Aires, but the Pico chapter did participate in multiple disputes at the local and provincial levels. Former employees described how during the 1960s, local union leaders consistently displayed solidarity with telephone workers across the country. If a strike was called to support another chapter, most recalled that Pico followed the order.[27] On at least two occasions, Lucio Suárez himself took more direct action, which reflected his power as the Secretary General of both FOETRA and the local branch of the CGT. The wave of popular demonstrations and uprisings which racked Argentine from 1969 through 1972 was less severe in La Pampa, but by no means absent. In October 1970, during a running protest against the Levingston government, Suárez and a group of collaborators cut the telephone lines into and out of General Pico, leaving the city incommunicado. Suárez and another union leader were arrested, sent to Bahía Blanca, tried, and convicted. However, their time in prison was evidently short. Within a year Suárez returned to La Pampa and resumed his place at the head of FOETRA and the

[26] This figure comes from interviews with former employees.
[27] AL interview with author (October 30, 2015).

CGT General Pico, and he was almost immediately drawn into the longest-running labor conflict in La Pampa's history.[28] Salt producers at the Salinas Grande factory struck from October 1971 through February 1972, in opposition to the deal that management had signed with the union behind the backs of the workers themselves. With tensions mounting as the year ended, Suárez stepped in and threatened that if the company would not negotiate in good faith, the CGT would launch a province-wide shutdown and arrange funds for the strikers for as long as necessary.[29] This proved the impetus for new talks that eventually led to a lasting resolution.

Neither of these conflicts directly involved the *telefónicos* or ENTel. However, given Suárez's prominent role and his reputation for developing and maintaining highly personalistic working relationships, it seems possible that some ENTel employees participated in one or both episodes. Yet this political activism did not characterize much of workers' sentiment toward the union during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Several ex-employees described Suárez's style as authoritarian and overbearing, and they suggested he actively dissuaded criticism from the rank-and-file.[30] A lifelong Peronist, he also marginalized the *radicalistas* within the workplace, ignoring their positions and frequently angering them with his decisions. A minor figure on the national stage, Suárez nevertheless held considerable power within General Pico, and La Pampa generally. He was, as one subject recalled, a true Peronista and his leadership of FOETRA and the CGT allowed him to wield his power with few constraints.[31] None of his former coworkers accused him of overtly using his position for personal gain at the expense of his membership.[32] However, the

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[28] Asquini, *Crónicas del fuego*.
[29] Although the conflict at Salinas Grandes falls well beyond the scope of this chapter, it is a fascinating story which illustrates the complex dynamics between national union bureaucracy, local union leaders, and corporate interests outside of Argentina's industrial center. For more detail, see Norberto Asquini, *Crónicas del fuego*.
[30] HP interview with author (June 27, 2015); OS interview with author (June 26, 2015).
[31] RC interview with author (June 28, 2015).
[32] Accounts differed markedly in their recollection of Suárez. AO described him as "having character," noting that he would defend his employees (Interview with author, May 28, 2015). HP recalled that as Secretary General, Suárez would listen sometimes, and other times not (Interview with author, June 27, 2015).

ambivalent testimonies around his character and honesty, together with moments like his subtle confrontation with Guillán days before the coup, suggest a man who could be ruthless and protective of his standing if he felt threatened.

Part II: The Dictatorship and Privatization

The PRN wasted little time after March 24 before voicing its bold strategies for national reorganization. Martínez de Hoz's national address on April 2, 1976, established the framework of what he hoped to accomplish as Minister of Economy. His primary mandate, given the continuing fallout from the "Rodrigazo" less than a year earlier, was to rein in the country's rampant inflation and bring stability to the domestic market, with economic growth and "reasonable" distribution of incomes as secondary and tertiary goals, respectively.[33] The new minister outlined a multipronged approach including the abolition of price controls, aggressive cultivation of foreign investment, opening of Argentina's domestic market to international competition, through the elimination of protective tariffs, and the dramatic reduction of the public sector via privatization and rationalization.[34] Martínez de Hoz claimed that these measures would both bring inflation under control and reposition Argentina for success in the global marketplace.

2.1: Reforms and Obstacles

The *plan Martínez de Hoz*, however, encountered resistance on multiple fronts, most significantly from the Armed Forces. Even though many within the regime acknowledged the need to shrink an inefficient state bureaucracy, they hesitated when confronted with the possible effects of such a dramatic restructuring. Members of the PRN feared the social and political consequences if tens of thousands of government jobs were suddenly eliminated, and their innate patriotism made

[33] Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto*, 357
[34] See "Martínez de Hoz plan unveiled in Argentina," *LAER*, Vol. 4, No. 15 (April 9, 1976).

them wary of ceding control of national patrimony to outside interests. Certain industries—including telecommunications—had such strategic, symbolic, and/or economic value that privatization would compromise Argentina's political autonomy on the world stage. At a more secular level, many state-run companies and industries were under the control of high-ranking military officers, who were generally loath to surrender what were usually financially and politically powerful positions.[35] Paradoxically, the military and economic relationships between Argentina and the United States apparently did not preclude these concerns around imperialism and national sovereignty, even among members of the junta.

ENTel exemplifies this tension between the free-market liberalism of Martínez de Hoz and the state-driven developmentalism supported by sectors of the Armed Forces. In March 1976, Argentina boasted the largest and most advanced telecommunications infrastructure in Latin America, yet telephone service remained inefficient while the demand for new lines far surpassed the company's ability to install them. With nearly 50,000 employees, a budget of approximately 12 billion pesos, and continual service issues, ENTel might have appeared an ideal test case for rationalization.[36] The regime intervened the company immediately after the coup, but instead of using ENTel as a laboratory for privatization, they began laying the groundwork for a massive state-funded public works project to expand and modernize service across Argentina. The five-year plan included the introduction of satellite and microwave technologies; the extension of high-speed networks; the construction of new call centers; a national Telex system; and numerous other

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[35] CM interview with author (November 18, 2015). See "Argentina's economy runs out of control," *LAER*, Vol. 4, No 19 (May 14, 1976); "Argentine planners fail to solve fundamentals," *LAER*, Vol. 4, No. 33 (August 20, 1976); "Argentine unions brought to a standstill," *LAER*, Vol. 5, No. 49 (December 16, 1977); Rock, *Argentina, 1517-1987*, 371.

[36] The total number of workers comes from ENTel's 1977 annual report. The figure for the 1976 budget comes from ENTel's 1976 annual report. See "Memoria y balance 1977," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones. Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires; *ENTel:* "Memoria y balance 1976," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones. Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires.

upgrades.[37] The Armed Forces believed in telecommunications as a powerful symbol of modernity that required state investment and oversight for Argentina to assume its (rightful) place as the leader of Latin America. The junta also hesitated to allow the country's communications network to be managed by a foreign corporation, likely concerned about national security.[38] Once again, the *plan Martínez de Hoz* foundered against competing and contradictory attitudes within the PRN.

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For General Pico's *telefónicos*, the military government's internal disputes over Argentina's economic orientation had little immediate impact. The day of the coup produced a moment of uncertainty for ENTel workers, but "normal" day-to-day operations returned relatively swiftly, at least on the surface. On March 24, employees found the local FOETRA headquarters shuttered, and within two days the local Secretary General, Lucio Suárez, had been arrested and imprisoned in Bahía Blanca.[39] Three company officials arrived from Buenos Aires to take control of the union, including David Pérez, who would remain in Pico for just over a year as interventor. In some respects, the major changes happened above the level of ENTel General Pico. The PRN divided the country into regions and subregions and appointed retired Major Obdulio Adolfo Siffredi as "Delegado Militar" of the Center-East region, which included Pico's *zona de actuación*. However, these measures barely affected daily operations, and within a short time the situation had largely normalized. One administrative worker described the reshuffling as "makeup," noting

[37] For a more detailed description of the various individual projects which constituted this broader plan, see ENTel's annual reports (1976-1981), Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires.
[38] CM interview with author (November 18, 2015).
[39] The details surrounding Suárez's arrest and imprisonment remained hazy across various tellings, and documentary evidence is scant. At least two people told me that Suárez was jailed not because of his work as Secretary General of FOETRA, but rather because of his position as Secretary General of the Pico chapter of the CGT, and his involvement in Peronist politics in that capacity. Even the length of his incarceration is unclear, as we will see later in this chapter. AO interview with author (April 3, 2015); OS interviews with author (June 26, 2015; October 29, 2015); AR interview with author (October 29, 2015).

that any turnover at the top of ENTel and FOETRA in General Pico had little concrete impact.[40] This attitude was common across most accounts of this period. People agreed that if there was a real difference after March 24, it was psychological rather than practical—that following the coup there was a *feeling* of stricter discipline and more demanding expectations, but that their responsibilities remained the same. We will return to this idea later in the chapter.

2.2: Authoritarianism and ENTel General Pico

Years passed before the regime's efforts to expand and modernize ENTel produced visible results in General Pico. Hopes for increased efficiency and reliability were almost immediately derailed by the realities of Argentina's economic situation and ENTel's entrenched bureaucratic culture. The Process of National Reorganization invested establishing effective and regular communications throughout the vast national territory with obvious symbolic weight. Improving ENTel's capacity in the Andean northwest and the pampean/Patagonian south became a primary objective of the larger project. The company announced ambitious plans for improving General Pico's *zona de actuación*, including the construction of new *centrales*; automatization of manual connections; the installation of thousands of private lines across the *zona*; new technologies, such as microwave transmitters and Telex, for Pico and Santa Rosa; and the incorporation of isolated areas into the national network.[41] However, as proposed timelines for these upgrades came and went, it became increasingly clear that the disconnect between talk and action—historically a prominent feature of major state endeavors—was also an obstacle for the PRN.

Indeed, the first three years of the *Proceso* saw almost no concrete advancement on the proposed expansion of communications in La Pampa. The rhetoric used to celebrate even minor

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[40] AO interview with author (May 28, 2015). AO used the term "maquillaje" to describe the reforms.

[41] For details of these plans, see ENTel's annual reports, 1976-1981, Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires; "Plan de obras 1977/1981," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones. Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires.

accomplishments points to the broader lack of success during this period. On July 29, 1977, the rehabilitation of a public phone booth in the small town of Pichi Huinca provided cause for an elaborate "inaugural" call between a local official and the military governor of La Pampa, Coronel Enrique Aguirre. When it turned out that Aguirre could not actually take the call, a subordinate quickly jumped on the line and made a statement praising the restoration of this "important means of communication," stressing the significance of Pichi Huinca's telephonic connection to the rest of the nation.[42] The ceremony and its associated coverage suggest that definitive accomplishments were few and far between, and that ENTel's new authorities took full advantage wherever they could. Ex-*telefónicos* recalled the first years of the dictatorship as defined by continuity in almost all aspects of their job. As one worker phrased it, "And as for me, what do I know. They intervened, yes, like they'd intervened various things. Here, I didn't note any kind of problems, everything was normal every day, you had to work and nothing else."[43] Others stated that expansion and new technologies were not successfully implemented until well into the 1980s.[44] Workers' memories tended to agree with local press coverage of specific efforts. Declarations from ENTel authorities frequently appeared in *La Reforma* of General Pico and *La Arena* of Santa Rosa describing upgrades and advances for the immediate future.[45] Confirmation of this progress, however, remained elusive.

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[42] "Cuenta Pichi Huinca con cabina telefónica," *La Reforma* (August 3, 1977).

[43] HH interview with author, October 31, 2015. The original quote is: "Y para mí que sé yo. Intervinieron sí como han intervenido muchas cosas. Acá yo no noté nada con problemas, normal todo lo de todos los días, que había que trabajar y nada más."

[44] HP interview with author (June 27, 2015). This expansion was part of a program under the Alfonsín administration known as "Plan Megatel," that aimed to increase and modernize the country's telecommunications network. By the end of the 1980s, it had failed dramatically, setting the stage for privatization. See Alejandra Herrera, "La privatización de la telefonía argentina," *Revista CEPAL*, No. 47 (August 1992).

[45] See, among many, "Ampliación del Servicio Telefónico," *La Reforma* (May 11, 1976); "El Sistema de Microondas Para la Central Telefónica de General Pico," *La Reforma* (April 4, 1977); "Expansión Telefónica en el Interior," *La Reforma* (May 28, 1977); "Plan Integral de Comunicaciones en la Provincia," *La Reforma* (February 21, 1979); "Radioenlace por microondas," *La Arena* (March 18, 1980).

The uneven fate of ENTel's expansionist project in La Pampa highlights several of this chapter's themes. First, despite the regime's promises of rapid development, these goals remained generally unrealized during their seven years in power. In 1980, ENTel Pico was still soliciting bids for building designs with completion dates that had passed over a year earlier, meaning that construction had not even begun.[46] This discrepancy between policy and practice is not unique, but it does illustrate the problems that the PRN's reorganizational efforts faced. Improving national telecommunications might seem a goal that could inspire comprehensive support, yet its failure indicates a different story. Second, ENTel General Pico's history during the dictatorship underscores the distance that separated Argentina's rural provinces from its urban centers. The supposed rationale for the *Proceso* was the transformation of the entire nation, as demonstrated by the discourse around ENTel's restructuring. In practice, however, the expansion proved far more selective. Certain areas received considerable support while others were largely left out. Buenos Aires, predictably, was the main beneficiary, but other southern provinces like Neuquén enjoyed broader upgrades and improvements than did La Pampa.[47] As one ex-technician explained, "the whole province of La Pampa, really began to function in the 1980s."[48] Finally, ENTel's attempted expansion during the PRN illustrates the significance of continuity over rupture. It proved more difficult to break free from ENTel's established patterns than the military administrators initially assumed. The chorus of voices affirming that operations after the coup remained much the same as before underscores an inertia that preserved certain practices and norms despite nominal changes at the top of the company—and despite the dictatorship's ambitious rhetoric of national reorganization.

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[46] "Licitan la construcción del edificio de ENTel en Quemú," *La Reforma* (March 7, 1980; "ENTel en Q. Quemú," *La Arena* (March 10, 1980).
[47] "Teléfonos: Sabemos que no sabemos," *La Reforma* (April 2, 1977).
[48] RC interview with author (June 28, 2015).

These themes also appear in relation to major transformations in General Pico during this period. In the early 1970s, CICAR began drafting proposals for a new industrial park in General Pico. The collective hoped that the park would be a centerpiece for regional revitalization and a key component of the shift away from agriculture and towards medium industry as La Pampa's economic engine. By the end of the decade, with the park nearing completion, the city anticipated an era of considerable growth. For ENTel, however, the project highlighted consistent problems with efficiency and the severe lack of available lines. In June 1976, during the construction of the park, an article in the local paper argued for the necessity of immediately adding as many as 10,000 new lines in order to meet projected demand. The same piece noted critically that two years prior, a similar plan to add 5,000 new lines had stalled for unknown reasons, before all the materials disappeared without explanation.[49] A year later, however, the situation remained unchanged. An editorial noted that of the estimated 4,000 lines that the industrial park would require, not one had been installed. This was hardly surprising, though, given that some requests for new lines in General Pico had been pending for more than fifteen years.[50] Although CICAR completed construction by the early 1980s, functional telephone service lagged for years. The industrial park exemplified the paradox between the promise of modernization and the regime's inability to deliver, especially outside the Argentina's major urban centers. Whether this failure reflected lack of funding, insufficient planning, Martínez de Hoz's free-market ideology, or some combination of all of these, the result was the same. The military's national reorganization, meant to bring progress to all corners of the country, never materialized for ENTel General Pico.

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[49] "Es Previsible Incremento Industrial de Pico Requiere un Mayor Número de Teléfonos," *La Reforma* (June 17, 1976).
[50] "Teléfonos: Sabemos que no sabemos," *La Reforma* (April 2, 1977).

Part III: Daily Life at ENTel Pico

For the *telefónicos* of General Pico, the discrepancy between the Armed Forces' plan to overhaul ENTel and the practical continuities in daily operations left a complex and contradictory legacy. On the one hand, former workers frequently mentioned that the intervention of the company and the union marked a change in the administration of discipline.[51] The idea that after March 24 management used a heavier hand with employees arose in most interviews as a common response to the question of if/how day-to-day life differed following the coup. The repetition of this response by ex-employees from across ENTel Pico echoes a broader, national narrative about the military regime that emphasizes its punitive nature. More generally, this link between the Armed Forces and increased discipline parallels assumptions from previous eras, including March 1976, when various sectors of society welcomed the *golpe*, either tacitly or openly, because they believed that it would bring order to the chaos racking the country.[52] On the other hand, the second consistent answer to if/how the dictatorship affected ENTel Pico was that little changed in the company's day-to-day functioning. Apart from some limited reshuffling of the administration, most aspects of the job continued uninterrupted. Almost every subject included some version of this response, meaning that the same people described how conditions at ENTel both changed and remained the same over the late 1970s and early 1980s. This narrative inconsistency appeared at a general level and in relation to individual episodes that ex-*telefónicos* described as characteristic of daily life during the PRN. These stories help illuminate where and how the attempted reorganization of ENTel played out for workers in the interior.

In the following section, I analyze moments of disconnect and inconsistency as much as examples of concrete details recalled during these oral histories. It is worthwhile to point out that

[51] AR interview with author (October 29, 2015); AL interview with author (October 30, 2015).
[52] Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*, esp. 19-25.

the contradictions and silences that permeate these testimonies should not surprise us, and indeed demonstrate the unique possibility of oral history to illuminate otherwise obscure moments. Alessandro Portelli has pointed to the explanatory value of "errors, inventions, and myths" that can push our analysis beyond facts and toward meaning.[53] These oral histories offer a window into the past that other sources cannot provide, although as others have noted that window is hardly transparent but rather partially obscured by the grime and dirt of memory. Yet, as Daniel James has argued, the "messy," "paradoxical," "contradiction-laden" testimony might more accurately reflect the complexities and inconsistencies of everyday life than does the self-contained and circumspect document that describes the same moment.[54] Human experience is rarely simple, and even less so when mediated through memory and narrative. Though we must always proceed with caution and reflexivity, acknowledging the difficulties and the potential of oral sources opens analytical avenues that might otherwise be impossible.

3.1: Shirking

Neither broad statement nor specific incident, former ENTel Pico employees often raised the topic of shirking on the job. They described the various tactics that their colleagues had used to avoid responsibilities and/or to prolong certain tasks for their own benefit. This might involve faking an illness; failing to show up on time; working slowly in order to spend more time away from the office or so as not to be put on another project; or even sneaking off for a quick nap while on the clock. For the most part, these practices were confined to those sectors of ENTel whose work took them away from the office. The *guardahilos*, or maintenance personnel, and installers operated in the field, far from the oversight of company administrators. This permitted them

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[53] Alessandro Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).
[54] Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 242.

opportunities for avoiding certain duties or responsibilities, common behavior from at least the 1950s. These practices partially explain the tensions over irregularities and inefficiencies in ENTel service throughout La Pampa. HP, who did repairs and installations for more than fifteen years before being promoted at the end of the 1970s, commented on the unreliability of the workforce, describing how "there were people who installed [telephones], and people who repaired, sometimes both things together, but there weren't enough people to do so many things, not because that's how the workforce was…[but because] there was always someone who got sick and all those things that happen to state employees…someone always had some sort of fake illness."[55] This shirking likely had concrete consequences, the most obvious being the multi-year waiting periods for new lines and the irregular service between General Pico and the rest of the country. ENTel's annual reports from 1976 to 1981 criticized previous administration and boasted about their success in reasserting control over the workforce, which they proved via a reduction in absenteeism.[56] AT ENTel Pico, however, consistent accounts of workers ducking their responsibilities undermined the company's assertion.

Two aspects of this story merit further consideration. First, this shared narrative raises doubts about the claim, made by both ENTel administrators at the time and former workers decades later, that workplace discipline increased following the coup. Though many of the stories about shirking took place either before or after the dictatorship period, others were clearly remembered as having occurred between 1976 and 1983. Moreover, questions as to whether the frequency of these behaviors changed or whether they elicited different punishments during these years,

[55] The original quote reads, "Había gente que instalaba, gente que repara, a veces las dos cosas juntas, tampoco había mucho personal para hacer tantas cosas, no porque así eran los planteles que ya tenían previsto con cierta cantidad de gente, siempre alguno que se enfermaba y esas cosas como empleado nacional, siempre tenía alguna ñaña." HP interview with author (June 27, 2015).

[56] "Memoria y balance 1977," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones, Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires, 2; "Memoria y balance 1980," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones, Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires, 3-4.

received negative responses. Subjects insisted that absenteeism and laziness remained commonplace, and that the consequences for these violations were consistent with those of the early 1970s. As further evidence, several ex-*telefónicos* could not recall if certain incidents had taken place before, during, or after the PRN, indicating that the stricter controls supposedly instituted under the military regime did not produce a corresponding (or memorable) change in disciplinary action. Second, these descriptions of shirking rarely, if ever, mentioned an individual person by name. They were characterized by a vagueness which made the practices themselves seem routine, while simultaneously limiting those practices to an undefined "other." Explanations of how and when people avoided work were almost inevitably followed by a statement along the lines of, "But not me, I always did my job." Further, with very few exceptions, any time that a former colleague was mentioned by name, the reference was positive—that they were one of the good ones who had taken their position seriously. This differentiation between a hard-working "us" and a lazy "them" might seem of little importance, except for its ubiquity across these accounts. Though minor details changed, the basic opposition remained consistent. This repetition suggests an awareness of the faults and failures of ENTel among the ex-employees, as well as an implicit criticism of an inefficient and corrupt administrative system.

3.2: Of Patriotism and Flag Pins

Workers' frustrations over both the perceived misbehaviors of their colleagues and bureaucratic mismanagement became apparent in other contexts. In addition to the general accounts of shirking, two specific episodes came up in several interviews with ENTel Pico workers. Though different in tenor and content, each illuminates critical features of labor relations at this moment. Each also adds nuance to the surface-level reading of continuity in the company's daily operations. The first story came up in response to my questions about labor conflict at ENTel

during the dictatorship. Part of the regime's attempt to implement a new mode of citizenship made certain practices obligatory after the 1976 coup, including displays of nationalist iconography and participation in various rituals. The military predictably stressed the importance of the *fiestas patrias* (national holidays) not just in La Pampa but across the country. On these dates, the *telefónicos*, as state employees, were required to wear blue-and-white cockades (*escarapelas*) and attend patriotic ceremonies in the town plaza. For most employees, these gestures were just that—gestures. At least in retrospect, almost everyone claimed that their participation was unrelated to their patriotism, and many mocked the idea that wearing a ribbon or standing in the plaza for fifteen minutes should have any effect on one's standing as a citizen. However, these regulations produced at least one disagreement that stuck in the minds of several former ENTel Pico workers, and four decades later remained the most readily available example of conflict at the company.

Early during the PRN, on an unspecified national holiday, ENTel personnel were required to wear a pin with ribbons in the colors of the Argentine flag, as a declaration of their nationalist spirit and presumably as a tacit marker of their support for the regime. For Don HH, a repairman working out at ENTel General Pico, this created a problem. A Jehovah's Witness, Don HH's religion prohibited him from wearing decorative adornment of any kind. When he arrived at the office that morning before heading to his worksite and refused to put on the pin, a dispute arose between Don HH and management, which escalated quickly. Though his bosses insisted, Don HH held firm. Complicating the issue further, Don HH was, by almost unanimous consensus, the most reliable and polite employee at ENTel General Pico, and prior to this moment had never had an issue in his fifteen years of working at the company. His mild-mannered demeanor evidently made the confrontation more uncomfortable for those involved and those who witnessed it. Unable to convince Don HH to put on the *escarapela*, his boss issued an ultimatum: either wear it or quit.

While the stories largely agreed on details to this point, here there is a split. In one telling, faced with this choice, Don HH decided that he would quit. He walked out of the office, and started away from the building, leaving his colleagues somewhat stunned. However, a coworker, who remained nameless in these accounts, chased him out and caught up with him. As he made to embrace Don HH, he apparently also pinned the *escarapela* to his lapel. This apparently satisfied Don HH, who did not have to adorn himself, and he returned to work with the issue effectively closed.[57] In the second conclusion, when Don HH received the ultimatum and when it became clear that he would rather quit, the supervisor retreated, sending him out into the Pampean countryside, somewhere far from General Pico, where he would not be seen. According to this version, Don HH was sent to Victorica, a small town some 200 kilometers west of Pico, to address a handful of minor complaints and work requests and told not to return until the evening.[58] Again, this marked the end of the episode.

This story (or these versions of the same story) raise several questions. Its repetition by multiple people confirms that it stuck in the collective memory of ENTel General Pico's workforce. Oddly, no one mentioned another instance of this same problem, though presumably Don HH's religious beliefs would have created the conditions for similar confrontations on all *fiestas patrias*. Moreover, Don HH himself, during a long and detailed interview, did not mention it. Though the temptation might be to suggest that this omission reflected the vagaries of memory, that was not my impression in this case. Don HH recalled stories from his early childhood in astonishing detail, and had no problem talking at length about different phases of his career or remembering the names of various coworkers and supervisors over more than forty years of employment at ENTel. Instead, his reticence seemed a product of his character. He took care

[57] AO interviews with author (April 3, 2015; May 28, 2015).
[58] VG interview with author (June 26, 2015).

throughout our conversation to refrain from criticizing anyone, or complaining about anything, although he had faced many serious difficulties during his life. His former *compañeros*, however, were less restrained, and made clear that they blamed management for the incident, and specifically the administrators who had arrived after March 24, 1976. This became both a ready example of labor conflict from the dictatorship period and, more concretely, a telling moment of bureaucratic incompetence.

3.3: "Retaking the Union"

The second story differed in nearly every aspect from the first. It spoke directly to control of the union, relations among the *telefónicos*, and the question of authority vis-à-vis national power structures. Suárez's arrest, followed by the appearance of three interventors from Buenos Aires, created an atmosphere of uncertainty around FOETRA General Pico. The Armed Forces frequently named military interventors to higher positions, but less important posts often fell under the control of civilian administrators. Despite the drama surrounding March 24, 1976, the three arrivals failed to leave much of an impression on ENTel personnel. Only one subject recalled the name of a single interventor—and he misremembered it.[59] The collective amnesia surrounding the imprisonment of the local Secretary General and the intervention of the union raises important questions about the relationship between Pico's *telefónicos* and FOETRA. While Suárez had been personally involved in several political confrontations during the late 1960s and early 1970s, most people agreed that the union generally remained on the sidelines. The majority of employees simply did not have a reason to interact frequently with the internal commission, which consisted of just three full-time members. Thus, although this story superficially addressed issues of power and control

[59] OS interview with author. OS repeatedly referred to David Pérez as David Estévez.

more directly than the narrative about Don HH and the cockade, ex-workers described it somewhat dismissively, implicitly lessening its significance.

That the interventors from Buenos Aires lacked names indicates how little the takeover of the union resonated with local ENTel personnel. Two of the three were barely mentioned, much less identified.[60] In part, this can be explained by the fact that the first interventor stayed less than a week, while the second spent a few months in Pico before returning to the capital.[61] This effectively left one man, David Pérez, in charge of FOETRA General Pico. Apart from a single mention in *La Reforma* on the day that he stepped down, Pérez's tenure left little documentary record.[62] Ex-employees recalled him in passing, without offering a single concrete detail about his time there. One administrative employee related that Pérez spent much of his time away from Pico, perhaps explaining why no one remembered him. The lack of specifics also suggests that his tenure was relatively free of major incidents.

However, the hazy recollection of the three outside interventors can also be partially attributed to the narrative centrality of another figure, the man who took over the union after Pérez, and the one that the former *telefónicos* associated explicitly with the intervention, OS. In March 1976, OS had been an administrative employee in ENTel Pico's main office. Though not especially committed to the union, he had nonetheless been an active member since he joined the company and served as press secretary for a period during the early 1970s. A short, quiet man whose true passion was football, in some ways the association of OS with the dictatorship period is difficult to understand, yet OS acted as *delegado normalizador* of FOETRA General Pico for over six years.

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[60] Only one interviewee mentioned that there had been three interventors. OS interview with author (June 26, 2015).
[61] The exact timelines for these departures have been impossible to reconstruct. The lack of surviving documentary evidence from ENTel combined with the absence of any mention of these comings and goings in the two largest local newspapers leaves these dates unconfirmed. While several interviews mentioned the arrival of three men from Buenos Aires immediately after the coup, only one person gave any details related to the tenure of the first two in General Pico.
[62] "El interventor militar en FOETRA puso en el cargo al delegado local," *La Reforma* (July 20, 1977).

More than three decades later, former colleagues remained unclear about the details of his appointment. The limited press coverage from the period described how, in a small ceremony on July 19, 1977, FOETRA's national interventor, Colonel Ricardo García del Hoyo, oversaw the transfer of power from Pérez to OS. OS, in turn, chose MM, a switchboard supervisor at ENTel General Pico, as his "colaboradora" in overseeing the union. In his remarks, García del Hoyo explained that OS had been chosen not because of his political ideology, but rather because of his honesty and ability. He then expressed his happiness at being able to leave the union in the hands of a Pico *telefónico*.[63] OS explained that, with few exceptions, his role as *delegado normalizador* involved rare appearances at the union hall and even rarer journeys to Buenos Aires for meetings of FOETRA representatives from around Argentina. MM, he claimed, ran the day-to-day operations, such as they were, during the dictatorship. As he described it, he had little interest in the position.[64] Despite his claimed uninterest, OS maintained formal control of FOETRA General Pico until early 1984, through the rest of the dictatorship and the transition to democracy.

Over two interviews, OS described his recollections from the period, including how he came to be named *delegado normalizador*, and what the position entailed. His professional trajectory paralleled those of other ex-workers. He started as an operator in the small town of Roberts, in western Buenos Aires province. From there, he moved to General Pico, and eventually made the switch from operator to administrative employee. This path, shared by many of his colleagues, evidenced the flows of internal migration which defined Argentina at the time (as tens of thousands of people left rural areas and settled in larger cities) and demonstrated the possibilities

[63] See "El interventor militar en FOETRA puso en el cargo al delegado local," *La Reforma* (July 20, 1977). This is the only reference I have found to the intervention of FOETRA General Pico from 1976 through 1983. There was, apparently, no press coverage at all of Pérez's arrival in 1976, nor of OS's continued status as *delegado normalizador* throughout the rest of the dictatorship period.
[64] OS interviews with author (June 26, 2015; October 29, 2015).

for professional advancement even for those without formal education (OS quit studying before he reached high school). Although he expressed ambivalence during our interviews about FOETRA and its value, OS nevertheless joined as soon as he was hired, and remained a union member throughout his career. This uncertainty regarding the union mirrored the views of many of his ex-coworkers.[65] These doubts did not stop him from becoming press secretary in the early 1970s. Suárez, already Secretary General by that point, had come to Pico from Lincoln, and had known OS from his time in Roberts. That personal connection both facilitated OS's appointment and helped overcome his initial reluctance to take on a job for the union.

OS detailed how his reticence had been justified. As press secretary, he discovered that the inner workings of the commission often skirted the letter of the law, and that Suárez often showed little compunction about exercising his authority without concern for opposing viewpoints. Somewhat disgusted, at the end of his term OS stepped aside. Over the next several years he had little direct contact with FOETRA, though he remained a member. By winter of 1977, Pérez, the interventor, requested a transfer back to Buenos Aires, likely tired of moving between city and province. OS, described how, with the rumors swirling of Pérez's departure, Suárez came to the ENTel office and told him "You take control, so the union stays here…all these people from Buenos Aires have to go."[66] Over the next several days, more *telefónicos* approached him and echoed Suárez, and, as OS stated, "in the end, I ended up taking over the union."[67] It is important to note that in this version, "retaking" the union was not related to resisting the dictatorship or pushing back against the intervention of FOETRA. Rather, ENTel personnel's support for OS

[65] Indeed, while everyone had belonged to FOETRA, almost everyone voiced reservations about the way the local chapter had been run, and most claimed their involvement was limited—that they had not been interested in getting involved in politics.
[66] OS interview with author (June 26, 2015).
[67] OS interview with author (June 26, 2015).

reflected a desire to reestablish local authority and to have someone from Pico in charge.[68] That labor relations had been dramatically curtailed and that FOETRA Pico had never been an especially militant chapter evidently mattered less than setting one of their own in command again. OS, apparently, fulfilled this need in the eyes of his colleagues.

Though mostly internally coherent, this account differs from other sources in several important details. First, OS repeatedly claimed that he was not appointed *delegado normalizador* until early or mid-1978. He first suggested that Pérez—who he misremembered as David Estévez—remained in Pico for more than two years, before remembering that he had taken over before the 1978 World Cup, so Pérez must have been gone by then. Though minor, this discrepancy is not insignificant given the context of dictatorship and intervention. Second, OS maintained that before taking the position, Suárez himself came to ENTel and encouraged him, followed by various others. OS also recounted stories about interactions with Suárez over the following years (from the late 1970s through 1984). However, other subjects maintained that after his arrest in the wake of the coup, Suárez remained imprisoned in Bahía Blanca for several years. If true, his speaking directly with OS at any point in 1977, and perhaps into the early 1980s, would have been impossible.[69] Third, no one else confirmed OS's story about having been encouraged by his coworkers to become *delegado* when it became clear that Pérez's time was coming to an end. In fact, multiple people implied that OS's promotion had more to do with loose ties to the Armed Forces, as opposed to anything related to his career at ENTel or his participation in FOETRA. Finally, not even OS explained the process by which he became *delegado normalizador*. Given General Pico's apparent reputation for trouble-making among some sectors of the military, it is

[68] OS interview with author (June 26, 2015).
[69] Accounts of when Suárez was released from prison were fuzzy, and often contradictory. However, only OS made any sort of claim that he had been freed by mid-1977. AO interview with author (April 3, 2015);

hard to see how OS, even with the encouragement of his colleagues, could have persuaded the national interventor of FOETRA to accept him rather than another outside authority.

Taken individually, none of these details necessarily invalidates OS's account, though together they suggest a pattern of inconsistency that requires further attention. Former workers expressed ambivalence about OS's time as *delegado*. Although little documentary evidence exists to illuminate daily operations during OS's tenure, several people had general stories about his time in charge of FOETRA Pico. They described how his door was always open to hear minor issues, even if he rarely took concrete steps to address whatever problems came before him. Multiple people stated that reunions and assemblies continued under OS, but that their character changed from participatory (even if that participation had been largely superficial prior to 1976) to explanatory, with OS simply relaying information from the meetings he attended with the national authorities, which took place for the most part in Buenos Aires. Adding another wrinkle, at least one ex-employee stated that OS returned from these trips frightened, and that at times he complained about having been chosen for the position.[70] Not surprisingly, OS described these trips as largely routine. He stated that for the most part he showed up, rubber stamped whatever initiative was under consideration, and returned to Pico.

Part IV: Analysis and Themes

The stories of daily life at ENTel General Pico highlight several themes which run through the experiences of various *telefónicos*, and just as importantly how they talk about those experiences. The disconnects between the Ministry of Economy's discourse of rationalization and privatization, the regime's ambitious plan for expansion and modernization, and the practical

[70] AO interview with author (April 3, 2015).

continuities in everyday operations, underscore the tangle of competing projects and philosophies that defined this period. In this final section, I trace three of the most important of these shared themes and consider how they contribute to a more nuanced reading of labor-state relations during the *Proceso*. Looking at the role of law at the margins; the relationship between work and identity; and changing notions of self during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates the need for a broader and more nuanced engagement with workers' lived experience under Argentina's most recent dictatorship. How these state employees navigated the daily challenges of possible threats to their employment within a context of general uncertainty and doubt indicates the importance of better understanding the coping mechanisms and pragmatic approaches that allowed people to adapt to, and even flourish in, this complex historical conjuncture.

4.1: Law at the Margins

The array of new policies, decrees, and regulations issued by the Ministries of Labor and Economy, especially between 1976 and 1979, aimed to profoundly transform the relationship between labor and capital in Argentina, as well as the state's role in mediating that relationship. The central problem, however, was that Labor and Economy did not share a vision of what this transformation should look like. Moreover, the application of this new legislation proved erratic and inconsistent, and the impact diminished as one moved further from the urban centers. The experiences of ENTel General Pico show how contradictory policies prevented concrete achievement, and how geographic distance undermined the significance of these aspirational reforms. Examining how ex-*telefónicos* recalled—or did not recall—the law and its effects during this period illuminates the extent to which strategies imposed by the regime's leadership, meant to control day-to-day aspects of labor relations, did not resonate with the workers themselves.

During both formal interviews and casual conversations with former ENTel employees, there was a sharp the divide between life in General Pico and happenings in Buenos Aires. Comments like "we always depended on Buenos Aires," "whenever something happened in Buenos Aires, there were repercussions here," or "those things happened in Buenos Aires, but they didn't really happen here in the interior" reinforced Pico's "dependent" position vis-à-vis the center and highlighted the geographical—and political—separation.[71] This attitude applied to things like negotiations around wages and working conditions, but it also characterized how people remembered, or did not remember, the dictatorship's overhaul of Argentina's legal system after 1976. AO, a former *operadora* and later an administrative employee, was the only person who recalled any specific details about the changes to the national labor laws, and she admitted that her interest distinguished her from her colleagues. AO described changes to labor and economic legislation in broad terms, and eventually produced a small booklet that contained details of the PRN's labor laws, including Law 22,105. She explained that the company never provided employees with information about national-level reforms regarding contracts, wages, or benefits. She herself had sought out the booklet, buying it at a *kiosco* in General Pico, because of her personal concerns that these developments would affect her job and her rights.[72] AO had been raised in a Peronist household but moved away from Peronism as an adult, and did not consider herself especially political. Her interest in how this legislation might affect her life was apparently exceptional among ENTel Pico personnel.

Indeed, other ex-employees repeatedly denied any memory of changes to Argentina's labor laws, although these changes almost certainly impacted their daily lives. For example, the national

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[71] AL interview with author (October 30, 2015); AR interview with author (October 29, 2015); OS interview with author (June 26, 2015).

[72] AO interviews with the author (April 3, 2015; May 28, 2015). Some information is also from unrecorded conversations with the author in October 2015.

intervention of ENTel, led by Brigadier General Eduardo Oscar Corrado, increased the workday from seven to eight hours in early 1977. This effort provoked a massive conflict in the capital that dominated national news.[73] FOETRA Buenos Aires members refused to work the eighth hour and the administration responded by firing more than three thousand employees. This was, in the testimony of one Buenos Aires militant, the *telefónicos*' most important struggle of the PRN era.[74] In General Pico, not one person even recalled the change, much less any resistance to that change. One person even declared that "the labor laws were kept more or less the same," before admitting (in response to a direct question) that he recalled certain rights and privileges being curtailed after 1976.[75] Yet according to most accounts of the period, it had been a non-event. The silence around these legal changes and the response they sparked has its own significance, as it shows how the divide between the urban center and rural periphery clearly marked the lived experience of citizens as they coped with shifting circumstances.

This case builds on and complicates recent scholarship on Peronism in rural Argentina. Mark Healey, for example, has shown how Perón used the 1944 San Juan earthquake as a platform to articulate a new national vision for Argentina that underscored the importance of the interior and its inhabitants. This stance helped launch Perón's political career, but the promises made in the wake of the disaster remained unfulfilled as his attention turned towards consolidating power in and around Buenos Aires after 1945.[76] While the PRN's engagement with the interior did not match Perón's initial commitment to San Juan, something similar can be seen in General Pico. The dictatorship's pledge to modernize and reorganize the nation rested, at least to some extent, on its

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[73] See, among others, "Dispusiéronse varias cesantías en ENTel," *La Nación* (February 4, 1977); "Nuevo horario en ENTel," *Clarín* (February 25, 1977).
[74] CM interview with author (November 18, 2015).
[75] HP interview with author (June 27, 2015).
[76] Healey, *The Ruins of the New Argentina*.

ability to integrate the periphery into the nation and bring progress to those outside of the country's industrial corridor. The ambitious plans for expanding and modernizing ENTel reflected this objective, but they proved unable to realize this transformation. Despite their effective control over the levers of local, provincial, and national government and the aggressive enactment of legislation intended to produce refoundational change, the regime's reorganization did not materialize. Though they were, in many ways, its target audience, at least in General Pico this new legal corpus simply did not resonate with telephone workers.

The apparent lack of concern for the remaking of the law after 1976 should not be interpreted to mean that Pico specifically, or rural Argentina more generally, existed in some state of anarchic disorder. Former ENTel employees did not characterize this period as particularly chaotic, especially when compared to the years that preceded the coup, or to an even greater extent, the decade that followed the return of democracy. Instead, what is relevant here is the repetition of the narrative about how little things changed. The military's attempt to use legality (through the creation of new laws) to construct legitimacy (in the hearts and minds of the people they sought to govern) fell well short of their objective, as many workers simply did not notice (or at least did not remember) a significant transformation of their daily reality during this period. However, recognizing this failure to directly shape workers' attitudes and redefine their place(s) vis-à-vis the nation does not preclude the possibility that other transformations were occurring within those same workers.

4.2: Work and Self

If most ENTel Pico employees failed to register the effects of the military's attempted reorganization, then what did matter to them as *telefónicos*? Their memories from this period revolved around several themes that indicate the dynamic formations and transformations of

personal mores and identities from the 1960s through the early 1980s. Work itself was clearly central to people's self-conception, and in their recollections the job and its associated practices stood in for elements of a broader worldview. This was perhaps clearest in the stories of shirking, which we will revisit in the next subsection. However, two commonly mentioned features of life at ENTel General Pico contrast sharply with critiques of anonymous coworkers. First, subjects frequently described the mutual respect between colleagues that transcended the company's hierarchy and shaped interactions among workers, supervisors, and management. This was often framed as a lament about the recent deterioration of *compañerismo*. Second, male workers repeatedly referenced the performance of an idealized, individual masculinity whose central components were marriage, children, and the construction of a family home. Men tended to remember the 1970s not as a period of political and economic turmoil, but rather as the time when they achieved a form of "adulthood" largely defined by personal accomplishment. The tension between nostalgia for lost collegiality and pride in individual success sheds light on how workers constructed the stories of their professional and personal lives, and on how those stories contribute to a richer understanding of rural public-sector labor at a moment when the regime found itself competing with global economic and socio-cultural forces to define Argentina's citizenry.

To view the past through rose-colored glasses is not unique, but the specifics of how former *telefónicos* described the camaraderie that existed at the company merits further consideration. AR, an electrician, opened our interview with the following statement, which was not a response to a question but evidently what he felt most important to impress upon me:

> For example, my wife was a switchboard operator, like Alicia. There were twelve positions. Me, to speak with my wife, I would say to the supervisor 'May I speak to Señora de Rocha?' And she would go and tell her 'Señor Rocha is here…' That was how it was, we didn't feel bad because we were used to treating each other this way, since we were kids. That was the respect that there was.[77]

[77] AR interview with author (October 29, 2015).

This idea of respect regularly arose across interviews, albeit in different contexts. Questions about tensions between labor and management were generally met with dismissal. The responses followed a similar pattern, emphasizing the collegiality that defined intracompany relations, and highlighting events like *asados* and football matches as evidence of the easy dynamic between supervisors and employees. According to these testimonies, little changed as a result of the 1976 coup: though *asados* were perhaps less common, most people insisted that the general tenor of interactions remained respectful throughout the period. In response to various inquiries, no one described conflict within the hierarchy of ENTel. One interviewee obliquely acknowledged the repression elsewhere but explained that in Pico "here, we all knew each other," implying that such things simply did not happen."[78] In large part, this attitude seemingly reflected what people understood as the small-town character of General Pico, in which personal connections carried more weight than ideologies, or even orders from Buenos Aires. The central tension in these narratives between objective moments of conflict (participation in national strikes, Suárez's arrest and imprisonment) and the claim that labor relations were always peaceful can be partially understood by subjects' commitment to the concept of interpersonal respect: they insisted that even in moments of discord, interactions were almost always polite and proper.

Respect was also critical for the relationship between individuals and the company itself. This tended to emerge in regrets about the company's current situation and more specifically its 1990 privatization. Complaints about the new managers who arrived after the sale of ENTel underscored the breakdown of the familial culture that had defined ENTel during the previous decades. Multiple people described feeling physically affected by the sight of computers and electronics, which they had learned to use in the 1980s and which they associated with progress and modernity, being

[78] OS interview with author (October 29, 2015).

thrown out the window onto the streets in the early 1990s as Telefónica gutted the old ENTel headquarters in General Pico.[79] VG, a former worker who began at ENTel in 1970 as an overnight operator and worked his way up to become a supervisor, offered this assessment of the transition from ENTel to Telefónica:

> And I'll tell you what else, when it was ENTel, which was a national company, maybe the service wasn't technologically up to date, but it was more. The workers were loyal, they would get offended if you spoke badly of ENTel. And I felt it, as if you were talking about me, because I lived it. Here there was a faulty telephone, the next day it would be repaired. Today, thirty days go by, in some towns who knows, forty days or more without a telephone, because they got rid of all the linesmen from outside, so they have to send them from here [General Pico]. So the service today, with all the technology, is worse. Before they would attend to you and they'd fix everything, today nothing. Today, they give the employees a daily goal, they have to fix five phones, so they go and they repair five phones, half an hour for each, and you think they're gonna keep working? No, they did their five. "I'm not working more than that," that's the goal they have. There's no more commitment on the part of the workers to the company, the company is the enemy of the workers.[80]

VG's point here is striking, if historically unsubstantiated. As previously detailed, many people described the prevalence of shirking among employees, and local and national news outlets frequently highlighted long wait times for repairs and new lines, inefficiencies, and irregularities from the 1960s into the 1980s. Yet VG remembers something else entirely. While this part of his testimony was not necessarily repeated by his colleagues, the more general argument about respect for the company was. Multiple subjects claimed that things had been better under ENTel and spoke fondly about their years at the company (prior to 1990). Though VG perhaps overstates his case, this broader point about loyalty is at least partially responsible for this shared recollection. AR, another former employee, stated simply, "I miss ENTel…I miss it because I loved it and I always say that for me, they never should have sold it."[81] The question, then, is why this version of the

[79] AO interview with author (May 28, 2015); AR interview with author (October 29, 2015). AR specifically mentioned tearing up as he watched.
[80] VG interview with author (June 26, 2015).
[81] AR interview with author (October 29, 2015).

story is so common. While being wary of oversimplifying, there seem to be two main factors that contribute to and shape this perspective.

First, that General Pico remained largely separate from the upheaval of the 1970s and early 1980s, a frequent point in nearly all accounts of the dictatorship years, almost certainly has consequences for how other aspects of the period are remembered. Memory, as a constant struggle between past and present, is reconstructed to satisfy current necessity as much as to reflect historical events. General Pico is a small town with relatively low crime, yet numerous interview subjects found ways to bring up what they perceived to be a rise in criminality among the younger generations. This centered mostly on drugs and drinking, but always underscored by a subtler complaint about lack of civility.[82] Thus, the insistence on and celebration of the multiple forms of respect (between coworkers; between labor and management; between individuals and the company) that characterized ENTel Pico over more than two decades speaks to a nostalgic reimagining of the past that fulfills two functions. One, it reaffirms the narrative that Pico remained peaceful despite the tensions that affected the rest of the country. In doing so, this story also highlights the cross-class relationships which these former *telefónicos* highlighted to evidence their reasonableness and maturity. And two, it creates a divide between the "what was" and the "what is," which gives the story additional resonance vis-à-vis the present moment. Their struggles take on greater meaning precisely because what they held as significant no longer exists.

Second, this idea of respect has likely been reinterpreted through what most ex-ENTel employees view as the actual moment of trauma in their professional careers: not the coup of 1976, but the privatization of 1990. Then-President Carlos Menem's decision to auction off ENTel to

[82] These references tended to come up during informal conversation, and thus went generally unrecorded. However, stories of drug dealers moving into the neighborhood, or even entire *barrios* dominated by trafficking, arose on multiple occasions.

private capital became a moment of profound rupture in the lives of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of telecommunications employees across the country, including those in Pico. Though many mocked the idea of nationalism while relating the story of the *escarapela*, it seemed clear that the surrender of a totemic state enterprise to foreigners remained, some twenty-five years later, an open wound. The concept of respect helped explain what had been lost in the sale. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Telefónica laid off workers and gutted benefit packages, undoing most of the gains which FOETRA, and the Argentine labor movement generally, had achieved through decades of effort. This alone would doubtless provoke strong negative reactions, but it was compounded by the loss of the corporate culture of ENTel, which, for the personnel of General Pico, had instilled in them a sense of camaraderie and a feeling of pride.

Still, this shared narrative about the collective trauma of privatization was not the only story that these interviews told. A simultaneous though contradictory undercurrent of individual development appeared in many testimonies, especially those of male workers. La Pampa, having earned provincial status during Perón's second term, maintained historic ties to Peronism, but for most of the *telefónicos*, politics evidently held little interest. When prompted to talk about major events (the return of Perón in 1973; his death in 1974; the 1976 coup; the 1979 general strike), responses were vague and lacked detail. The only notable exceptions were the 1978 World Cup, which people seemed somewhat embarrassed to discuss; and the 1982 Malvinas War, which most dismissed as a last-ditch scheme of the military to remain in power for a few more years.[83] The most common response from men to questions about that period of their life was remarkable in its

[83] The embarrassment in discussing the 1978 World Cup was not related to the horror stories which later emerged about concentration camps throughout Argentina, and tales of guards taking prisoners out to celebrate the victory as a means of demonstrating that no one cared that they were missing. Instead, their shame came from (as yet unproven) allegations that with Argentina needing to beat Peru by four goals in order to advance, the dictatorship paid the Peruvian government off with a massive grain shipment to secure the necessary margin. Argentina defeated Peru 6-0, and eventually advanced to win the tournament.

consistency. Nearly every man described, in varying degrees of detail, how during those years he started a family and built his own home. Implicit in this account was the idea that in doing so, he had fulfilled his duties as husband and father by performing a particular idea of patriarchal masculinity.

What this reoccurrence means is harder to decipher. At one level, any single subject could easily and understandably have read our interview as a moment of power imbalance, and thus felt compelled to assert his achievements in what might be called the terrain of masculinity. Although that power imbalance cannot be dismissed, other features of the interviews point to additional factors. On one hand, most men explicitly stated that their wives had also worked in some capacity throughout this period, in some cases at ENTel. The idea that both parents worked outside the home did not produce any hesitation or other indication that this was an irregular circumstance, suggesting that the role of patriarch as provider had socially accepted practical limitations. On the other hand, accounts of home-building were unmistakably celebrations of largely individual masculine capability. Men recalled their interactions at the hardware store, how many bricks they had bought, the foundations they dug, the framing that they put up, how long into the night they worked installing plumbing or adding another bedroom. These stories emphasized the pride that people felt in creating a space to live for their family. And even though other characters occasionally played important roles—some mentioned that friends or coworkers would lend a hand when they could, or that their family members (including children) contributed their labor—the overall tone remained one of personal achievement. Interestingly, narratives about home-building often arose in response to questions about duties and responsibilities at ENTel. Instead of describing the productive labor that they did while at work, men frequently detailed their

production in the private sphere—a production predicated upon consumption (the buying of supplies) made possible by their professional lives.

These interviews revealed a tension between nostalgia for belonging to the community as a member of ENTel and pride in individual masculine success. Reinforcing the gendered nature of these stories, women spoke to the first part of this dichotomy, but not the second. In the 1960s, women made up 36% of ENTel's workforce nationally, but in General Pico the percentage was higher. In 1963, women were 113 out of 265 total personnel (43%).[84] The work itself had been divided along gender lines, such that women remained in the office (all of the dayshift switchboard operators were female, for example), while men did maintenance and installation work (and, significantly, most of the nightshift switchboard work). Starting in the late 1970s, as technologies changed and more *centrales* became automatic, these operator jobs were the first to be phased out.[85] In Pico, however, no one remembered layoffs during this period. Instead, AO, a former operator and then administrator, recalled the job's comradery and noted that when problems arose on the job, people hesitated to push too far because they wanted to stay on good terms with management.[86] This could reflect fears about job security—perhaps more acute for women, who might feel more precarious at work—but given the overall description of collegiality and the immediate context of the statement, it more likely referenced the cross-hierarchical personal relationships within ENTel Pico, or, at the very least, indexed both concerns. However, no female

[84] "Memoria Anual 1963," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones. Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires.
[85] "Memoria y Balance 1980," Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones. Library of the Ministry of Economy, Buenos Aires. This report noted a net 3,600 person decline in operators between 1975 and 1980, although this was offset by considerable increases in hiring in other areas. Per most interviews and much of the documentary evidence, the real transition period was in the 1980s and 1990s, when Plan Megatel and then privatization prompted massive changes to the existing telecommunications system and its associated structures of labor relations.
[86] AO interview with author (April 3, 2015).

employee described her work vis-à-vis a process of self-actualization, and even mentions of children and/or motherhood were rare.

That this masculine individuality (and its corresponding absence among women) coexists with nostalgia for lost community within a single testimony is not surprising. These tensions contribute to the notion that the 1970s/1980s were a moment of upheaval in personal identity. Scholarship on individuality and consumption has tended to emphasize either the pre-dictatorship years (1950s-1970s), or the post-democratization period, especially the 1990s and 2000s.[87] The PRN, however, has yet to be seriously explored. While an argument locating the origins of Argentine "neoliberalism" in the economic policies of Martínez de Hoz has increasingly gained traction, this must be countered by recognizing, as the previous chapters have shown, that the regime's discourse rarely matched the actual economic outcomes of its actions—particularly regarding those consequences that did not become apparent until after the 1980s.[88] The PRN's language stressed a national identity that was Catholic, nationalist, patriarchal, and that recognized sacrifice. It does not seem a stretch to think that elements of this rhetoric might have resonated deeply with ENTel Pico employees. Yet these same employees' accounts of marriage, family, and home-building speak to a shared recollection of this period as transformative—as the moment in which they asserted their individuality and constructed adult, masculine, lives for themselves. Though it is too simplistic to simply lump General Pico in with the global psycho-narcissism of

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[87] On pre-1976 individuality and consumerism, see Natalia Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina*. For work on these questions after 1983, see Beatriz Sarlo, "Argentina under Menem: The Aesthetics of Domination," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (October 1994); Karen Ann Faulk, *In the Wake of Neoliberalism: Citizenship and Human Rights in Argentina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), esp. Chapter 2.

[88] Nápoli et al., *La dictadura del capital financiero*. Interestingly, there exists some research on the intersection of privatization, neoliberalism, and identity within the specific context of ENTel. See Damián Pierbattisti, "La privatización de ENTel y la transformación de las identidades en el trabajo: génesis del dispositivo neoliberal en Argentina. 1990-2001," *Documentos de Jóvenes Investigadores*, Vol. 10 (May 2006).

the "Me Decade," these testimonies suggest that many ex-*telefónicos* saw themselves in between the individual and the collective and continue to wrestle with that divide into the present.

4.3: "For me, it wasn't that bad…"

How former ENTel workers understood their personal lives within the context of the dictatorship can perhaps illuminate aspects of this tension. Although many people acknowledged the state's use of repression during our conversations, no one admitted to having known about it at the time. Instead, they claimed that during that period, they heard noting about concentration camps, disappearances, or extrajudicial killings.

Among the most common refrains was a version of: "Para mí, no me fue tan mal..." ("For me, it wasn't that bad…"). As described above, male employees especially emphasized how they came into their own at this moment. Responding to a question about what came to mind when he thought about the late 1970s, AL, a former operator and then administrative employee, described his feelings as follows:

> For me, let's say in those years…one, I married; my house, my daughter. I can't say that it was bad for me…I can say that in that period I lived very well, I can't complain. Everything as a result of sacrifice…What I have, I did without credits [from the government], so one has to be grateful for that. It wasn't so bad for us…[89]

This attitude fits the narrative of relative calm in General Pico and reinforces the notion that they were good people whose respect for one another and for their work helped avoid unpleasantness. In describing the environment of ENTel, and how little it changed after March 24, 1976, many former employees noted that they got along with the interventors and the military just as they had with the administrators during the early 1970s. This raised a paradox that proved difficult to resolve. One former technician explained how during a job on which the Armed Forces helped ENTel, the officers invited him into their tent to share their food and whiskey. Laughing

[89] AL interview with author (October 30, 2015).

somewhat ruefully, he concluded, "And I had a good time. I don't applaud them, eh, but I had a good time."[90] This tendency also highlights a discursive separation between the interviewees (who did not suffer, and who claimed to be unawares of the suffering of others) and the terror which the state unleashed in other parts of the country. If it is impossible to objectively verify who knew what when, we can say that as early as April 1977, General Pico's local paper *La Reforma* was regularly reporting on disappearances across Argentina.[91] Given the issue's prominence in the mainstream press, it seems unlikely that residents of Pico could have avoided all mentions of state violence. This is made clearer by analyzing how ex-*telefónicos* framed their ignorance and its relationship to their own lived experience.

First, AL's quote underscores an important concept that returns to the frequent stories of shirking at the workplace. The accounts of shirking are interesting precisely because they lack definition. No one identified a shirker by name, but instead they spoke about it vaguely, referring to *this* one or *that* one. Further, only one person admitted that he had been among those who shirked his duties, although he made clear that it had been only occasionally, and that he never slacked off when there was real work to be done.[92] The opposition between an unnamed "other" that shirked and a hardworking respectful "self" that fulfilled responsibilities accomplishes at least three things. First, it helps smooth over the tension between individual and collective well-being by stressing that hard work explains how some people "got ahead"—getting married, starting a family, building a home—while general conditions deteriorated. AL's insistence that he succeeded on his own without help from anyone else or from the government (in the form of credit) helps construct a

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[90] AR interview with author (October 29, 2015).
[91] At least four front-page articles in April 1977 addressed the topic of disappeared persons in some capacity. See "El Obispo de San Rafael se refirió a los derechos humanos," *La Reforma* (April 1, 1977); "Desparecidos: Desvirtúan rumores," *La Reforma* (April 5, 1977); "Los desaparecidos y la Suprema Corte," *La Reforma* (April 20, 1977); "Fue detenido el director del 'Buenos Aires Herald'," *La Reforma* (April 23, 1977).
[92] HP interview with author (June 27, 2015).

specific life narrative. Second, because ENTel was a state enterprise, it connects this idea of sacrifice to notions of pride and patriotism that appeared across most interviews. Respect for and loyalty to ENTel, expressed through hard and honest work, easily stood in for peoples' sentiments toward the nation as a whole. And finally, thinking about the sale of ENTel in 1990, we can also suggest that this narrative aimed to shift the blame for privatization by underscoring that the productive and responsible "us" always accomplished what was demanded of us. Even as most ex-employees admitted that ENTel was inefficient, the trauma that privatization caused also created the need to ensure that their actions had not contributed to the rationale behind privatization and therefore, albeit indirectly, the loss that nearly everyone felt vis-à-vis ENTel.

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"Para mí, no me fue tan mal…" also brings another important theme to the fore. Scholars have generally agreed that Argentina's economic, political, and social circumstances prior to March 24, 1976 provoked initial feelings of acceptance—or at least resignation—toward the coup among various sectors of society, including important segments of the trade-union leadership.[93] However, this literature has also tended to claim that the rank-and-file could never have supported military intervention.[94] The justification for this assertion, though, is harder to follow, and the case of ENTel Pico offers an excellent opportunity to reconsider this question. In his study of trade-union leadership during the PRN, Daniel Dicósimo makes a convincing case that we should not be so quick to assume that the working class did not share this attitude. Dicósimo shows that some workers welcomed the coup, expecting it to bring relief from the uncertainty and turmoil that defined their professional lives. Speaking about the coup, one former metalworker estimated that

[93] See, among others, Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983*, Chapter 1; Pozzi, "Argentina 1976-1982: Labour Leadership and Military Government."
[94] Pozzi, "Argentina 1976-1982: Labour Leadership and Military Government"; Pozzi, *Oposición obrera a la dictadura*.

at the factory where he worked, at least 80% of the personnel believed that "Now we'll be better, all this mess is going to end, now we'll be able to work."[95] Before the scope of state terror became apparent, many people looked to the military as the only institution capable of restoring order. That segments of the working class shared this perspective should hardly surprise us.

Indeed, something similar might contribute to explaining the repetition of "For me, it wasn't that bad" among Pico's ex-*telefónicos*. Numerous hints, and some overt references, to the inefficiencies and irregularities of ENTel General Pico support the notion that these workers might have held ambivalent views on the dictatorship. Apart from having lived through a series of military regimes, they also understood that the state telecommunications company—despite their evident pride—had serious problems. Interviews and documentary evidence pointed to tensions between FOETRA's local and national authorities, inconsistent service, multiyear wait times for new lines in La Pampa, and the prevalence of shirking and general laziness among the workforce. Together, these suggest an implicit, and at times explicit, critique of ENTel Pico's operations. People's pride in both their work and its connection to the national good might easily make these daily obstacles a source of frustration, and that frustration might just as easily be directed toward the structures that sustained this pattern, including company administration and the trade union hierarchy. Within this context, we can begin to see how a collective narrative that simultaneously laments the loss of a perceived culture of *compañerismo* and rues the sale of national property while also criticizing the everyday function of the company itself could be constructed and maintained.

Conclusions

[95] Dicósimo, "Dirigentes sindicales, racionalización y conflictos durante la última dictadura militar," 13.

This chapter, unlike others in the dissertation, relies primarily on detailed testimonies from former workers, as opposed to written sources. Although the pampas occupy an important space in Argentina's national imaginary (as the country's breadbasket, as the home of the gaucho), General Pico, and La Pampa more broadly, exist at a remove from the center of national life. This remove is more than simply geographic, though that is an important element. It is also social, political, and even cultural. For *piquenses*, the 600+ miles between General Pico and Buenos Aires is an important separation, and the same is true in the reverse: Buenos Aires does not think often think about General Pico.[96] One important consequence of this relative isolation is the scarcity of documentary evidence related to ENTel General Pico, specifically, and daily life in the region, generally. This context has meant that the interviews acquired a greater role in reconstructing the story of telephone workers in Argentina's interior during the most recent dictatorship.

Much of this chapter's work has been on highlighting continuities of belief and/or practice in the everyday professional lives of ENTel Pico workers. Primarily, this reflects what emerged in the oral histories themselves: people insisted that little changed, even as they occasionally described what could be read as significant developments. Beyond the obvious and important commitment to accuracy, however, there are two ideas behind this emphasis.

First, as analyzed throughout the dissertation, this chapter shows that the notion of March 24, 1976 as a rupture must be treated with caution—and perhaps, in certain circumstances, rethought entirely. Despite its contemporary social and political weigh, to posit March 24 as a before/after moment risks eliding the persistence of patterns and behaviors across this temporal boundary. ENTel Pico workers did not remember March 24 as a moment of collective trauma that redefined their professional or personal lives. Many could not recall if they went to work that day

[96] Though anecdotal, my own experience bears this out. Explaining to people in Buenos Aires that I was conducting research in General Pico, most did not know where the town was, and many had never heard of it.

or if the offices had been closed. Moreover, the frequent misplacement and conflation of events between the late 1960s and the early 1990s suggests that the dictatorship years did not resonate as a distinct era in their life stories. Even the concept of "Para mí, no me fue tan mal" indicates that as people sought to make sense of their experiences during the PRN continuity, and not rupture, provided the framework. Given the relative lack of repression that Pico's *telefónicos* suffered, we must be careful about overgeneralizing from their descriptions. The argument here is not that the regime's violence was unimportant nor that its attempts to implement broad structural changes were inconsequential. Instead, what this chapter posits is that the PRN's impact from 1976 through 1983 and over the subsequent decades has been, at best, inconsistent and that numerous factors must be accounted for in evaluating the relative weight of the dictatorship's policies and legacies for specific populations.

The second idea that underpins the focus on continuity during the 1970s and 1980s relates to the moment of rupture that most former ENTel Pico employees *did* describe: privatization. The sale of ENTel in 1990 to Telefónica and Télécom had dramatic and lasting consequences for the company's day-to-day operations and, as a corollary, its workforce. Descriptions of privatization, rather than the coup or the PRN, elicited the strongest emotional responses from interviewees, as people voiced their anger, frustration, sadness, and regret around both what was lost and how it was lost. Some were let go during the 1990s as part of rationalization and downsizing, while others remained and worked for Telefónica into the 2000s. However, there was little difference in how people discussed the sale and its aftermath. Nearly everyone expressed a sense of betrayal and mourning, regardless of their position within the company. Privatization, not the coup nor the violence of the 1970s, was the shared trauma for former ENTel workers, and nearly every interview made its way to the 1990s and Menem in some form. The 1970s and 1980s, by

comparison, seemed an extension of the 1950s and 1960s insofar as the relationship between employee and company remained largely intact. The lack of critical judgment toward the PRN and the insistence on respect and harmony at ENTel General Pico during the dictatorship cannot be taken at face value but must be understood in relation to the loss that privatization provoked. Only within this context can we begin to engage with the nuance, complexity, and contradiction of these personal narratives of daily life under Argentina's most repressive military regime.

Conclusion

> "So history has a will, eh? It's always dangerous to try to personify history. As far as I'm concerned, history has no will of its own and, furthermore, it hasn't the least concern for mine either. So if there is no will whatever involved in the process, you can't talk about accomplishments. And all the so-called accomplishments of history prove it. They're no sooner achieved than they begin to crumble away. History is a record of destruction."
> - Yukio Mishima, *Spring Snow*

During a 2014 interview, then-Undersecretary of Labor Relations Álvaro Ruiz detailed his experiences as a labor lawyer in private practice during Argentina's most recent dictatorship. Ruiz received his degree in May 1978 and spent the next several years representing primarily workers who had been injured on the job, and to a lesser extent those who had been wrongfully terminated. In response to a question about the role of the Ministry of Labor vis-à-vis his everyday obligations, Ruiz quickly stated that the Ministry of Labor had little to do with his job—despite the fact that the laws and provisions that he drew on in his practice at least nominally fell under the Ministry's purview.[1] Ruiz described the Ministry's mission during that period as one of "disciplining" the working class and, occasionally, serving as a bridge between the state and the more "cooptable" sectors of the labor movement. However, he denied that the Ministry's "normal" functions

[1] Author interview with Álvaro Ruiz (June 7, 2014).

remained relevant, and he reiterated that his practice had not included contacts with representatives from the Ministry of Labor or any other state entity, except for occasionally the labor courts.

Various subjects, in both formal interviews and informal conversation, repeated some version of the claim that under the PRN, the Ministry of Labor did not function. Ruiz's account was undeniably more nuanced, and he recognized that the Ministry had specific objectives. Yet even he reinforced the notion that the de facto government largely abandoned governance in favor of coercion. His reading left little space for the law as a site of contestation and/or negotiation, instead underscoring that "normal" practices were effectively suspended from when he began practicing in 1978 (or before) until the early 1980s. Dr. Ruiz's testimony highlights the complexities that this dissertation has attempted to address. Implicitly, this interpretation speaks to the idea of authoritarian exceptionalism, bringing us back to the question of whether the law remains the law during periods of non-democratic rule. As we have seen, the issue is far from simple. However, returning to the origins of modern legal structures can perhaps shed some light on the relationship between legality, authoritarianism, and memory.

Modern legalism is often assumed to be a product of the liberal intellectual currents that shaped seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, among other works, extolled the promise of rational laws for the organization of society as contrasted with rule by arbitrary fiat.[2] The law offered the possibility of something beyond divine rule, that would instead integrate the will of the governed and move toward a more equitable and just future for all. Yet this Enlightenment reading of legalism's potential has long had a darker underbelly. Historian Irene Silverblatt has argued that understanding twentieth-century nation-states—whether democratic or de facto—requires a deeper engagement with European colonialism

[2] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (New York, NY: Hafner Publishing Company, 1947).

and the legal and bureaucratic mechanisms that supported the colonial system. Focusing on the Spanish colonies, and the Andes specifically, Silverblatt shows how the implementation of governing institutions was carried out through a combination of bureaucratization and coercion.[3] In particular, she cites the Inquisition and the exportation of its structures to the Americas as a key development in the evolution of the modern nation-state. Silverblatt highlights the historical arc that connects the creation of a legal bureaucracy erected to justify the violence of capitalism to contemporary legal structures and their role in supporting repression.[4] The law, then, exists as much to sustain the present-day equivalents of colonialism's unequal power dynamics as it does to move societies toward a normative conception of justice.

This is hardly an original point, but it does suggest an answer as to why so many insisted that the government broadly, and the Ministry of Labor specifically, ceased to function during the PRN. How people recalled their experiences between 1976 and 1983 cannot be divorced from how they remember and analyze what followed. Interviews with shop-floor activists and leftist militants who continued to participate in politics during the dictatorship—to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the possibilities available—revealed a mixture of fear, pride, and wry nostalgia. For many, speaking in the 2010s, they missed the significance and immediacy of their political involvement during those years precisely because after 1983, they experienced a profound letdown. Alfonsín's victory and what they described as the disintegration of leftist movements marked a period of retreat for labor militancy. Conversations with workers who had not been politically active, or who did not consider themselves militant, revolved around a different contextual marker. Although a handful of moments from 1976-1983 stood out clearly—March 24,

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[3] Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
[4] Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisition*, esp. 217-226.

the World Cup, the Malvinas War—many of their recollections were blurred and lacked specific referents. These subjects found it difficult to speak about the dictatorship years largely because that span did not function as a discrete chronology within their memories. Details and events that preceded and followed the *Proceso* would appear in these testimonies, and the speakers rarely realized that they had transgressed these supposed temporal boundaries. Instead, memories of the 1976-1983 period were colored by the hyperinflation crisis and economic instability under Alfonsín. In both cases, which accounted for nearly all of the project's formal interviews and informal conversations, Argentina post-1983 largely failed to live up to expectations for democracy's potential to restore the national well-being.

The collective narrative that the rule of law remained suspended throughout the dictatorship, then, can perhaps be read within the context of a society that hoped for, but ultimately lost faith in, legalism's ability to restore some version of normative order. The bracketing off of the dictatorship era as a moment of illegitimacy—or even illegality—helped minimize the defeats and crises after 1983. The regret and uncertainty of these years acquired additional weight precisely because they occurred under the rule of law, and therefore people felt them with more immediacy. Individually and societally, bracketing off the PRN as a distinct moment, without connection to or lasting influence over the present, is an understandable response. But this distancing not only functions as a coping mechanism, it also allows certain questions related to the dark side of legalism—namely the law's coercive power—to remain uninterrogated. Importantly, the only people that had clear recollections of the Ministry of Labor as a functional entity during this period were former Ministry of Labor employees. Interviews with three administrative workers who had been at the Ministry during the PRN revealed that the 1976-1983 years were the

busiest of their careers.[5] Why these subjects, rather than any others, would have an easier time recognizing the compatibility of authoritarianism and the rule of law demands further attention, but it drives home that much work remains to be done on these questions.

This dissertation has attempted to show that authoritarian legality remains relevant for people's everyday lives, and that treating this period as exceptional elides the potential for understanding both how the PRN sought to remake Argentina and how Argentine workers responded to that effort. Part I explored this reorganizational project from the top down. Chapter 1 deconstructed the Armed Forces and the dictatorship, highlighting how the *Proceso*'s internal functioning allowed for dissent and conflict to create fissures within the regime. The ambitious attempt to overhaul the nation and its constituent citizenry repeatedly clashed with the inconsistencies and contradictions that defined the PRN's legal system. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, this was especially evident in the field of labor relations. Although the dictatorship successfully enacted a raft of laws and policies that established new parameters for the labor-capital relationship, their day-to-day effectiveness remained limited. The inefficacy of these measures reflected resistance and opposition from the workers themselves, as explored in Part II, but also evidenced the disconnect between the letter of the law (the dictatorship's legal framework) and its practical implications (the functional legitimacy of the regime). This discrepancy had profound consequences for both the long-term stability of the government, and for how the people directly affected by these laws understood and responded to them. Workers, administrators, and management all routinely ignored the military's efforts to redefine Argentina's labor infrastructure, often choosing for themselves the times and places they wanted the Ministry to

[5] AS, RS, and IR interviews with author, November 18 and 20, 2015. Each of the three had spent decades at the Ministry of Labor, so their claim that they worked hardest under the PRN is especially noteworthy, given their long careers.

intervene. The government's attempts to govern were circumscribed by the combination of infighting and external pressures that defined this historical conjuncture.

Part II took these questions and reexamined them in three historically-rooted case studies. Taking seriously the contention that theory must be situated within specific material contexts, these chapters examined workers' responses to the PRN's attempted remaking of Argentina.[6] Chapter 3 challenged commonly-accepted interpretations of the dictatorship as simply an organ of repression, using the case of labor conflicts at Deutz Argentina to question how workers found spaces to voice opposition to regime policies. While the military's restraint undoubtedly reflected multiple factors, I argued that among them was the ability of the Deutz personnel to establish the parameters of the conflict through their use of patriotic, Catholic, and family-oriented discourse. This reading further demonstrated the need for a broader reconsideration of the predominant historical narratives around workers and the dictatorship that have emphasized either revolutionary class consciousness and heroic resistance, or passivity and broad immobilization. Chapter 4's analysis of Mercedes Benz Argentina provided a critical complement, changing the focus from the absence of repression to what followed repression. Although much has been written about MBA, most authors have not seriously explored how labor relations were reconstituted on the shop floor after the disappearance of more than a dozen rank-and-file employees. This chapter reinforced the argument that rather than heroic militancy or working-class surrender, labor relations under the PRN often reflected pragmatism and continuities grounded in existing understandings of organizing and dialogue. Critically, this held true not only for workers, which might be expected, but also at different times for management and state actors, as well. This chapter further challenged simplistic understandings of class conflict that lump worker and union together against capital and

[6] For proponents of the importance of historically-grounded theoretical analysis, see, among others, Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*, esp. Preface.

the state, showing that these alliances are, in fact, more complex and dynamic that we might assume—even under authoritarianism.

Chapters 1-4 relied to some extent on oral histories, but Chapter 5 brought these sources to the fore. The final chapter drew heavily on the testimonies collected from former employees at the Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones in General Pico, La Pampa province. These personal narratives of work described life in rural Argentina during the dictatorship and emphasized the limits of the regime's reorganizational efforts in this context. The blurred recollections of events and dates reinforced the idea that March 24, 1976 did not function as a rupture point for many, perhaps especially those farther from the country's urban centers. This chapter also introduced important questions around the relationship of labor, capital, and the state within the public sector. While their descriptions of daily responsibilities did not contrast sharply with accounts from private-sector industrial workers, former ENTel workers' memories of privatization sparked a nostalgia for the state-run company and its nationalist symbolism. Some MBA workers, for example, also recalled their time at the factory fondly (at least prior to 1976), while Chapters 3 and 4 showed that even workers under foreign capital maintained a patriotic understanding of their labor and found ways to deploy that discourse to their advantage. Yet the tone and content of ENTel Pico personnel's testimonies suggests a slightly different connection between workers and company, likely requiring further investigation.[7]

Ultimately, these initial forays into a deeper and more nuanced engagement with this state/labor/capital dynamic will hopefully provoke further conversation and research. No matter the context, workers' relationship to the law puts them in constant dialogue with the state, and the

[7] One potentially useful avenue would be to reconsider features of this case study through the lens of Raymond Williams' notion of "structures of feeling," which could perhaps shed light on the affective quality of both the work itself (inextricably tied to both capital and the state) and the individual and collective memories of that work.

state's defense of capital's interests contributes to the entanglement and overlaps among all three.[8] Guillermo O'Donnell argued that the bureaucratic-authoritarian state, typified by the 1966-1973 Argentine dictatorship but applicable—he suggested—to the *Proceso* as well, was a particular version of the capitalist state, and must be understood as such. This is, per O'Donnell, especially true for any interrogation of relations of production under such a regime.[9] During the PRN, the imposition of a new legal regime necessarily provoked responses from those it sought to influence. Argentine workers, whether in the public or private sector, faced a shifting landscape made more complicated by the inconsistencies and inefficiencies that defined the *Proceso*'s attempted legislative overhaul. They responded with strikes, work stoppages, go-slows, and even sabotage. They also responded by going to work each day, continuing to build buses and tractors, maintaining telephone lines and connecting calls. Prior to March 24, 1976, Argentina's working class, though undeniably powerful and well-organized, contained both revolutionary impulses and reformist practices. That the coup should have somehow changed this remains both difficult to believe and largely unproven. Perhaps future investigations will confirm the revolutionary class-consciousness that supported a coordinated program of heroic resistance; perhaps scholars will find that Argentine workers suffered a crushing and unqualified defeat, and that their organizations on the shop floor and in the union hall were decimated. More likely, as this dissertation has tried to show, the same measured and cautious approach to labor relations that characterized much of the literature on the 1955-1976 period must be extended and must shape any reinterpretation of labor under the PRN. Perhaps this involves a more general reconsideration of heroism or victory. People remain people, complete with all of their complications, failures, and successes. Under

[8] There is a robust literature on all aspects of this dynamic. On the relationship between workers and the law, see, in particular, Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement*. On the state as the defender of the interests of capital, see, in particular, Tomlins, *The State and the Unions*.
[9] O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*, 2.

abnormal and difficult circumstances, maintaining that humanity and fighting to preserve some sense of normalcy might simultaneously be expected and a triumph worthy of acknowledgment.

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———. "Las intervenciones a organizaciones sindicales durante la última dictadura militar argentina: un estudio cuantitativo." *Desarrollo Económico* 57, no. 223 (April 2018).

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EDUCATION

2013–2019 **Ph.D., History**, Indiana University (May 2019)
Dissertation: *Remaking Argentina: Labor, Law, and Citizenship during the* Proceso de Reorganización Nacional
Dissertation Advisor: Daniel James

2011–2013 **M.A., Latin American and Caribbean Studies**, Indiana University
M.A. Thesis: *The View from Above: Reimagining State-Labor Relations during Argentina's* Proceso de Reorganización Nacional

2003–2007 **B.A., Magna cum laude, History**, Wesleyan University
B.A., Magna cum laude, Hispanic Literature, Wesleyan University

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Journal Articles

"(P)Reimagining the State: Citizenship, Work, and the State in António Ribeiro Sanches's *Cartas sobre a educação da mocidade*," *Luso-Brazilian Review* (Under Review)

2019 "'In Defense of Our Livelihoods': Deutz Argentina Workers, Resistance, and Authoritarian Legitimacy during Argentina's *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* (Forthcoming)

2019 "Manifest Destiny, the Frontier, and *el Indio* in Argentina's *Conquista del Desierto*," *Journal of Global South Studies*. Vol. 36, No. 1

2018 "Religion and the Commemoration of the Disappeared in Argentina 40 Years after the Dictatorship: A Study of Martyrological Memory at the Church of Santa Cruz," (with Loren Lybarger and James Damico), *Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 20.

Refereed Book Chapters

"'Breaking the Rules of the Game': Labor Law and Practice on the Shop Floor, 1974–1981," in *The (Un)Civil Military State in the 1970s*, eds. Sebastián Carassai and David Sheinen (Accepted for Inclusion)

"'En defensa de nuestras fuentes de trabajo': Replanteando la legalidad autoritaria y la resistencia obrera durante el *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*" in *Clase obrera y dictadura cívico-militar*, eds. Luciana Zorzoli and Juan Pedro Massano (Accepted for Inclusion)

Additional Publications

2014 "Una revisita al trabajo industrial: Introducción al tema," *Revista de Trabajo*, Año 10, Nro. 12 (2014)

MAJOR FELLOWSHIPS AND HONORS

2018–19 **Mendel Dissertation Year Fellowship**
Department of History, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

2014–15 **International Dissertation Research Fellowship**
Social Science Research Council, Brooklyn, NY
Research Project: "Remaking Argentina: State, Labor, and Citizenship during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"

2015 **Fellow, re:Work Summer Academy**
IGK Institute for Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History, Humboldt University, Berlin

2013–14 **Foreign Language and Area Studies Academic Year Fellowship**
U.S. Department of Education, Foreign Language and Area Studies Program
Language Studied: Portuguese

2012 **Foreign Language and Area Studies Summer Fellowship**
U.S. Department of Education, Foreign Language and Area Studies Program
Language Studied: Portuguese

ADDITIONAL AWARDS AND HONORS

2018 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2018 **Brantlinger-Naremore Essay Prize for Best Essay in Cultural Studies**
Cultural Studies Program, Indiana University
Paper: "On Violence, Justice, and Revolution: Cinematic Representations of the Killings of Pedro Aramburu and Dan Mitrione"

2018 **Ruth Lilly History Fellowship**
Department of History, Indiana University

2017 **Martins-Sadlier Award for Best Paper in Brazilian Studies**
Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Indiana University
Paper: "(P)Reimagining the Nation: Citizenship and the State in António Ribeiro Sanches's *Cartas sobre a Educação da Mocidade*"

2017 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2017 **Louise McNutt Fellowship**
College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University

2017 **Ruth Lilly History Fellowship**

Department of History, Indiana University

2016 **GPSG Conference Travel Award**
Graduate and Professional Students Government, Indiana University
Conference: LASA Annual Meeting, Lima, Peru, Spring 2017

2016 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2016 **Louise McNutt Fellowship**
College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University

2016 **Ruth Lilly History Fellowship**
Department of History, Indiana University

2015 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2014 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2014 **Tinker Foundation Field Research Grant**
Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Indiana University

2014 **Stephan P. Jacobs Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper**
Latin American Graduate Organization, Tulane University
Paper: "Remaking Argentina: Labor and Citizenship during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"

2014 **Graduate Student Conference Travel Award**
College Arts and Humanities Institute, Indiana University

2014 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2013 **Graduate Student Conference Travel Award**
College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University

2013 **Mendel Research Fellowship for Latin American History**
Department of History, Indiana University

2012 **Tinker Foundation Field Research Grant**
Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Indiana University

INVITED TALKS

2015 "Remaking Argentina: Labor and Citizenship during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"
Programa de Historia Contemporánea
Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, Buenos Aires

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Conferences/Workshops Organized

2014 Workshop Title: "From Proletariat to Precariat: Changing Labor Relations in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries"
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

Panels Organized

2019 Panel Title: "Loyalty and Competing Narratives in Oral History"
American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL
Panel Chair, Session Organizer

2018 Panel Title: "Law and Lawlessness under Authoritarianism"
Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies Conference, Reno, NV
Panel Chair, Session Organizer

2017 Panel Title: "Labor Outside the Metropole"
Latin American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Lima, Peru
Panel Chair, Session Organizer

Papers Presented

2019 "Switchboards, Telexes, and Microwaves: Modernity, Geography and Telecommunications in Rural Argentina, 1969-2000"
Cornell University Latin American History Workshop
Ithaca, NY, Spring 2019

2019 "'And if this Internal Commission is destroyed, we must elect another Commission': Worker Representation and Shop Floor Organization in the Aftermath of State Violence"
Southeastern Council on Latin American Studies Annual Meeting
Oaxaca, Mexico, Spring 2019

2019 "'My first response, I would say it was counterfeit': Contradiction and Meaning-Making in Oral History"
American Historical Association Annual Meeting
Chicago, IL, Spring 2019

2018 "'En defensa de nuestras fuentes de trabajo': Trabajadores de Deutz Argentina y legalidad autoritaria durante el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional"
Workshop - Clase obrera y dictadura cívico-militar, Universidad Nacional de La Plata
La Plata, Argentina, Summer 2018

2018 "Reorganizing Citizenship: Authoritarian Labor Law and the Vision of a New Praxis of Citizenship"
Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies Conference
Reno, NV, Spring 2018

2017 "Arrested Development: Neoliberal Developmentalism in Argentina, 1976-1981"
American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting
Washington, D.C., Fall 2017

2017 "Public Industry in Times of Privatization: State Telephone Workers in La Pampa, 1976-1983"
Latin American Studies Association Annual Meeting
Lima, Peru, Spring 2017

2016 "In Defense of Our Livelihood: Deutz Workers, Community, and the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"
Corporations and Authoritarian Regimes in Latin America, Georg-August University
Göttingen, Germany, Fall 2016

2014 "Remaking Argentina: Labor and Citizenship during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"
Latin American History Graduate Conference, Columbia University
New York, NY, Spring 2014

2014 "Remaking Argentina: Labor and Citizenship during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"
Latin American Graduate Organization Annual Conference, Tulane University
New Orleans, LA, Spring 2014

2013 "Their Own Worst Enemies: Creation of Worker Resistance by the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* in Argentina, 1976-1980"
Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies Graduate Conference, Indiana University
Bloomington, IN, Spring 2013

2013 "The View from Above: Rethinking State-Labor Relations during Argentina's *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"
Institute for Latin American Studies Student Association Conference, University of Texas
Austin, TX, Spring 2013

2012 "Argentina's Manifest Destiny: Race, Religion, and Indigeneity in the Conquest of the Desert and Representations of the Indian"
Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies Graduate Conference, Indiana University
Bloomington, IN, Spring 2012

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2018 **Adjunct Faculty**, Global and Historical Studies, Butler University
Course: "Frontiers of Latin America"

2018 **Course Assistant**, Department of History, Indiana University
Course: "Sparta at War"

2017 **Adjunct Faculty**, Global and Historical Studies, Butler University
Course: "Postcolonial Studies: The Caribbean"

2017	**Instructor of Record**, Lifelong Learning Center, Indiana University Course: "Long Live Santa Evita: The Life and Post-Life of Eva Perón"
2016	**Course Assistant**, Department of History, Indiana University Course: "Rock, Hip Hop, and Revolution: Popular Music in the Making of Modern America, 1940 to the Present"
2014	**Assistant Instructor**, Department of History, Indiana University Course: "The World in the 20th Century to 1945"
2012	**Instructor of Record**, Lifelong Learning Center, Indiana University Course: "On the Brink of Destruction: 50 Years after the Cuban Missile Crisis"
2011–2013	**Instructor of Record**, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University Courses: Spanish 105, Spanish 200, Spanish 250

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2014–Present	**Founder and Coordinator**, Latin American History Workshop Department of History, Indiana University
2018–2019	**Graduate Student Mentor** Department of History, Indiana University
2015-2016	**Graduate Student Mentor** Department of History, Indiana University
2014	**Lead Organizer and Coordinator**, Labor Studies Workshop Indiana University
2013-2014	**Co-Organizer**, Paul Lucas History Graduate Conference Department of History, Indiana University

TEACHING AREAS/COURSES

Areas
Latin American History (Modern and Colonial)
Latin American Political Movements
The State and State Formation
Race and National Identity
Comparative Southern Cone History
History of Labor and Labor Relations
History of Capitalism and Neoliberalism
Memory and Oral History

Courses
Modern Latin American History
Colonial Latin American History
Authoritarian Politics: Government and Dictatorship in the Southern Cone

The Voice of the People: Populism in Latin America
Latin America's Working Class in Comparative Perspective
Frontiers of Latin America
Methods and Risks in Oral History
Argentina in the Twentieth Century
Long Live Santa Evita: The Life and Post-Life of Eva Perón
Revolution and the Neoliberal Future: Cuba and the Twenty-First Century
Latin American History in Film
The Postcolonial Caribbean

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

American Historical Association
Latin American Studies Association
American Anthropological Association
Rocky Mountain Council on Latin American Studies
Southeastern Council on Latin American Studies

ADDITIONAL SKILLS

Languages
Spanish – Fluency (Reading, Writing, Speaking)
Portuguese – High Proficiency (Reading, Writing, Speaking)
Italian – Intermediate Proficiency (Reading); Limited Proficiency (Writing, Speaking)
French – Intermediate Proficiency (Reading); Limited Proficiency (Writing, Speaking)