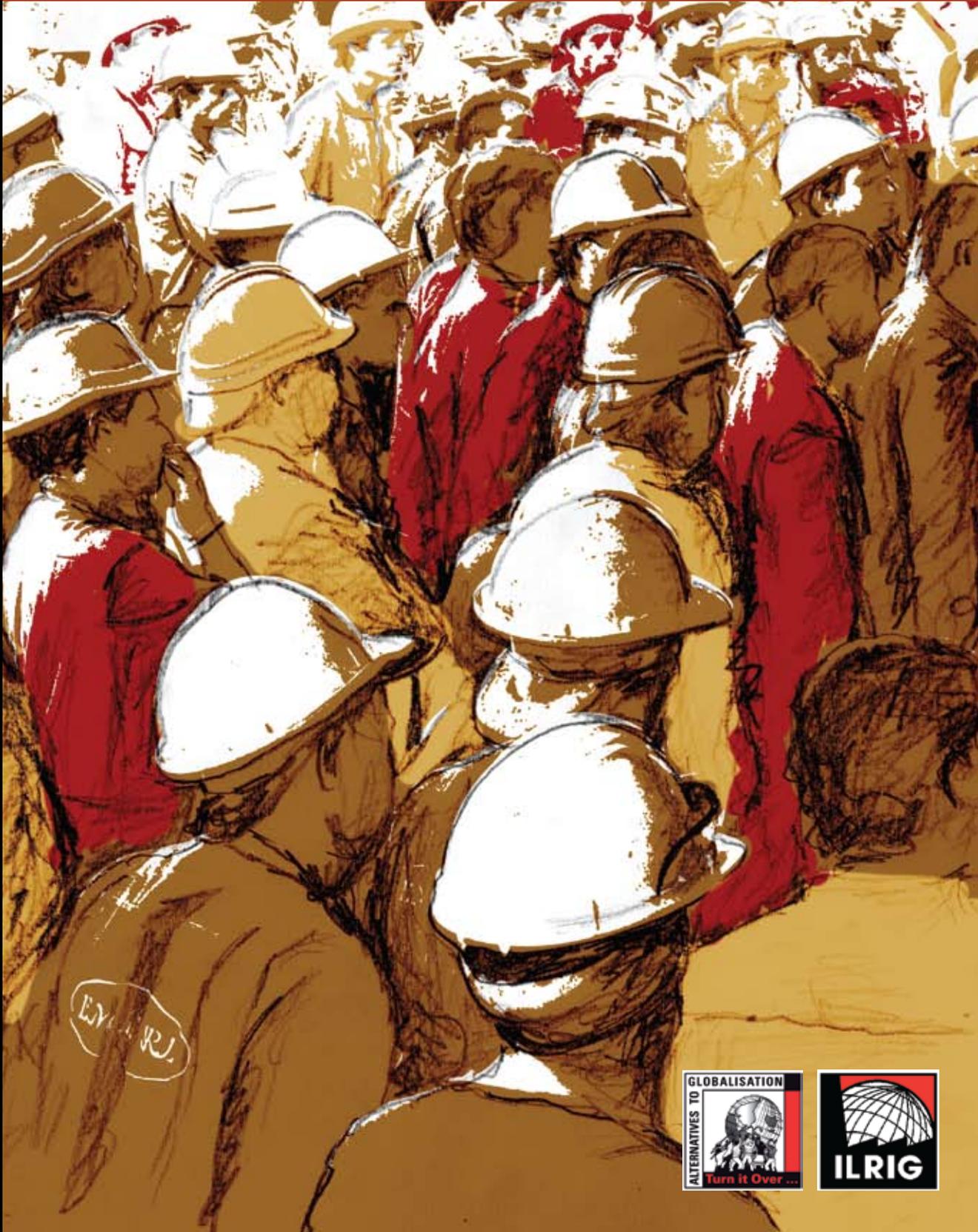


NEW FORMS OF ORGANISATION



THE ARGENTINE WORKERS' FEDERATION VISITS SOUTH AFRICA



NEW FORMS OF ORGANISATION: THE ARGENTINE WORKERS' FEDERATION VISITS SOUTH AFRICA

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ITINERY OF THE CTA SOUTH AFRICAN VISIT

September 2007



| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Thurs 20 September | Arrival of CTA delegation |
| Fri 21 September | CTA delegation meets ILRIG |
| Sat 22 September | Arrival of delegation from the United Steelworkers of Canada (USW) |
| Sun 23 September | USW/CTA group visits Sikhula Sonke in Stellenbosch |
| Sun 23 - Fri 28 Sept | ILRIG Globalisation School |
| Wed 26 September | CTA meets the UCT Workers' Forum |
| Fri 28 September | Visit to the UWC Workers Committee |
| Sun 30 September | USW/CTA group depart for Johannesburg |
| Mon 1 October | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with National Office bearers of the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA) • Visit to NUMSA members at Scaw Metals • Public Meeting with SWOP at Wits University • Departure for Mozambique |



ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

NEW FORMS OF ORGANISATION
The Argentine Workers Federation (CTA) visit to South Africa

This booklet was inspired by a visit to South Africa in September 2007 of two leaders of the Argentine Workers' Federation (CTA) – **Jose Olivera** of the Union Obrera Metalurgica, and **Cristian Horten** of the Cooperativa De Trabajo¹. The CTA (La Central de Trabajadores Argentinos, in Spanish) is a new trade union movement, the second largest in Argentina, formed in 1991 that represents about 1.3 million Argentinean workers - employed and unemployed, casual and informal.

The CTA comrades visited Cape Town and Johannesburg in South Africa and then went on to Maputo in Mozambique. In Cape Town they attended the 7th Annual ILRIG Globalisation School, which brought together some 200 social movement and trade union activists from across the continent of Africa to explore Alternatives to Globalisation.

Comrades Jose and Cristian spoke passionately about how their metalworkers union, UOM, and the CTA had responded to the collapse of the Argentine economy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The CTA established from the outset its determination to represent all working people, whether employed or unemployed, contract or casual. Their assessment of their effectiveness was marked

¹ A third member of the CTA delegation, Elena Reynaga, General Secretary of AMMAR, was turned away by the South African officials at Sao Paulo airport in Brazil

by honesty: “worker take-overs were not the salvation of the world, but they were a way out of a social and economic crisis in Argentina. We created jobs. Through cooperatives we have found an alternative model to contractors and the casualisation of work. There are better working conditions and salaries for the people involved”.

Cristian and Jose, with their tireless Argentinean-born interpreter, Florencia Belvedere, conversed with South Africans, day and night, about the many different initiatives undertaken in Argentina. Jose’s main responsibility is working with contractors, stressing that the union represents all workers and trying to bargain conditions for contractors that have parity with what permanent workers are able to bargain. Cristian stressed the key role of the UOM in the creation of his worker cooperative – the 7th of May Cooperative. This workers’ cooperative operates the ocean port of the Mittal steel plant in Villa Constitucion. The docks had been closed for five years when the then employer, ASINDAR, re-opened them, but with contractors who wanted to pay lower wages, with no benefits. The UOM insisted that it represented **all** workers and, more importantly, that it would not negotiate with labour brokers – it would only talk to the ultimate employer. The UOM used its bargaining power to force the employer to the table. Today UOM members at the self-managed Cooperative provide a range of cutting, rolling, packaging and shipping functions for a major steel company.

The commitment of the CTA and the UOM to represent unemployed and contract workers and to build active relationships with social movements generated a lot of intense debate at the ILRIG Globalization School and in later meetings with COSATU and NUMSA members in Johannesburg. As Cristian said in his report to his Argentinean colleagues once he got home:

“I felt enormously proud to be representing the CTA outside of Argentina. It is really important to know how we are viewed externally and what others think of the model of trade unionism we’ve adopted in the CTA...especially this new phenomenon of workplaces taken over by the workers....It was in the workshop on “New Forms of Organizing” that we were able to share in detail the experiences of 1st of May Cooperative, all in the larger context of recuperating bankrupt or abandoned workplaces and creating the CTA as a new form of trade unionism. I found the closing of the workshop really moving, with all of the participants, both local activists and those from outside South Africa, waving the coop banner and singing the song of the CTA: “C-T-A-belong to the workers. If you don’t like it you can lump it.””

The aims of this book are to:

- Give a brief snapshot of the exchange visit
- Introduce South African activists to the CTA
- Examine the CTA’s experience of new forms of organising workers in this period of informalisation of work, casualisation and unemployment
- To explore whether their experience has relevance for South African trade unions by looking at examples of new forms of organising in South Africa



WHY NEW FORMS OF ORGANISING?

Globalisation has led to fundamental changes in the world of work in all countries. The full time, employed worker is now a small minority in many countries. Most of those who have jobs now survive in high-paced, intense, flexible workplaces or as casuals, part-time workers, home-workers, or workers working for labour brokers. Mass unemployment has led to the growth of the informal economy as many people turn to it for survival.

In South Africa we have an unemployment rate of 40% and of those who are employed almost the same percentage are in precarious employment. Women workers are the majority of the casualised and vulnerable workers. Women also form the majority of the working class forced to work in the informal sector.

The workplace has also been redefined. While factories, farms and mines remain the main places of formal work, the home and the street have also become workplaces. Some workers work in workplaces that may be only one link in a product chain which has little to do with their immediate employer or the owner of the workplace e.g. workers performing outsourced functions.

Most trade unions were formed in a very different period of work. In South Africa we have national, industrial unions which assume a mostly, permanent male worker working in a definite workplace for a fixed time.

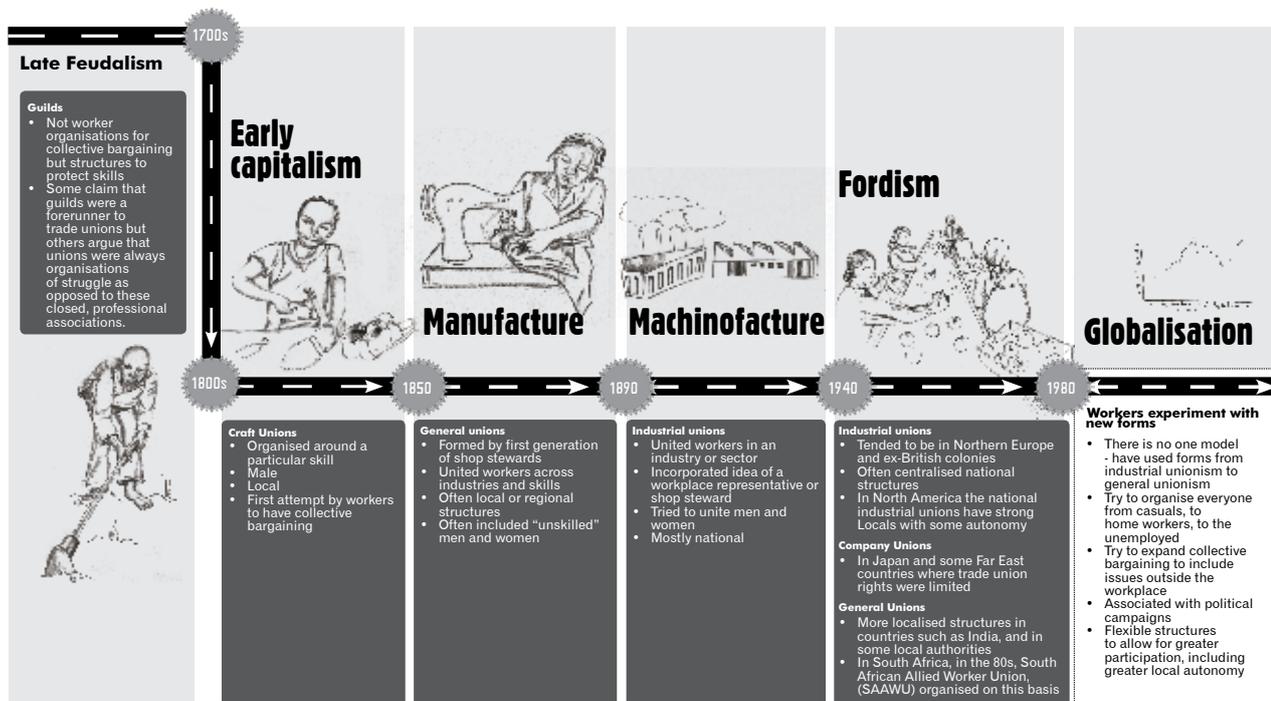
- Union membership is largely organised through workers signing stop order forms which allow their bosses to deduct membership fees from their wages and pay them over to the union.

- Shop stewards locals and regional and national meetings happen over weekends, and at night, when it is assumed that workers are not at work.
- The legal scope and bargaining units of unions often do not cater for outsourced workers and casual workers.
- The Labour Relations Act (LRA) explicitly favours big, national, industrial unions bargaining with big employers who have large human resources departments.

Winning trade union rights in the period of apartheid required that workers use their strength in large industrial factories, shops and mines to forge unity. This was reflected in the forms of union organising which prevail in South Africa today.

But the changes in the nature of work, the workplace itself and the composition of the working class, present serious challenges for trade unions in South Africa today - about how to recruit and who is a member, about what organisational forms they have and what campaigns they take up. Most unions have not been able to organise the non-permanent workers despite passing many resolutions about the need to organise vulnerable workers.

In this regard, internationally, some trade unions have experimented with new forms of organising more appropriate for this new informalised working class. Some of these initiatives originate within the traditional unions while others happen outside the established unions. The CTA is an example of any initiative arising out of a breakaway from the largest federation of industrial unions in Argentina – the General Workers’ Confederation (CGT)



Case Studies of new

Textile and Garment Workers' Union (FILTEA) - Italy

- Organises workers in small enterprises since the 1990s.
- Has two types of membership - full membership and indirect membership.
- When a worker is a full member the employer is informed and subscriptions are paid via stop orders operated by the boss. When a worker is an indirect member, the employer is not informed and the dues are paid directly to the union at a fixed annual amount.
- FILTEA legal assistance on unfair dismissals and severance pay attracted many vulnerable workers to it.
- Organises social activities which contributes to unionisation.

CONLUTA - Brazil

- The Lula government cut the pensions of public sector workers by 30% in its first five years in office, as part of its shift to neoliberalism.
- In response the public employees' unions broke from the PT's trade union ally, the CUT, and joined other independent unions to form a new confederation, CONLUTA.
- Some student organisations, progressive ecologists and other social groups are also affiliated to CONLUTA.
- In May 2007, CONLUTA had a general strike and was supported by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), the biggest social movement in Brazil.

Buenos Aires subway workers initiative - Argentina

- Workers in the privatised Buenos Aires subway formed an internal commission within the Union of Transport Workers (UTA).
- Worker activists wanted the direct involvement of rank-and-file workers, not only the shop stewards, in the union.
- Workers began to participate in the UTA elections and voted for pro rank-and-file workers as their representatives.
- Emphasizes direct democracy and horizontal organising. Functions through general assemblies with special commissions and delegates to coordinate the implementation of the decisions of the assembly.
- As the internal commission workers engaged in militant struggles for a six-hour work day and demanded increases in wages.

Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA) - Argentina

- Formed in 1991 in opposition to pro-capital, Peronist, federation General Labour Confederation (CGT) that focused only on the organising of permanent workers.
- Organises and represents all workers – permanent workers, part time workers, labour broker workers, contract workers and the unemployed.
- CTA allows direct individual membership – one can be a member of the federation without having to belong to one of its affiliates.
- Affiliation is also open to progressive non-trade union organisations e.g. student organisations, youth organisations, cooperatives and community organisations.

forms of organisation

Chhattisgarh Mine Workers' Union (CMSS) - India

- Started in 1977 and organises workers employed through contractors in the unmechanised mines.
- Formed because the industrial trade union of directly-employed workers failed to organise workers in the unmechanised mines.
- After major struggles the CMSS won increased wages, shorter working hours, bonuses and a moratorium on retrenchments.
- Turned one of its offices into a medical clinic where the doctors work voluntarily. Clinic is also open to poor communities in solidarity with the CMSS.
- When demand grew the CMSS created a fund to establish a hospital which benefited the community.

Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) - Turkey

- The DISK started working on the problem of precarious employment in the 1990s.
- In October 1994 DISK initiated a campaign called "Do not work uninsured", aimed at popular awareness-raising of uninsured work and at informing workers about their rights.
- Established two "worker houses" in the working class areas, Kartal and Umraniye, to improve links with unorganised workers.
- Organising in local communities through the use of "worker houses" facilitated cooperation of trade unions from different sectors.
- The "workers houses" also received support from democratic organisations but worker houses were later closed by the state in 1998 claiming that there was no clause in the trade union's constitution that allows their establishment.
- Activists inspired by the method set up worker commissions in people's houses to continue what worker houses were doing.

Uganda Public Employees Union (UPEU) - Uganda

- Early 1990s privatisation of public services saw its membership drop from 108 000 to 700
- UPEU decided to radically change its outlook and scope.
- Redefined public employee to include anyone engaged in serving the public. Including state workers, retrenched workers, retired workers, trainees and workers in the informal economy serving the public e.g. street vendors.
- These innovations resulted in an increase in membership, reaching 17 000 by 1999.

THE CONTEXT

The Latin American Region: ALBA and the Bank of the South

- These are both regional initiatives which show the growing anti-neoliberal tide in Latin America
- ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternatives for the America's) is a new international trade alliance involving 9 member countries - Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Ecuador, Uruguay, Dominican Republic, St Kitts and Haiti – to trade on the basis of co-operation, and in opposition to the WTO.
- The Bank of the South is a new bank which undertakes to lend money to member countries without the neo-liberal conditions imposed by the World Bank and the IMF.
- Both the ALBA and the Bank of the South are initiatives of Venezuela and include representation of social movements on their governing bodies

Mexico

- In 1999 the Zapatistas, a social movement of poor peasants in Mexico's poorest province, Chiapas, begin to challenge the national state and force the state to recognise their effective control over the countryside in Chiapas.
- Strong peasant and indigenous people's movements become a feature of political life and fight against NAFTA. Despite that a pro-USA, pro-free market government of Vicente Fox elected.
- Mexican election of August 2006 leads to victory of right wing, Felipe Calderón, and the blocking of the centre-left Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who had promised pro-poor legislation and renegotiating NAFTA.
- Accusations of electoral fraud lead to mass uprising throughout the country including in the state of Oaxaca, where workers set up an alternative assembly, the Council of the State Popular Assembly (APPO).

Nicaragua

- USA-backed President Enrique Bolanos became increasingly isolated since he led an anti-corruption drive against his predecessor and former ally, Arnoldo Aleman, since convicted of fraud.
- Mr Bolanos' own Liberal Party turned against him in congress and joined forces with former rivals, the left-wing Sandinistas.
- Sandinista leader, Daniel Ortega, wins the Presidential elections in 2007. The Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections, following a 10-year civil war against the US-backed Contras.
- Ortega's programme combines pro-poor programmes with making many concessions to the conservative Catholic elite, including making abortion illegal.

Bolivia

- Between 2002-2005 mass struggles throughout the country involving new social movements, particularly amongst the indigenous people of Bolivia
- At Cochabamba people successfully stop and reverse the privatisation of their water
- In 2005 a mine workers strike and call for nationalisation of the mines and force new general elections
- In 2005 Evo Morales of the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) is elected as president – the first president of indigenous descent and a coca farmer.
- On 1 May Morales enforces the nationalisation of the gas fields and tells Transnational Companies (TNCs) that they must negotiate new terms for mining rights in Bolivia
- Bolivia announces that state land will be made available en to poor peasants.
- Throughout 2007 Bolivia struggles with the pressure of threats of secession of its richest province backed by the Bolivian elite and the USA

Chile

- After years of rule by US-installed military dictator, Pinochet, in the 1970s and 1980s, deals are struck to smooth over a shift to democracy in which the military still has much power
- Widespread public dissatisfaction however with the deals struck lead to demonstrations against the impunity granted to Pinochet and others
- Election in 2006 of Michelle Bachelet, who beat conservative businessman Sebastian Pinera in a second round of voting to become Chile's first woman president. Michelle Bachelet had been jailed under the Pinochet regime
- The Bachelet government however attempts to stick to neo-liberal policies



- LATIN AMERICA SWINGS LEFT

Ecuador

- From 1996 there is a rise of mass social movements throughout the country
- The alliance of social movements, CONAIE, emerges and supports the elections of populist Gutierrez for president in 2002
- CONAIE, in alliance with mass urban trade unions, has been effective in defeating the US-backed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (ALCA) and cancelling oil contracts with Occidental Petroleum, a US oil company.
- 2007 Elections lead to the victory of the centre-Left Rafael Correa, with promises of radical reforms and a new constitution.

Venezuela

- Hugo Chavez gets elected as President of Venezuela and proclaims himself a Bolivarian socialist.
- Chavez stops the process of privatising Venezuela's national petrol company
- Chavez begins to use Venezuela's oil revenues to finance a social democratic programme of public health and education, and publicly forges an anti-USA, anti-IMF programme.
- Successive attempts by the conservative elite minority to win referendums' against Chavez fail and then a US-backed coups to kidnap Chavez fails when a mass uprising leads to his release.
- Trade unions and factory occupations grow and, although critical of Chavez, unions and neighbourhood social movements support the successful re-election of Chavez in November 2006.
- Chavez begins to set up alternative trade relations involving Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia against the norms of the WTO.
- From 1 May 2006 housewives in women-headed households receive a wage paid by the state for domestic labour.
- In 2007 Chavez proposes new Constitution and a vision of "21st century socialism". The Constitution combines rights of expropriation of capitalist property and the nationalisation of the central bank, together with setting up popular assemblies of governance. But these are combined with extending the term of the presidency and establishing a top-down united socialist party.

Brazil

- Rise of landless workers' movement (MST) whose members occupy land of the large landowners and then begin to run farms as democratic co-operatives
- Large left currents and militancy in the trade union federation - CUT - who back the Workers' Party (PT) since the 1980s.
- The PT wins key state elections such as Rio Grande do Sul and municipal elections in Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo
- Lula, ex General Secretary of the metalworkers union of the CUT and head of the PT wins the Presidential elections in 2001.
- Lula begins to make compromises with Big Business and the IMF.
- Tensions arise between the PT and the MST, and within the PT, over Lula's neo-liberalism
- Some unions split from the CUT and form the more radical CONLUTA in May 2006.

Argentina

- Debt crisis and collapse of peso in 2001 leads to banks freezing people's accounts overnight
- Mass strikes and stayaways lead to four pro-IMF/USA governments collapsing in 3 months in 2001/2002
- Rise of neighbourhood movements - the piqueteros - and movements of the unemployed.
- New trade union movements, like the CTA, reflect a more militant labour movement
- Workers begin to occupy and run some factories
- New government of Nestor Kirchner, although a pro-capitalist one, gives public commitment to freeze debt payments to the IMF
- Argentina moves closer to Venezuela, joins ALBA and Venezuela buys out Argentine debt.
- Christina Kirchner, wife of the former president, elected president in October 2007.



A brief history of Argentina

Argentina is, in many senses, not a typical Latin American country. It became formally independent from Spain quite early - in 1816. Historically, it was a relatively rich economy – largely based on beef exports - and by 1933 it was the 10th richest economy in the world. At one point it was richer than France and in 1945 boasted a higher standard of living than Canada. The Argentinean elite were of Spanish stock, proud of aping British cultural linkages and their links with European markets. They ruled over the country through weak, right wing governments. The military and officer class played a large role in society and for much of the 20th century Argentina was ruled by military dictators.

But within this military, sections of the officer class began to nurture nationalist sentiments. In the aftermath of World War 2 – when we had the emergence of national liberation movements in Africa and Asia – these officers embraced nationalism and greater economic independence and turned to the people to fulfil these aspirations. In 1943 a secret society of officers organised a military coup. One of them – Juan Peron – became head of the Department of Labour in the military government and later Secretary of War and began to forge links with sections of the trade unions grouped under the General Workers' Confederation (CGT).

After Peron was himself arrested in 1945, the CGT campaigned for his release and in 1946 he was elected President of Argentina. While in power Peron carried out many of the Keynesian policies which all other capitalist countries did after WW2 - promoting a strong public sector, industrialising, and regulating labour markets. Because much of the Argentinean elite were so tied in with Europe they resisted and Peron went over their heads, using repression and yet appealing to sections of the middle and working class to carry out this programme. This gave rise to what has come to be called “ Peronism” – a mixture of populism and authoritarianism. Included in this brand of populism was his second wife, Evita, who was a kind of Winnie Mandela figure rubbing shoulders with the poor and with women’s groups while living a life of luxury.

Peron ruled from 1946 to 1952 and then from 1952-1955, whereafter he was overthrown by a coup. After a series of military dictatorships in the 1960s, Peron returned to power in 1973 and 1974 before he died in 1974. His third wife, Isabel Peron, succeeded him as President before she was overthrown by a coup in 1976.

Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina was run by a dictatorship. A military junta staged a coup and declared a state of siege. Over the next six years of the so-called “Dirty War”, the military government murdered over 30,000 Argentines, mostly left wing students and union activists, many of whom simply “disappeared”. The IMF immediately provided billions of dollars worth of loans to the military Junta while the USA trained these kinds of military dictators at the





School of the Americas. The military scrapped economic policies favouring national industries in favour of neo-liberalism and the opening of Argentina to foreign investors. From that point the IMF and other banks began to control the economy more and more by imposing neoliberal conditions with priority given to repayment of the foreign debt, which had escalated during this decade of military rule. This Structural Adjustment Programme in Argentina included deindustrialisation, privatisation and commercialisation of functions of the state and restrictions on public services.

But in the 1980s, corruption and scandals in the military, and the defeat of the Argentinean forces in the Malvinas/Falklands war, led to public protests. At the same time, internationally, capitalist globalisation began to champion a form of managed, top-down negotiated transitions to democracy. These transitions saw Brazil and Chile change from dictatorships to elected governments, Namibia experience its negotiated settlement to end colonial rule and Zambia and other independent African countries move from a one-party states to multi-party democracies under the banner of neo-liberalism, and encouraged by the IMF and the World Bank. This new democracy in Argentina was however weighed down by a \$45 billion national debt - more than five times what the debt was when the military took over in 1976.

In 1983 the newly elected government of Raúl Alfonsín's took steps to account for the "disappeared", established civilian control of the armed forces, and consolidated democratic

institutions. The members of the three military juntas were prosecuted and sentenced to life terms. Failure to resolve endemic economic problems and an inability to maintain public confidence led to Alfonsín's early departure six months before his term was to be completed.

Carlos Menem won the 1989 presidential elections making traditional Peronist promises of rebuilding national industry, and stayed in power for the next ten years. But once in power, he made a hard right turn, imposing what he called "surgery without anaesthetic". Menem's policies turned Argentina into the model pupil of the IMF and the World Bank. Work programs, environmental laws,

labour legislation, and real wages were slashed. Almost all national assets were privatized, currency markets were deregulated, and the peso was pegged to the U.S. dollar at one-to-one.

These policies led to a huge increase in foreign investment and growth, with huge profits for Transnational Corporations (TNCs) throughout the 1990s. However, Argentina's currency, the peso, was tied to the dollar at an artificially high rate, which could only be maintained by flooding the market with dollars. As a result the foreign debt increased enormously and even more state companies and services were privatized. The total opening up of the market to foreign goods, which up until then were produced locally, resulted in the collapse of local industry. So while the middle classes were saving in dollars, travelling overseas, and purchasing imported and luxury goods cheaply, the rest of the population was experiencing both poverty and unemployment.

But toward the end of the 1990s the overvaluation of the pegged peso caused a gradual slide into economic crisis. In 1998 a period of profound economic recession began.

The first major protests against neo-liberal government policies began in the interior of the country in 1996 and 1997 when unemployed workers called piqueteros, or picketers, blocked major highways demanding jobs. By 2001 the blockading of strategic commercial arteries had spread to the entire country. The piqueteros were loosely organized in the Movement of Unemployed Workers.

On 19 December 2001 millions of Argentines took to the streets rejecting their government's neoliberal policies they viewed as imperial and responsible for the crash of their economy and livelihoods.

From 2000 Argentinean workers came out in 8 general strikes and between December 2001 and January 2002 the Argentinean people toppled 5 presidents.

Mass struggles in Argentina

The rebellion erupted on 19-20 December 2001, when the government of Fernando de la Rúa froze domestic savings accounts in an attempt to salvage the country's domestic and international banking interests.

There was an explosion of grassroots activism all over the country, but particularly in Buenos Aires, where people ignored the curfew, gathered in the city centre and chanted: All of them Out! Unemployed workers in the industrial suburbs, who organized themselves against the downsizing of the early 1990s, employed the "piquete" technique of blocking roadways to make demands on the government. Middle class "neighbourhood assemblies" in Buenos Aires met on street corners to discuss national politics and local issues, practising direct democracy. Abandoned and bankrupt workplaces were occupied by their former workers as was the case with some banks, bakeries, health clinics, bus lines and schools.



The government's repression of the protests resulted in the deaths of 32 demonstrators. De la Rúa fell the next day and was succeeded by four governments in a period of less than two weeks. The second president, Adolfo Rodríguez Saá defaulted on the external debt - which was the largest default in history, and not taken lightly by the IMF who instantly devalued the Argentinean currency, losing over two thirds of its value. Once Latin America's wealthiest country, over 50% Argentines fall below the poverty line overnight.

There were over 11,088 protests nationwide in the first six months of 2002. The demonstrations that erupted in December were commonly referred to as *cacerolazos*, protests in which participants banged on empty pots and pans to symbolize their inability to buy the basic necessities of life. Many of the demonstrators marched under the banners of the communities they come from, after gathering in *asambleas populares*, or popular assemblies. These *barrio* gatherings rapidly became autonomous centres of community participation that included a wide variety of groups and individuals, ranging from the unemployed and independent trade unionists, to housewives, human rights activists and members of left political parties.

Workplace Takeovers

In addition to mobilizing demonstrations the popular assemblies often took on local issues and concerns. Owners of businesses went bankrupt and began to shut down. The workers seized control and formed cooperatives, which they had to then defend against the police and the courts. In some cases, the local policemen expressed their solidarity with the workers in the plant and those they faced on the barricades. In one case of workers seizing a local printing press, the police authorities even back-pedalled on their attempts to remove workers, appealing to the judge who ruled against



the workers, to rescind his order to seize the printing facilities.

In May 2003, Nestor Kirchner was elected the new president of Argentina. Although



pro-capitalist, Kirchner gave a public commitment to freeze debt payments to the IMF and has since then worked to co-opt many of the militant struggles into a project of capitalist stability. His government has invited the piqueteros to serve on advisory committees, legalised some of the gains made by workers and entered into alliances with Venezuelan Hugo Chavez's radical government. He has negotiated that Venezuela buy out Argentina's debt and build an oil pipeline to help with Argentina's energy needs.

Since then there has been improvement in the Argentinean economy and unemployment has come from its crisis rate of 25% down to 10% today.

The Kirchner government has not yet formerly recognised the CTA however.

... "those sectors that have grown have done so by adopting practices of employment that is not necessarily permanent employment but rather casualised labour - contract labour."

Jose Olivera, Union Obrera Metalurgica



WORKER CONTROLLED FACORIES IN ARGENTINE: THE CASE OF ZANON CERAMIC FACTORY

The Zanon Ceramic factory was declared by its workers a factory under workers' control in October 2001. The workers called their factory FaSinPat which means "factory without owners". The take over of Zanon factory can be traced back to the hardships workers faced in the early 1990s. A number of workers had been retrenched and the remaining 300 workers had been forced by management to work harder and faster. This resulted in many injuries and deaths and in 2000, in response, workers went on strike and demanded increased standards of health and safety and the inclusion of a nurse to cover all shifts. The factory owner responded by locking workers out. In response to the lock out, workers occupied the factory.

The Zanon management declared the company financially bankrupt and sought the permission of the courts to allow them to sell the factory. In October 2001, after a long debate among

themselves, the workers resolved at their workplace assembly to take over the factory under their control and began the process of restarting production. Workers claimed control of the factory on the basis that the factory owner owed them a significant amount in unpaid wages. In March 2002 the Zanon Ceramic factory fully returned to production.

As part of popularizing their struggles, Zanon workers made links with workers in other countries. They established links with workers in Venezuela, in Uruguay and in Brazil, where there had been experience of taking over closed factories. The Zanon workers also participated in the first Latin American Congress on Recuperated Enterprises in October, 2005 where strategies against governments' attacks and capitalist markets were discussed. They also embarked on international tours to speak to other workers in Europe.



Since it was taken over by workers the Zanon factory has increased employment from 300 to 470 workers. The extra 170 workers employed were drawn from the unemployed groups that played an important role in the struggle to defend the Zanon factory. The level of production has also improved. In its first month of production under workers' control 20 000 square metres of ceramic tiles were made. By the fourth month workers were producing about 120 000

square metres of ceramics per month. By 2004 the monthly production rate went up to 300 000 square metres. The wages of workers have also improved quite substantially since the take over by workers. Every worker receives the same salary. The number of accidents at work has dropped dramatically.

The hiring of workers, the organisation of production and the pace of work are all decided democratically by the workers. Decisions on what to produce, how much to produce and what to do with what is produced are also taken by workers themselves in a general assembly of Zanon workers. The workers have also set up worker committees to deal with sales, administration, security, purchasing, production, planning, health and safety, and publicity. Each committee elects a coordinator that reports on issues, news and conflicts within her or his committee, to a meeting of all coordinators. Each coordinator then reports back to her or his committee. Weekly assemblies per shift are held by workers. The factory also holds a monthly general assembly during which production comes to a standstill.



THE CTA: A NEW STRATEGY FOR ORGANIZING WORKERS

“After the ‘Dirty War’ time and the coming of democracy and the entrenching of neoliberal policies in Argentina this brought about a fracture – a breaking – in the union movement in Argentina and the creation of much more localized trade unions at very grass roots level from the traditional forms of organizing of national confederations in Argentina.”

Cristian Horton, President of 7deMayo Cooperative

Traditional industrial unions under the CGT had grown between the 1950s and 1990s but these unions experienced a severe crisis under neoliberalism. Partly because of the crisis in the economy, and partly because the centralised model of negotiations and union cooperation with business, the CGT model of industrial unionism no longer worked in a lean and mean economic policy that had begun to focus on the external market, on cost-recovery, and casualisation.

Unemployment and precarious, casualised work created serious difficulties for the traditional union model in providing for all workers since they traditionally focused on formal workers. Neoliberal

states reduced the space for union intervention in the design of economic, social, and labour policies. Collective contracts and labour laws became less protective of jobs, working conditions and wages. Negotiating with downsizing businesses or a corporatised state was very different to the kind of state-worker relationship established under Peron.



At the 1991 congress of Argentine Workers in the town of Burzaco, a group of unions (especially the state and education employee unions) decided to break from the General Workers' Confederation (CGT) and to build a union that represented all workers, including the unemployed. They felt that the traditional form of trade unionism at that time had become complicit in capitalism's 'corporate business unionism' which did not substantially challenge neoliberalism or empower workers. These discussions about a new form of unionism that would include the unemployed, as well as social and political formations interested in a collective for an alternative Argentina, grew over time to create the constitution of the Argentine Workers' Federation, the CTA.

Confidence sprouted in the idea that another country is possible, if workers, men and women, take into their hands the responsibility of building and developing it according to their interests and aspirations. Resisting the most disgraceful handover of the country to the expansionist, imperialist voracity of capital, in open opposition to corporate business unionism that was growing in the CGT, a group of unions, inspired by the Association of State Employees (Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado, ATE) and the Confederation of Argentine Education Employees (Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina, CTERA), decided to build a union organisation capable of organizing and representing all workers, employed and unemployed. The Burzaco developments at the congress of Argentine Workers laid the foundations for a new type of unionism, which later would be affirmed and would mature into the constitution of the CTA.

In addition to organizing the employed and unemployed, on a basic class alliance, the CTA set out to organize and coordinate with other social movements, in order to collectively build a political project for a different Argentina. The CTA decided to design a strategy that would enable it to unify the working class as a whole, the central motor force for any possible alternative to neoliberalism; and to organise (and be organised by) all social movements, with a view to forming a social and political force for change. Today, out of a total of 13 million workers in Argentina, 1.3 million are organised by the CTA, while the CGT has about 2.5 million members.

“During the 1990s Argentina had about 25% unemployment (and another 15% only had part time work). I know for here it probably sounds quite low but for Argentina it’s certainly quite high and this is when CTA was formed and arose...”

Cristian Horton, President of 7deMayo Cooperative



The issue of political alignment

'Peronism was the political unity that expressed and contained the working class. Union power was not only the structure, but the key identity: "Peron to power".'

(V́ctor De Gennaro, President of the CTA, 2002)

Ever since World War 2 and the first election of Juan Peron, the largest trade union federation, the CGT, had tied its fortunes to its alliance with the Peronist Party. Although Peron had implemented authoritarian policies and promoted Argentinean national business interests, his successive governments had also provided benefits for some permanent workers and their leaders. Increasingly the leaders of the trade unions traded worker militancy for links with the Peronists and Argentinean businesses. This arrangement was to collapse when Argentina first embraced neo-liberalism in the 1980s, and when the crisis hit the Argentinean working class in the 1990s.

As each wave of mass struggles brought down successive governments between 2001 and 2002 the CGT stuck loyally to political ally. This loyalty was to see the CGT lose millions of members and to be lined up against the movements of the unemployed such as the Unemployed Workers' Movement and the piqueteros. This loyalty also saw a section of the CGT breakaway to form the CGT-Moyano after its leader Hugo Moyano.

The desire for working class independence was also to inform the spirit of militancy at Burzaco that led to the formation eventually of the CTA. However the long traditions of political alignment were also to haunt the CTA, which is formally independent of any political party at present, with major differences between members for whom any kind of future alignment with any political party is now abhorrent and others who still seek political alignment.

At the CTA convention in mid-December 2006 there were calls from some affiliates for the CTA to become a political party. The proposition was soundly defeated, in favour of issue-based politics and support of politicians who advocate the ideals of the CTA. The vote was dramatic, with delegates on the losing side setting fire to their credentials and holding them above their heads to vote.

Today the CTA faces some criticism for sometimes making very radical calls and then not being able to carry them out, and there is much debate within the CTA as to its future political direction.

The CTA and trade union forms

The CTA is a very different form of trade union federation from that which we are familiar with in South Africa. Unlike industrial unionism it does not only focus on representing and organising the permanently employed workers on an industry basis. Membership and affiliation are structured to accommodate all the different sections of the working class – from the different types of employed workers (i.e.



permanent workers and vulnerable workers like casuals, part-time workers, labour broker workers and contract workers) to the unemployed.

A person becomes a member of the CTA through being a member of an affiliated trade union, or an affiliated organisation. But the CTA also allows direct individual membership. This means that you can be a member of the federation without having to belong to one of its affiliates. And affiliation to the CTA is not limited to Trade Unions. Its affiliates are from a wide range of organisations, including:



- Community-based organisations and movements
- Youth organisations and student organisations
- Landless people's movements in locals or 'territorial' organisations such as the Federación de Tierra y Vivienda, involved in land seizures.
- Industrial trade unions
- Sex worker rights organisations
- Factories without bosses (recuperated/take over factories)
- Cooperatives (e.g. the 7th May Workers' Cooperative)
- Organisations of the unemployed (e.g. the Federation for Land, Housing and Habitat (FTV), the Territorial Liberation Movement (MTL))
- Research and training Centres



The CTA has more than 200 different affiliated organisations. The CTA's opening of membership to progressive non-trade union organisations is informed by its understanding of the need to go beyond defending the interests of union members and to reach out to other social groups within the working class. Through this approach the CTA seeks to build a collective force embracing all the differences within the working class. These differences are reflected in its recent campaigns, such as: the demand for their legal recognition as a Federation of Argentinean Workers by the State, punishment and incarceration of those involved in repression in the 1970s, a minimum wage, a family subsidy, and pensions for retired workers at 82% of their salaries.

The CTA also participates in neighbourhood forums which are organized in cities across the country. They are a local response to the crisis. Neighbours band together to protect people from being evicted, find solutions to eroding services and infrastructure problems and help find uses for abandoned buildings.



The Structure of CTA

CTA has national, provincial and local committees. The National Committee is elected every three years and has sub committees for example - gender, human rights, international etc. It has 24 Provincial Committees that are made up of representatives from organisations in the different provinces. Its local committees are made up of affiliated organisations and workers. All committee representatives are elected through voting.

Women's representation within CTA structures

The CTA is something exceptional in the labour movement because of the role played by women and its emphasis on gender in the organisation's development. Women have borne the brunt of neoliberal policies and are often at the forefront of anti-imperialist movements internationally.

The CTA uses quotas for the representation of women at all levels. Women represent approximately 30 - 40% of elected CTA structures. Voting lists are rejected if women candidates are not sufficiently represented.

Organising the unemployed

In the 1990s hundreds of new groups exploded in Argentina - the most significant and novel of these groups were the piqueteros. The piqueteros or *picketers* became a national movement. Because they had no workplaces to shut down in protest of economic policies, they blocked highways. Some of the piqueteros, through their affiliate organisations, are part of the CTA. In 2001, whole families of piqueteros participated in more than 900 highway closures.

The CTA also promotes the organising of the unemployed by allowing the unemployed to join as individuals even if they are not part of organisations. Demands that speak to the needs of the unemployed, for example the creation of jobs, family subsidies, and pensions for retrenched workers, are taken up with the state by the CTA.

A unified working class will be the "central motor force for any possible alternative to neoliberalism."

Jose Olivera, Union Obrera Metalurgica

Organising informalised workers

Resisting Outsourcing: 7th May Workers' Cooperative

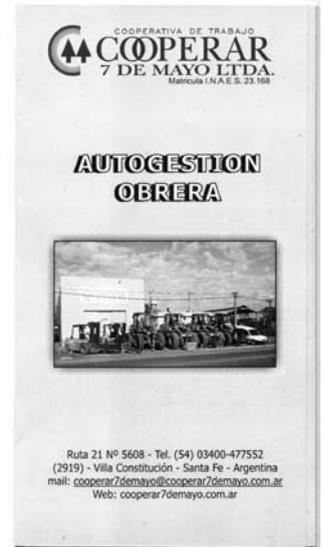
The origins of the 7th of May Workers Cooperative can be traced back to 1991, when a steel production company called Acindar PLC that operate in the Acevedo Port decided to outsource some of its functions including the loading and offloading port operations. The loading and offloading functions were outsourced to a labour broker that contracts former workers of Acindar PLC to carry out the operations. The workers were fragmented into company workers that are

relatively well-paid and contractors that get low wages. The trade union, Union Obrera Metalurgica (UOM) that organise in the port, through its local, UOM Villa Constitucion, successfully forced Acindar PLC into negotiations to address the needs of workers employed through the placement agency. The UOM local forced the company to agree to allow workers themselves to manage the operations of loading and offloading.

On the 7th May 1996, the workers set up a cooperative named Cooperar 7 De Mayo Ltda (which means 7th May Workers' Cooperative in Spanish) and took over the operations of loading and offloading of port operations.

To ensure its long term existence the 7th May Workers' Cooperative, together with other cooperatives has placed a number of demands to the Argentinean national state. It has pushed for changes to the national law on cooperatives, so that it incorporates issues such as provision of healthcare to workers by the state, provision of insurance against workplace risks and pension benefits to co-op workers. It has also called for financing by the state for coops to facilitate their production. It has made calls for the expropriation of factories and machinery that have been taken over by workers and for the right of ownership by coop workers.

The 7th May Workers' Cooperative is affiliated to the CTA. The 7th May Workers' Cooperative is also part of the National Association of Self Managed Workers that brings together factories taken over by workers.



“The sector in which I work and I represent -what we did is that we took over factories and companies that owners left – they never gave any kind of packages to people that were laid off and what we did is that we took over those companies and started to make them operational again and let workers run those factories.”

Cristian Horton, President of 7deMayo Cooperative

Organising Sex Workers

AMMAR stands for the Association of Argentine Prostitutes and connotes the Spanish word, ‘amar’, meaning ‘to love’. Elena Reynaga is the President of AMMAR.

“The police demanded bribes and kickbacks from us, and engaged in abuse and arbitrary detentions. The police would grab us, drag us on the ground, kick and beat us, and take us to jail, where we were held in awful conditions, in filthy cells whose floors and walls were covered with excrement and urine...Inside jails, and in the patrol cars, we were also subjected to rape.”

Elena Reynaga, president of AMMAR

In 1994, in the face of such harassment, sex workers in Argentina decided “we could not control it individually and decided to band together. Before that we believed what we had been told historically, that we were trash and had no rights. The change in our mindset came about in part because we began to have contact with people from the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA).

Once we were shown that we were citizens like anyone else, and once we believed it, we launched what we saw as our biggest struggle, to get the police off our backs, since they had always been our greatest pimps.”

In March 1995 AMMAR became part of the CTA. “This was the turning point for our struggle to gain acceptance, recognition, and clout. It was of great help in our combat against police violence, since we now had the backing of this large federation of labour unions, and when we lodged complaints of violence and harassment, the complaints were signed not only by AMMAR, but also by the CTA. It was thus fundamental to us to be part of a workers’ federation that supported and strengthened us as the struggle grew harder. Once we had that support, police thought twice before harming and harassing us.”



“Once inside the CTA, we instituted education programmes. We went into our communities, schools, bars, universities, and poor neighbourhoods, and carried out training and workshops in sex education and AIDS prevention”



Such education campaigns has changed public perception of sex workers and has led to a victory in 1998 when AMMAR was able to change the municipal legislation around vagrancy in Buenos Aires, to repeal ‘disorderly conduct’ ordinances that had been used as pretexts for police harassment. “Now, even in provinces where those laws and ordinances have not been repealed, there has been a political decision not to enforce them”

When a sex worker organiser, Sandra Cabrera was shot in January 2003, over 7000 people from various CTA affiliates came out to protest and a policeman was detained for investigation.

After 11 years of struggle, we have finally received official recognition from the government as valid participants in the discussions to address the problems in our sector. In early October, Kirchner signed a decree that opens up an official line of communication and recognises that the fact that sex workers are not entitled to social security or retirement benefits is an act of discrimination that must be addressed by the government. We want recondition of our work as work. What we want is to have the same rights as any other class of worker in our country, and not special laws, since those are also kinds of discrimination. We are not looking for special privileges, but we will no longer be marginalised. At the end of the day we want equality just like every citizen of Argentina”

Elena Reynaga, president of AMMAR

Occupying factories

The taking over of factories in Argentina began in 2000 and accelerated in 2001 when economic crisis worsened. Thousands of workplaces closed and millions of workers lost jobs. In response, many workers took over their workplaces when they were abandoned or closed by the bosses. By the end of 2006 there were more than 180 workplaces taken over by workers, providing jobs for more than 10 000 Argentina workers who have recuperated their jobs and their dignity. The

workplaces taken over by workers are run on a co-operative basis and aim to be democratic. Key decisions about their functioning are decided by all workers in a Workers' Assembly in their workplaces. The experience of recuperated factories shows that it is possible to

- run workplaces without bosses
- produce for human needs not profits
- make production decisions democratically

The Argentinean workers are experimenting with revolutionary ideas that are based on equality, direct democracy and working class solidarity. Experimentation with such revolutionary ideas is only possible when the working class is mobilised and organised on a democratic basis.

Many of these factory takeovers are CTA affiliates. But not all factory takeover movements are aligned to the CTA and some are critical of the CTA. Many new social movements prefer to remain autonomous and shape their own networks because of they are critical of the union's form and the centrality of votes and elections as means of decision-making. Many factory seizures for example choose to remain under self-management and self-organization.

The Bauen Hotel closed after the 2001 crisis, and in 2003, 40 workers cleaned up and re-opened for business. Today the hotel employs 150 people and is run by a cooperative with no legal standing and no government subsidy.



“The people of Argentina must have a say about how the wealth of the country and its profits should be distributed amongst the population and we demand a minimum wage for both employed and unemployed workers as a base so that we can have a dignified life.

We want the CTA to be recognised as a legal entity. Our own government does not recognize us as such. We take on all sorts of court cases – we’ve got discussions on salaries and we put through complaints – we work with other movements. But the government works with other unions and other leaders but we are yet to be recognized as a congress of Argentinean Workers and this has the impact that many of our leaders can’t work freely in Argentina and they face persecution and difficulties in being able to carry out their work.

We want justice and we want action and punishment for those, who we call genocidal figures, who are making us live in the conditions that we are living in this world today”.

Cristian Horton addressed the 2007 ILRIG Globalisation School



NEW FORMS OF ORGANISING IN SOUTH AFRICA

During their travels in South Africa the CTA members had the opportunity to meet some South African organisations who are also grappling with new forms of organising workers, which may be more appropriate for the many changes that have happened to the working class under neo-liberalism. These organisations were: Sikhula Sonke, the UCT Workers' Forum and Sisonke.

Sikhula Sonke

Sikhula Sonke (We grow together, in isiXhosa) is a social movement trade union started in 2002 by women employed as casual seasonal farm labourers. Many of these workers actually work all year round and yet were still considered "seasonal."

When the group of seasonal women workers started off they would go out to pickup points for casual labourers in townships and on trains and farms to publicise new laws for minimum wages. In 2005 Sikhula Sonke registered as a trade union because of the negotiating challenges faced by their members. Because their goal is to improve the lives of farm workers and to build women's leadership, they focus on a range of ongoing issues. These issues include wage negotiations, but are also, much more extensively, other aspects affecting the real lives of workers, for whom the

workplace and the home are not really two distinct spaces. Sikhula Sonke thus mobilises farm workers around evictions, the need for crèches, combating alcoholism, and domestic violence, to the need for monitoring labour brokers, to HIV and its link to women’s economic dependence on men. The union even has a back-to-school campaign where it publicises applications for exemption from school fees, and talks directly to school principals. In all these cases Sikhula Sonke considers all their members, employed or not.

The union believes in politicising all issues - from the workplace, to farm evictions, alcoholism, domestic violence, and education. As a result Sikhula Sonke has grown in number and geographical spread, including opening the union to men, while strategising to keep their feminist principles at the fore

Sikhula Sonke currently has about 4,000 members working on farms across the Western Cape.

“When there is a problem on one farm, we go out as a collective and go and picket or march together to show other farm workers that if you stand together, if you unite, you are much stronger than if you are just one worker or farm dealing, or if you are isolated.”

Wendy Pekeur, General Secretary of Sikhula Sonke

Collective action is used for practical local struggles as well as for long term and international strategic planning. For example, Sikhula Sonke has taken the plight of farmworkers directly to shoppers at the British Supermarket, Tesco. The union works with international solidarity organisations to monitor corporate abuse, as well as, locally, with other South African trade unions believing that workers’ problems will not be solved by the small number of unionised workers.

“We need to unite to improve workers lives because that is our main goal.” Sikhula Sonke stresses the need for ongoing reflection to face the mountain of challenges ahead. We looked at FAWU’s , and SEWA’s experiences. It’s a learning process. We are not experts. We are learning. We make mistakes.”

Wendy Pekeur, General Secretary



This kind of empowerment is a “long haul” says Pekeur as she relates the debates around registering as a union or not, and the way that would change their membership being legally required to allow men to join. “Other unions you see women are not in the leadership positions so that is one of our challenges. How do we ensure women’s voices don’t become silent because men are there now? You can put 2 men in a room and they will dominate even 50 women. We have many strong women but we need ongoing empowerment and awareness.” Both female and male members must be on board with the need to have women in front, foster leadership, and build an organisation that is “vehicle for women’s voices”- for example, everyone signs a code of conduct in which they agree not to take part in domestic violence starting in their own homes.

The UCT Workers’ Forum



The UCT Workers’ Forum (UCTWF) is an initiative of workers at the University of Cape Town (UCT) who fought the outsourcing of functions, viewed by UCT management as “non-core”. Outsourcing of the so called “non-core” services means that workers previously directly employed by UCT are now employed by companies with service contracts with UCT. The move towards outsourcing started in the early 1990s. Outsourced services include: cleaning, security, catering, maintenance of grounds, sport grounds, gardens, document services and transport.



The outsourcing of services at UCT has resulted in the fragmentations of workers. Workers now work for different companies even though they are still based at the same workplace. The outsourcing of services poses challenges on how to organise workers employed by different companies operating in one workplace. The UCTWF is in a sense a response to the failure of the current industrial unions to organise and defend workers in outsourced services.



Prior to the formation of the UCTWF the organising of workers took many different unions, as each was formally obliged to organise within its scope. As a result of this approach the Food and Allied Workers’ Union (FAWU) organises catering workers, the SA Transport and Allied Workers’ Union (SATAWU) organises the security and cleaning workers, whilst the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union (NEHAWU) focused on workers directly employed by the university. With the shift to outsourcing, NEHAWU had to let go of workers who were now employed by other companies and therefore fell under the scope of other COSATU affiliates. Meanwhile an independent union - the Oil, Chemical, General and Allied Workers Union (OCGAWU) - also organised workers at UCT.



As a result of the union fragmentation workers in outsourced services fell in the cracks and mobilising by the traditional unions was not successful. Workers at the university have moved from one union to the other because of change in employment terms and the lack of service by the relevant union. For example the cleaning workers and who belonged to NEHAWU before their outsourcing, to Supercare and Metro services, had to join SATAWU because they fell under its scope. Some of the cleaning workers who joined SATAWU were however not happy with the way SATAWU took up their problems and wanted to rejoin NEHAWU. NEHAWU initially did not want to take workers from SATAWU in line with COSATU's position that its affiliates should not poach each others' members but, in this case, NEHAWU accepted workers outside their scope when workers threatened to join an independent union. But compounding these inter-union technical difficulties, was the fact that while cleaning workers have their wages settled through negotiations at a Cleaning Bargaining Council, NEHAWU is not represented because the union falls below the required membership level threshold for the Bargaining Council.

The UCT Workers' Forum emerged in response to outsourcing, as an attempt to unite workers at the university and to cut through all the inter-union technicalities. The UCTWF was formalised in early 2004 and is open to all UCT workers irrespective of union affiliation, as well as to non-unionised workers. The UCTWF is as such not a formal trade, as such, but a forum bringing together workers from different unions. The UCTWF enjoys the support of a group of academic sympathisers – called the UCT Workers Support Committee (UCTWSC) – who have helped with resources and acts of solidarity. The UCTWF meets for an hour once a week during lunch time breaks. A UCTWSC activist chairs and records the proceedings of the UCTWF meetings.

While the UCTWF does not have a formal recognition agreement with the UCT management and the outsourced companies, it has de facto become the organisation bargaining on behalf of the workers and recognised by the employers.

The UCTWF, jointly with UCTWSC, organised a popular referendum on the right to safe decent and dignified working conditions for all workers at UCT irrespective of who their employer is. All workers were asked to vote by a show of hands. All workers voted unanimously for decent and dignified working conditions. The UCTWF used this kind of public campaigning to put the spotlight on the UCT management for the poor working conditions at the contract companies and made calls on the UCT management to intervene in various disputes between workers and the contract companies responsible.

The activities of UCTWSC and UCTWF finally forced the UCT management in July 2005 to impose a code of conduct for outsourced service providers, aimed at improving the working conditions of outsourced workers. Companies will be required to follow the terms of the code if they wish to obtain or retain contracts with UCT.



The Sisonke Sex Workers Movement and SWEAT

Sisonke is a movement of sex workers launched in the Western Cape in 2003. “Sisonke” means togetherness which is exactly what Sisonke attempts to do – to bring together sex workers from across the country, to unite and fight for their rights as regardless of work, race or sexual orientation. The Cape Town branch of Sisonke meets once every second month at community house and participates in various campaigns initiated by other social movements and NGOs. The national Sisonke group, which consists of representatives of other provinces, meets once a quarter to coordinate activities.

Sisonke works with the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Training (SWEAT), an NGO doing outreach work with sex workers, working on the streets and within agencies. SWEAT provides crisis counselling, legal advice and skills training for sex workers and advocates for the decriminalisation of adult sex work.

Sisonke was formed because sex workers were sick and tired of police harassment and they decided they needed an organisation to defend their rights. The sex workers decided to find strength in numbers and take responsibility for bringing about change. In 2005, Sisonke held a national sex worker conference which brought together 80 sex workers from across South Africa. In 2006 Sisonke launched a campaign to help sex workers get IDs and access to bank accounts.

The movement is too small. Most sex workers don't know about Sisonke and SWEAT, which supports Sisonke. We need a campaign to increase membership. Sisonke should consider joining the labour movement as it's the best way to mobilise and would allow the movement to grow big.

Sisonke leader, Western Cape

In 2006, Sisonke joined the Social Movements' Indaba (SMI) in the Western Cape which has given them an opportunity to connect with other struggles and share their issues. Sisonke members feel that other activists could show their support for sex workers by attending marches which demand for sex worker rights.

Through the involvement in the SMI and other processes Sisonke representatives have attended both the Southern African Social Forum in Malawi and the World Social Forum in Kenya.





COSATU ON NEW FORMS OF ORGANISING

The question is no longer whether we organise a-typical forms of work but rather when and how we do this, the attack is an attack on all workers, so the slogan an injury to one is an injury to all is more relevant than ever.

(Resolution adopted at 7th Congress of COSATU)

COSATU is the biggest working class mass formation in South Africa. It is by far the largest trade union in South Africa with some 1.6 million members, spread over 21 affiliated trade unions.

COSATU-affiliated unions have however struggled to organise the unemployed, and the visit of the CTA was particularly inspiring for South African unionists who met the comrades and who attended the ILRIG Globalisation School, to share experiences of these challenges.

Mike Louw, COSATU Western Cape Provincial Educator, had the following to say about the visit of the CTA comrades.

Latin America today

“Although we did not necessarily meet formally with the CTA, but we feel that such connections are important for us as a trade union federation and that the lessons we can learn especially with things that are happening in South America as a whole, Bolivia, Venuezela and Argentina itself. That there are very valuable lessons that we can learn.”



Organising the unemployed

Commenting on the problem of unemployment in Argentina and organising innovations of the CTA that draws the unemployed sections into the working class by allowing them to join the CTA federation through their organisations and also allowing individual membership to facilitate the organising of the unemployed, Comrade Mike had this to say:



“That is the type of experiences that we think we need to feed from. Because in our situation this is probably the way things are going at the moment (in terms of the increase in unemployment). We need to make sure that we can draw from the experience of the CTA - if we want to unite as a working class, then we must first identify and we must accept that the working class is made up of many components. It is the unemployed and the employed and there are certain strata in between as well that we need to attract. And as unions and a union federation we have to be looking at the way the workplace is structured at the moment - that is the experience that is where we need to be learning from.”



A divided working class

“We are still regarded as the labour aristocracy because we have these jobs. I think we must be looking at it, and dispense with that argument altogether. And the one way we can do that is to make sure that we can attract unemployed, the very people that we believe we speak on behalf of or for, that they should be closer and involved in the organisation without impediments. So those are issues that we need to examine closely and find out how we could get to that point sooner rather than later”



Union structures that exclude the unemployed

“It is important that we find ways of getting unemployed people involved in the matter, in our structures, we need to look at how do make sure that the retrenched workers are not only retrained but we find ways to retain them in the union and we really have to look seriously at that situation because it will start to unlock our minds to know about what do we do to maintain the level of our influence, at the moment our influence is dwindling.”

International Solidarity

“There is a lot of things we think we can learn and that we can exchange through our experiences and whatever experiences they have. So unfortunately it may have been an opportunity missed but we hope that ILRIG would assist us or that connection, that bond could be cemented and hopefully as COSATU we will be able to feed into that exchange in the future.”

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