LABOR UNREST IN ARGENTINA, 1930–1943*

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In recent years, the major debate regarding the social origins of Peronism in Argentina has revolved around whether the institutional arrangements that preceded the military coup of 1943 were continuous or discontinuous with those that prevailed by 1946, after Colonel Juan Perón had emerged and been eventually elected to the presidency.[1] This debate has been a fruitful one, for it has led to historical reevaluation of the changes undergone by organized labor during the period between the two world wars. These new historical insights have in turn revealed the 1930s and early 1940s to have been a period of transition in which old and new social arrangements coexisted. According to this perspective, the emergence of Peronism was characterized by continuity as well as change, and labor studies must strive to establish more precisely the origin and character of each set of forces as well as their interrelationship with one another.

This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing historical reevaluation of the interwar period in Argentina by offering new insights into the changes undergone by the labor movement between the coups of 1930 and 1943. The first section will present original data on labor unrest during this period to demonstrate that a wave of strikes in the mid-1930s revealed that workers in virtually all labor sectors were adopting industry-wide forms of action and organization and pursuing state mediation to press their demands. By the mid-1930s, the epicenter of labor unrest had shifted to industrial unions organized by workers in construction, man-

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1. A good recent review of the different positions in this debate can be found in Horowitz (1990). A crucial early work on the 1930s is Durruty (1969). One of the best accounts of political tendencies within organized labor during the 1930s and early 1940s can be found in Campo (1983) and Tamarin (1985). On the same period, see also Matsushita (1983). On continuities in patterns of state mediation, see Gaudio and Pilone (1983, 1984). On continuities in the leadership of trade unions in the 1930s, see Horowitz (1983, 1984). Many of these key essays have been collected in Torre (1988). A useful historical synthesis can be found in Bergquist (1986).

ufacturing, and agriculture. This article will also provide new historical data on labor unrest and the adoption of industrial unions among workers in agriculture and will argue that this transition to new forms of labor organization provided an opportunity for Communists to enhance their presence within the labor movement. Finally, it will be argued that adopting these new forms of action and organization allowed workers to enhance their political bargaining power and that state authorities and employers responded to these changes by seeking greater formal regulation of capital-labor relations. In generating a demand for new forms of political mediation, these interwar changes provided a critical underpinning for the emergence of Peronism after 1943.

PATTERNS OF LABOR UNREST IN THE 1930S

The data presented here were compiled by recording all instances of labor unrest reported by the Argentine daily newspaper *La Prensa* from 1930 to 1943. This undertaking is part of a long-term project to construct a homogeneous indicator of labor unrest between 1887 and 1946. For the longer period, *La Prensa* was found to report regularly more instances of labor unrest than other contemporary periodicals such as *La Vanguardia* and *La Nación*. The data are intended to indicate year-to-year trends and the composition of labor unrest for periods in which reliable data have thus far been lacking. These data include all press reports of actual events of labor unrest such as strikes, walkouts, rallies, demonstrations, and general strikes. All such instances were recorded regardless of duration or size (as long as they involved more than a single worker). Again, these data are intended to indicate roughly the trends, sectoral composition, and geographical distribution of labor unrest, rather than an actual count of each and every instance of labor unrest. The distribution of all instances of labor unrest reported by *La Prensa* between 1930 and 1943 is indicated in table 1.

Within this period, labor unrest significantly declined immediately after the 1930 coup and during World War II. Clearly, the repressive stance taken by the regime of General José Félix Uriburu after 1930 played a major role in dampening labor unrest. The causes of the decline in labor unrest during World War II are still being debated, however. It was similar in magnitude to the decline that had accompanied World War I. Labor unrest intensified in 1932 as trade unions perceived a less hostile political environment, but unemployment continued to dampen labor unrest in 1933 and 1934. The years 1935 and 1936 brought a major wave of labor unrest, the peak for the 1930–1943 period.

Contrasting the data on labor unrest for 1930–1943 with those for

TABLE 1 Labor Unrest in Argentina, 1930–1943, by Sector

Year	Transport	Manufacturing	Construction	Commerce & Services	Public Workers	Agriculture	Port	General Strikes	Other	Total
1930	20	22	12	11	7	9	30	10	3	124
1931	8	3	0	0	1	3	2	1	0	18
1932	26	33	8	4	4	43	11	19	1	149
1933	15	14	6	4	3	33	7	5	0	87
1934	6	20	6	4	5	13	4	2	0	60
1935	21	51	17	6	16	46	6	14	3	180
1936	38	56	25	11	9	50	0	18	8	215
1937	12	22	31	6	2	33	2	3	5	116
1938	17	33	20	6	7	19	0	4	4	110
1939	30	32	21	4	6	27	0	5	3	128
1940	17	47	25	5	4	33	0	6	3	140
1941	13	30	32	3	5	11	1	4	3	102
1942	12	32	20	3	2	7	0	7	1	84
1943	13	28	4	4	2	9	4	6	0	70
Total	248 (15.7%)	423 (26.7%)	227 (14.3%)	71 (4.5%)	73 (4.6%)	336 (21.2%)	67 (4.2%)	104 (6.6%)	34 (2.1%)	1583 (100.0%)

Source: *La Prensa*, 1930–1943.

the 1887–1907 period highlights several changes.[2] By 1930–1943, the epicenter of labor unrest had shifted noticeably. During 1887–1907, strikes in the ports had accounted for 14 percent of all instances of labor unrest reported by the press. By 1930–1943, however, their share had dropped to 4 percent, and their intensity declined throughout this period. In contrast, the share of construction workers in all instances of labor unrest increased from 8 percent to 14 percent. Agricultural workers during the 1887–1907 period had accounted for less than 1 percent of all instances of labor unrest, but by the 1930–1943 period, they were involved in 21 percent of all such instances.[3]

Moreover, between the period around the turn of the century and the 1930s, labor unrest shifted away from the city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding suburbs. From 1887 to 1907, this area accounted for 53 percent of all instances of labor unrest. But by 1930–1943, as indicated in table 2, occurrences in this area had dropped to 27 percent. Meanwhile, the absolute share of the province of Santa Fe rose from 14 percent to 29 percent, while the share of other provinces rose from 11 percent to 29 percent during the same period. Table 2 also provides a rough index of the

2. The data on the earlier period are discussed in Korzeniewicz (1989a, 1989b).

3. As indicated by table 1, during the period from 1930 to 1943, numerous general strikes occurred, usually organized on a citywide basis in locations like Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza, Rosario, and Tucumán.

relative intensity of labor unrest by controlling for the overall population of each province. As indicated by this table, the province of Santa Fe (Rosario and the rest of the province) had the highest relative rates of labor unrest. In relative terms, Tucumán registered higher rates of labor unrest than the city of Buenos Aires. But the relative intensity of labor unrest was also high in the provinces of Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Formosa, Mendoza, Catamarca, San Juan, and Santiago del Estero. In this sense, by the 1930s and early 1940s, labor unrest in Argentina had acquired truly national scope.[4]

These changes in the sectoral and geographical distribution of labor unrest have significance for the ongoing debate about the social origins of Peronism. Until the 1970s, it was generally agreed that the emergence of Peronism had been sustained by the support of recent migrants from the provinces of the interior. Some argued that these migrants were particularly susceptible to the charismatic authority of Juan Perón because of their traditional background (see Germani 1973). Others countered that support for Perón was not limited to recent migrants but also included established urban workers who rallied in pursuit of their own economic interests (see Murmis and Portantiero 1971; Little 1975). Germani's arguments were further challenged by a series of revisionist studies indicating that new arrivals in Buenos Aires originated primarily from the pampa region rather than from the provinces of the interior, and that migration flows from the poorer provinces of the interior to Buenos Aires became substantial only after the mid-1940s.[5]

Most labor studies focusing on the emergence of Peronism, however, have assumed a difference between the strong organizational experience of established urban workers and the lack of previous exposure to collective action on the part of provincial or rural workers. But the high intensity of labor unrest in agriculture and many of the provinces of the interior of Argentina challenges this assumption in suggesting that workers in rural and urban areas during the 1930s may have shared a similar (although not identical) organizational experience.[6]

In particular, the new data indicate that the agricultural sector experienced many of the same changes that affected the labor movement elsewhere in the country. The introduction of technological changes and

4. The shift in the geographical scope of labor unrest probably took place during the 1920s, although this hypothesis awaits further study.

5. For a good example of such arguments, see Little (1975). Agricultural employment in the pampa region leveled out after the end of territorial expansion. Furthermore, the high cost of labor provided a strong incentive for mechanizing agriculture. The end of territorial expansion combined with the mechanization of agriculture displaced large numbers of wage workers and small farmers from the Pampean region.

6. For an earlier challenge to the existence of this dichotomy in organizational experience (one focusing on the contrast between European and Creole workers), see Halperin Donghi (1976). See also Little (1975).

TABLE 2 Geographical Distribution of Labor Unrest in Argentina, 1930–1945

Area	Total Instances of Labor Unrest (N)	Share of Total Instances of Labor Unrest (%)	Share of Population 1936 (%)	Share of Population 1947 (%)
Capital Federal	331	20.9	18.9	18.8
Buenos Aires	309	19.5	27.1	26.9
Gran Buenos Aires	96	6.1		11.0
La Plata	23	1.5		1.3
Bahía Blanca	17	1.1		0.7
Mar del Plata	19	1.2		0.7
Other Buenos Aires	154	9.7		13.2
Santa Fe	453	28.6	11.2	10.7
Rosario	118	7.5		2.9
Other Santa Fe	335	21.2		7.8
Tucumán	78	5.0	3.7	3.7
Córdoba	145	9.2	9.5	9.4
Entre Ríos	65	4.1	5.0	5.0
Formosa	8	0.5	0.6	0.7
Mendoza	43	2.7	3.6	3.7
Catamarca	11	0.7	1.0	0.9
San Juan	17	1.1	1.5	1.6
Santiago del Estero	28	1.8	2.9	3.0
Chaco	15	1.0	2.2	2.7
San Luis	6	0.4	1.2	1.0
Misiones	7	0.4	1.3	1.6
Corrientes	15	1.0	3.4	3.3
Salta	8	0.5	1.8	1.8
La Rioja	3	0.2	0.8	0.7
Jujuy	4	0.3	1.0	1.1
Chubut	1	0.1		0.4
Neuquén	1	0.1	0.5	0.6
La Pampa	2	0.1	1.4	1.1
Río Negro	0	0.0	0.8	0.9
Santa Cruz	0	0.0		0.2
Tierra del Fuego	0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Sources: For the data on labor unrest, *La Prensa*, 1930–1943. The population data for 1936 and those for Gran Buenos Aires in 1947 were calculated from *Informe demográfico de la República Argentina, 1944–1954* (Buenos Aires: Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 1956), 16–18, 36. The population data for 1947 were taken from *Anuario estadístico de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos), 1:31–50.

Note: This table excludes nationwide and interprovincial strikes. It also excludes the city of Comodoro Rivadavia, which was treated as a separate territory in the 1947 census (although it had been combined with data for Chubut and Santa Cruz in the 1936 data). Between 1930 and 1943, this city had a total of 5 strikes, accounting for 0.3 percent of all instances of labor unrest.

growing competition in the labor market rapidly undermined craft controls over production and provided strong incentives for organizing more inclusive industrial unions. In agriculture by the mid-1930s, these unions sought to limit competitive pressures within the labor force by regulating employment and workplace conditions. As in urban areas, agricultural workers sought to develop political alliances with other social sectors (tenant farmers and merchants in this case) around issues like minimum commodity prices and growing state regulation of capital-labor relations. Finally, as elsewhere in Argentina, labor unrest in agriculture promoted growing state mediation and regulation.

LABOR UNREST IN AGRICULTURE

By the mid-1930s, after almost a decade of slow growth, rural labor organizations in Argentina achieved considerable strength and greater coordination.[7] These rural labor organizations were strongest in Santa Fe, although they also operated in Córdoba and Buenos Aires. In February 1935, agricultural workers met in the city of Santa Fe to form a regional organization to coordinate strikes and develop one list of demands to present to their employers throughout the province during the corn harvest. These demands included calls for increasing wages, recognizing the union and its delegates, employing union personnel exclusively, regulating sleeping arrangements and the food sold at the farms, and firing no workers "without a cause justified before the union and its delegates."[8]

Agricultural employers blamed labor unrest on professional agitation. During the 1936 harvest, grain merchants met with the agriculture minister to denounce "the presence of agitating elements" and to ask for "energetic action." Santa Fe delegates of the Unión Patriótica Argentina asked for immediate action against "the disruptive action carried out among the working element by the delegates of some trade unions who are foreign to the activities and benefits [of those workers]."[9] In Buenos Aires province, employers attributed a strike among rural workers in March 1937 to "*personas ajenas al ambiente*." A letter written by the Sociedad Rural de Cerealistas to the agriculture minister in 1937 reiterated that the spread

7. Most studies have paid little attention to labor in the rural areas of Argentina. The exception may be Solberg (1971), who provides significant insights into rural labor unrest during the 1920s and points out that 1928 brought a major wave of rural strikes in Santa Fe. Marotta mentions isolated instances of strikes in agriculture in 1925 and 1928–1930. He indicates that initial efforts to create a formal province-wide labor organization in Santa Fe date back to 1928, but he provides no information about rural labor unrest in the 1930s (Marotta 1970, 186, 261–64). One also finds scattered references to rural labor unrest in Deutsch (1986) and Solberg (1987). A good study of strikes in the sugar industry is Greenberg (1987).

8. *La Prensa*, 27 Feb. 1935, p. 15; and 10 Mar. 1935, p. 14.

9. *La Prensa*, 1 Feb. 1936, p. 5; and 14 Feb. 1936, p. 11. See also *La Prensa*, 9 Feb. 1935, p. 14; and 10 Mar. 1935, p. 14.

of rural labor conflicts was due to the activities of "agitators" and "*elementos extraños*."[10]

Such claims were disputed by trade unions and government functionaries involved in mediating labor conflicts. Trade unions attributed labor unrest to the economic vulnerability of agricultural workers.[11] Government functionaries and trade unions agreed that the strike wave of the mid-1930s reflected the new competitive pressures that local workers were facing. The director of the labor department in the province of Santa Fe argued that labor conflicts in the countryside "were almost always caused by the bad practice on the part of employers of hiring or contracting . . . workers who are foreign to the locality where production is carried out, as well as by the lack of [written agreements] on the conditions of employment."[12] From the trade unions' perspective, migrants were hired by rural employers in a calculated effort to lower wages and undermine local labor organizations: "A concrete and demonstrative event . . . is that of Berabevú, where. . . a landowner . . . published announcements soliciting hands for [a] harvest [that], according to . . . local workers, will yield no more than 50 percent of last year's harvest, so that it can be anticipated that work will be wanting for a good number of local workers. It is clear that the purpose of said *vecino* is to employ workers foreign to the town in order to pay them lower salaries."[13] According to the Federación Santafesina del Trabajo, migrants had displaced local workers "organized by the trade union who had reached an agreement with [employers to] establish favorable working conditions."[14]

Where did these migrant workers originate? Migration flows during the 1930s were shaped by cyclical and structural unemployment elsewhere in agriculture. According to the labor department in Santa Fe, migrants to the province came "especially from Santiago del Estero, Tucumán, and Córdoba, [making] themselves available for insignificant wages."[15] The

10. *La Prensa*, 26 Mar. 1937, p. 16; and 31 Mar. 1937, p. 22.

11. In 1938 rural unions from Santa Fe protested that there were "more than 50,000 rural workers, who can get work only during three or four months each year, earning in that period between three and four hundred pesos to meet their individual and family expenditures for the whole year." See *La Prensa*, 7 Feb. 1938, p. 17. During the same harvest, the minister of government for Santa Fe warned the Junta Nacional para Combatir la Desocupación about poor employment conditions in the department of General López: "The mass of people from other territories and provinces seeking work creates a serious situation for [maintaining] public order in that department, where entire families with domestic utensils camp out in the roads imploring the public for charity and invading agricultural and livestock establishments." See *La Prensa*, 27 Feb. 1938, p. 9.

12. *La Prensa*, 17 Nov. 1936, p. 18.

13. *La Prensa*, 4 Mar. 1938, p. 17.

14. *La Prensa*, 7 Feb. 1938, p. 17.

15. *La Prensa*, 12 Apr. 1938, p. 18. In 1940 the press again reported large flows of migration from the provinces of Santiago del Estero, Santa Fe, Corrientes, Salta, Tucumán, Córdoba, and La Rioja to the cotton harvest in Chaco and the corn harvest in northern Santa Fe: "In some cases, these workers move with their families and personal belongings, with some

Federación Santafesina del Trabajo emphasized that workers migrated not only from those provinces but also from "the most impoverished localities of Santa Fe and neighboring provinces."[16] Moreover, employers sometimes responded to effective labor organization by hiring workers from neighboring towns within the same region.[17] Rural labor organizations in Santa Fe called repeatedly for the establishment of formal labor jurisdictions in order to avoid conflicts when workers from neighboring areas of the province arrived seeking work.[18] Employment of migrant workers was undoubtedly a major source of unrest. During the 1935 corn harvest, the press reported that "thousands of day laborers from neighboring provinces have [come] in search of work to the province of Santa Fe, but unions organized throughout the countryside maintain a strict vigilance to prevent those men from working unless they were previously affiliated with said labor organizations."[19] Santa Fe grain merchants met soon after, protesting that migrants "have been made objects of pressure by the organized workers of each locality, being forced to abandon the territory of the province."[20]

In lowering wages, the practice of employing migrant workers also threatened to undercut local consumption. For this reason, employing migrant workers was believed to harm "not only local workers but also commerce and the population as a whole."[21] Hence local merchants tended to support demands by labor organizations to exclude migrant workers. During the 1936 corn harvest, merchants in Díaz (in Santa Fe province) threatened to close their shops in solidarity with strikers, arguing that "as opposed to local [workers], who have been displaced, the personnel foreign to the area . . . do not bring any benefit."[22] Even local police authorities sympathized with labor demands on occasion.[23]

small villages (particularly in Santiago del Estero) experiencing a genuine exodus." See *La Prensa*, 25 Mar. 1940, p. 21; see also 28 Apr. 1941, p. 23.

16. *La Prensa*, 7 Feb. 1938, p. 17.

17. See *La Prensa*, 24 Apr. 1935, p. 17. In the locality of Casilda, for example, the union complained that employers were hiring workers from Cañada del Ucle instead of Caseros. See *La Prensa*, 15 Jan. 1940, p. 22.

18. *La Prensa*, 20 May 1935, p. 18; and 24 Aug. 1940, p. 15.

19. *La Prensa*, 27 Mar. 1935, p. 15. During the corn harvest of 1937, *La Prensa* reported that because of the large crop expected that year, "the work of the harvest could be carried out normally because a greater number of workers arrived from the provinces of the north; but the intervention of disruptive elements impedes the peones and agriculturalists from working with freedom." From *La Prensa*, 28 Mar. 1937, p. 5.

20. *La Prensa*, 16 May 1935, p. 15.

21. *La Prensa*, 3 Feb. 1939, p. 17.

22. *La Prensa*, 7 June 1936, sec. 5, p. 1.

23. See, for example, *La Prensa*, 26 Mar. 1935, p. 13. This article attributes the recent organizational success of rural workers in Santa Fe to "the tolerant attitude of the province's authorities and the partiality of some *comisarios de campaña*." A few months later, grain merchants in the departments of Caseros, General López, and Constitución (Santa Fe) criticized "the evidently tolerant attitude of authorities, who allow the labor unions to exercise armed inspec-

Although the employment of migrant workers threatened to undermine union control over labor supplies, local workers were effectively regulating labor competition by the late 1930s. During the 1937 corn harvest, for example, the regional labor department in Córdoba had agreed that in facilitating the transfer of workers to areas of high labor demand, its employees should ensure that "they do not consist of operatives of the same branch that in the respective place could be in conflict with their bosses or employers, or that the transfer of [these workers] could be a cause promoting conflicts."[24] In Santa Fe, the labor department announced in 1938 that it would protect local workers from "the threat represented by the arrival of great numbers of braceros from other provinces."[25] By the late 1930s, the Santa Fe labor department was responding to labor unrest in agriculture by allowing local trade unions to restrict employment to unionized workers.[26] In 1941 nonunionized workers in Santa Fe reported that they were unable to find work due to the strict control exercised by trade unions over employment.[27] In 1943 the Santa Fe executive branch officially recognized that the supply of workers in rural areas would be channeled by local trade unions, and nonunionized workers were required to pay a fee of fifty pesos to labor organizations on obtaining employment.[28] In short, the ability of local workers to dampen competitive pressures within the labor market derived from the organizing (or strengthening) of trade unions that imposed greater regulation on employment—often by increasing political pressures on state agencies.

Although eager to improve state controls over labor unrest, employers opposed work regulations that forced them to employ union personnel or that restricted the employment of migrants. Voicing these concerns, a 1938 editorial in *La Prensa* argued, "Internal migration responds to needs, causes, and natural factors of the country's economy, which for now and in the future must act freely. Besides being anti-economic and impolitic, [such restrictions] would go against the constitutional principle that allows all the inhabitants of the nation to circulate freely throughout its territory, work, and exercise all lawful skills. This consideration alone is sufficient to reject [these restrictions] flatly."[29] Later in 1938, a second

tion of grain transportation [and] to demand toll payments to go from one district to another." From *La Prensa*, 16 May 1935, p. 15. Going a bit further, grain merchants argued in June of the same year that labor conflicts "are almost always facilitated by the action of the police, as happens in the case of the department of Constitución [Santa Fe]." See *La Prensa*, 9 June 1935, sec. 3, p. 5.

24. *La Prensa*, 20 Mar. 1937, p. 16.

25. *La Prensa*, 12 Apr. 1938, p. 18.

26. See *La Prensa*, 20 June 1939, p. 18.

27. *La Prensa*, 26 Feb. 1941, p. 17. Around the same time, reporting on a strike among rural workers in Córdoba province, the press indicated that "the trade union does not allow for employment being given to nonunionized workers." *La Prensa*, 30 Oct. 1940, p. 21.

28. *La Prensa*, 3 Mar. 1943, p. 10; and 7 Mar. 1943, p. 11.

29. *La Prensa*, 6 Mar. 1938, p. 8. See also *La Prensa*, 26 Mar. 1937, p. 16.

editorial in *La Prensa* asserted, "It is natural for workers to seek to improve their salaries to a reasonable extent, but it is not acceptable that they achieve this [goal] by using violence, and less still, that they attempt to limit work to only those in the area, for they themselves go to other provinces and territories when the wheat harvest has ended to be employed in similar tasks."[30] By the late 1930s, employers in Santa Fe province were complaining that employment restrictions had resulted in higher wages and were undermining their ability to compete effectively with agriculturalists from Buenos Aires province, where enterprises had access to nonunionized workers.[31]

The conflicts between local rural workers and their employers over migrant labor illustrate a broader transition affecting the labor force in Argentina during this period. Changes in the organization of the labor market and the workplace undermined the bargaining power that workers had previously derived from tight labor-market conditions. In grain-producing areas like those in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Santa Fe, these changes were manifested in growing competition among local and migrant workers. But similar conflicts could also be found during this period in urban areas and other sectors of the labor force. In textiles, for example, technological innovations in the workplace were accompanied by growing employment among unskilled male workers and the displacement of skilled female workers. Among construction workers, changes in the organization of production undermined the craft organizations that had prevailed until the 1930s, as indicated by Durruty's pioneering study (Durruty 1969).[32] These changes suggest a diversity of experiences among different sectors of the labor force (male and female, skilled and unskilled, local and migrant workers), but they also offer clues to the nature of the new forms of action and organization commonly adopted by workers during this period. Clearly, the crucial issue of trends in rural labor unrest warrants further research to elucidate the nature of formal and informal organizational networks among agricultural workers.

THE CHALLENGE OF LABOR UNREST AND COMMUNISM

Agricultural workers manifested several similarities to other sectors of the labor force. First, they disrupted production as a means of pushing for their demands, and in taking this line of action, rural labor unrest was following broader trends in strike activity. In pursuing their

30. *La Prensa*, 24 Nov. 1938, p. 13.
31. *La Prensa*, 17 July 1939, p. 22.
32. Celia Durruty was among the first to focus on the changes that labor organizations underwent during the 1930s. Her early death was a major loss for the development of labor studies in Argentina.

objectives, agricultural workers organized large trade unions, which in turn sought to enhance their political bargaining power by developing broader social alliances. Finally, Communists played an important role in these new organizations, a trend that promoted a strong state response aimed at containing labor unrest.

Agricultural workers maintained considerable bargaining power during harvests because they could interrupt the flow of perishable commodities during production. In 1935 the press reported:

> The workers in each locality do not bring forth a common list of demands that would take into account the activities of the different unions that participate in collecting and shipping the harvest; [instead,] they do so in fragments, by trades, prolonging the conflict for many months. And once the demands for wage increases made by the day-laborers are resolved . . . , the grain collecting begins, but when the machines have to start working, another conflict develops with their personnel.
>
> Once this disagreement is resolved, the threshing of the grain begins, and when the grain is ready to be transported, other difficulties arise with the stevedores and later with the truck and cart drivers. Thus the Sindicatos de Oficios Varios, which function in each major town to direct union activity, are able to keep the rural proletariat in a continual state of agitation, harming the national economy.[33]

A well-developed transportation and communication network also enhanced the ability of agricultural workers in different locales to coordinate their actions.[34]

The capacity for disrupting production through sudden short strikes, work to rule, and slowdowns was primarily characteristic of railroad workers. This category accounted for 90 percent of all instances of strikes lasting one hour or less between 1930 and 1943. During this period, *La Prensa* reported 110 instances of labor unrest among railroad workers: 49 percent involved short strikes lasting an hour or less, and 20 percent involved work-to-rule and sit-down strikes. Only 28 percent of all instances of labor unrest on the railroads involved regular strikes lasting more than five hours. Work-to-rule and short strikes (which generally lasted fifteen to thirty minutes) were most likely to be used by traffic personnel, whose contact with the public made this kind of action particularly disruptive. Attacking workers' use of these methods, a *La Prensa* article explained the nature of these disruptions:

> Work carried out to rule should be normal. But the rules of the railroads, since 1894, are inadequate after the ongoing improvements achieved by the services in the forty years since that time; and although it is true that many reforms have been introduced, [the rules] constitute a hindrance. And a hindrance in a public service that ought to be fast and whose functioning is precise implies that the service is

33. *La Prensa*, 26 Mar. 1935, p. 13.
34. *La Prensa*, 13 Mar. 1935, p. 18.

being canceled. Thus it turns out that the railroad rules are a weapon for workers who wish to disrupt or paralyze traffic without incurring legal responsibilities.[35]

In contrast, railroad personnel in the shops and yards usually engaged in sit-down strikes.[36]

The railroad workers' ability to engage in these means of disrupting production illustrates a relative advantage that they enjoyed over other sectors of the labor force. The very nature of the railroad network, combined with the formalized labor codes used to ensure traffic flows, gave workers considerable bargaining power in the workplace that other labor sectors generally lacked. Even among agricultural workers, the strong bargaining power derived from their ability to disrupt production was limited seasonally to harvest time (as had been the case among port workers at the turn of the century). As a result, most of the other labor sectors responded by adopting innovative forms of action and organization to enhance their political bargaining power.

The new patterns of labor unrest and state mediation became evident after the mid-1930s. The crucial event shaping this shift was a strike among construction workers late in 1935. In October of that year, workers formed the Sindicato de Obreros Albañiles, del Cemento Armado y Anexos under Communist leadership and called a strike that was supported by the craft unions of painters, stonemasons, plasterers, and electricians. The strike lasted ninety-five days and was supported by 95 percent of the workers (Tamarin 1985, 128).[37] In December, the Frente Obrero made up of twenty-four labor organizations called a general strike in solidarity with the 60,000 striking construction workers.[38] During the general strike in the first week of 1936, violent clashes erupted between striking workers and the police. At least half a dozen people were killed, with dozens more injured or arrested. In the northeast section of Buenos Aires, particularly in the barrios of Floresta Norte, Villa Devoto, and Villa Urquiza, strikers were reported to be virtually controlling the streets.[39] This event thus took on major significance. According to *La Prensa*, "its dimensions allow us to assign it the same magnitude as that reached by the events in this

35. *La Prensa*, 26 Nov. 1938, p. 6.

36. Thus during the strikes of June 1936 on the Pacífico Railroad, "two hours before work was to end in the shops, the workers resolved to carry out a stoppage, to which effect the whistle . . . was sounded and the personnel ceased their work while remaining at their posts." *La Prensa*, 17 June 1936, p. 18.

37. The strike revolved around recognizing the trade union, increasing wages, reducing hours, eliminating piecework, and improving working conditions and workplace safety (Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* 1936, 4460–63).

38. *La Prensa*, 14 Dec. 1935, p. 18.

39. See *La Prensa*, 8 Jan. 1936, p. 10. The police attributed the acts of violence to "extremist elements, most of them foreign, who evidently carried out, with results favorable to them, what they call *gimnasia revolucionaria*."

capital in January 1919."[40] Here the daily was referring to the Semana Trágica of 1919, when state and paramilitary forces conducted violent reprisals against striking workers. After the general strike in 1936 ended, state authorities gave new powers to the national labor department to take a more active role in providing institutional channels of mediation between workers and employers.

The strikes of 1935 and 1936 in construction and manufacturing were channeled through industrial unions that grew rapidly in the following years. As indicated by Durruty (1969), these industrial unions gained strength from the breakdown of the small craft associations established at the turn of the century. The industrial unions developed large bureaucracies of their own and relied more strongly on political mediation to resolve conflicts between workers and employers. Perhaps the most important was the Federación Obrera Nacional de la Construcción (FONC), created in 1935. By June 1936, the FONC had "more than 58,000 affiliates (of which some 40,000 paid dues on a regular basis) . . . [and] became the second [-largest labor] organization in the country, surpassed only . . . by the Unión Ferroviaria" (Campo 1983, 96). The total number of union members among construction workers more than doubled from nearly 33,000 in 1936 to some 74,000 by 1941, accounting for 58 percent of the total growth of trade-union membership in Argentina between 1936 and 1941 (Durruty 1969, 114). The militancy of this union proved rewarding to its members, whose wages rose faster than the national average.[41] During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the FONC developed a truly national organization.[42]

Large unions eventually prevailed not only in construction and manufacturing but among agricultural workers as well. In August 1937, labor delegates from the north and south of the province of Santa Fe met to create the Federación Santafesina del Trabajo. It adopted a broad platform that included demands for minimum wages, a forty-hour workweek, government construction of cheap housing, protective legislation, pensions and social security, labor legislation, and vocational education.[43] In February 1938, the Federación held its Congreso de Trabajadores Rurales, which produced numerous demands: state measures to avoid declines in agricultural production; a reform of tenancy laws to extend leases to ten

40. *La Prensa*, 8 Jan. 1936, p. 10.

41. Thus nominal wages in construction moved from lagging behind the national average in the early 1930s to exceeding the average after 1936. See Departamento Nacional del Trabajo (1940, 50).

42. On the new role of trade unions in carrying out strikes and mediation, see Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* (1939, 5334-40).

43. *La Prensa*, 20 Aug. 1937, p. 20; and 27 Sept. 1937, p. 17. The Federación Santafesina del Trabajo formally affiliated with the CGT effective in September 1937 or April 1938. See *La Prensa*, 25 Apr. 1938, p. 18.

years; the creation of permanent commissions of arbitration (formed by state representatives, landholders, and tenant farmers) to fix and regulate the terms of tenant farming according to production expenses, labor costs, and agricultural prices; state programs to provide education and nutrition to the children of rural workers; a forty-hour workweek; vacations; health and insurance benefits; extra pay for extra work; the right to strike; and a homestead law.[44] Later in 1938, the Federación added demands for eliminating the Ley de Residencia and increasing the number of inspectors hired by the labor department. The federation also expressed its support for the Republican cause in Spain and its opposition to racism in Germany.[45] In 1940 the Federación reiterated its call for state agencies to promote family farms and cooperatives and thus avoid large-scale units of agricultural production.[46] A precise estimate of the size and influence of the Federación Santafesina awaits further research. It was not registered in the union census carried out by the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo in 1937. By 1941, however, it was listed as having 4,000 members, making it the twelfth-largest labor organization in the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT).[47]

As occurred in the urban areas, these industrial unions sought to develop broader political alliances with other social sectors around issues like community improvements, state price supports, and better services.[48] In agriculture, as labor organizations successfully pressed for higher wages, tenant farmers throughout Argentina called for state authorities to provide higher agricultural prices.[49] Labor organizations played an active role in supporting these demands and often became involved in actually creating Juntas de la Defensa de la Producción to demand higher state price supports.[50] During the harvests of 1935 and 1936, the Juntas held numerous meetings and demonstrations that rallied massive support from

44. *La Prensa*, 7 Feb. 1938, p. 17.

45. *La Prensa*, 21 Nov. 1938, p. 19.

46. *La Prensa*, 28 Jan. 1940, p. 17. Meeting in Rosario in 1940, rural workers also called for a union representative on each work crew to "keep watch over the efficient performance of personnel and to receive all claims related to work [as well as] to forbid gambling and the sale of alcoholic beverages, except for half a liter of wine with each meal." *La Prensa*, 29 Jan. 1940, p. 24.

47. See Departamento Nacional del Trabajo (1941, 12). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the reference to the 1941 data and also to Joel Horowitz for providing me with historical data on this period.

48. On these new demands in urban areas, see Matsushita (1983, chap. 7).

49. For example, following the corn harvest in 1935, the Liga Agrícola Ganadera of Buenos Aires asked the agriculture minister to raise the minimum price of corn to five pesos per hundred kilos. The organization partially justified the need for higher prices by noting that "in many areas, . . . the harvest of corn [was accompanied by] agitation among the workers, which resulted in an increase that can be estimated at 15 percent, and [the same applies to] the expenses of threshing, transportation, and movement around the [railway] station." See *La Prensa*, 1 June 1935, p. 12.

50. For examples, see *La Prensa*, 24 June 1935, p. 9; and 30 June 1935, p. 9.

rural workers, merchants, tenant farmers, and owners of small farms. For example, at a demonstration held by agricultural producers in Rosario after the corn harvest of 1935, protesters argued, "It is essential that Juntas de Defensa de la Producción, composed of agriculturalists, tenants and owners, workers, merchants and industrialists, be formed in all the towns of the agricultural areas [to support higher corn prices and] to exhort all the forces that represent genuine Argentine interests, free of the shackles of internal and external monopolistic capitalism, to support their effort for the triumph of the legitimate interests of the agrarian mass, on whose welfare the life of the whole nation depends."[51] The Juntas involved not only grain-producing areas but cotton and yerba mate production in the northeast as well.[52] In April 1938, for example, the Juntas organized strikes and rallies of merchants, workers, and employers throughout the province of Misiones protesting production limits on yerba mate imposed by the executive branch and calling for import restrictions.[53]

In some areas, the Juntas enjoyed considerable success. In the 1936 harvest, the state finally increased the basic price of corn to five pesos per wagon at the dock.[54] Following this announcement, the agriculture minister took pains to remind agricultural producers of the executive's "firm intention of abandoning [price supports] when the factors weighing in the world economy allow it to do so without possible prejudice of the national income. The farmer should not rely on [price supports] as a permanent factor." In the same speech, the minister called upon agricultural producers to appreciate the new measures and avoid "the flattery of the professional agitators who propose exceptional situations that no responsible government could adopt in the current circumstances."[55]

Efforts by trade unions to develop broader political alliances were also made in other sectors of the labor force. For example, political activism expanded among construction workers, particularly after late 1939, when prices bounded upward following the formal declaration of war in Europe. National and local state agencies sought to control this escalation of prices, and a national law was passed to suppress speculation. This

51. *La Prensa*, 1 July 1935, p. 8. See also *La Prensa*, 11 Mar. 1936, p. 15.

52. In Oberá in the province of Misiones, a confrontation took place between the police and some four hundred agricultural producers who had rallied to demand a fixed price for yerba mate. The police reported that one person died and six were wounded in the clash: "Communist elements of Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian nationality . . . with a flag and the banner of the Unión Obrera Campesina attacked the people of Oberá, and this aggression was repelled by the authorities and the people en masse." *La Prensa*, 16 Mar. 1939, p. 17.

53. See *La Prensa*, 25 Apr., p. 6; and 30 Apr. 1938, p. 6.

54. In announcing the price increase, the Junta Reguladora de Granos explained that its "main function . . . is that of a regulating mechanism, which must not only avoid the abnormal fluctuation of grain sales in the markets but must also contribute to determining the natural price of its value for the Argentine producer, taking into account international demand and prices." *La Prensa*, 22 Mar. 1936, p. 5.

55. Ibid.

crisis hit construction particularly hard: as imports of raw materials for construction declined and wholesale prices for these products rose, entrepreneurs became less willing to tie up large investments in construction projects. In response, the Sindicato Unico Obrero de la Construcción in Buenos Aires began holding rallies for public support of construction to overcome the crisis, arguing that it could also be achieved by stimulating domestic manufacture of construction materials.[56] By the early 1940s, labor organizations of construction workers had broadened the range of their demands.[57] By the end of 1942, the FONC was calling for national unity among all popular and democratic forces to enforce the constitution and national sovereignty and to oppose fascism and fraud.[58]

The development of these broader political alliances created a new political discourse among the industrial trade unions. Contributing important components to this discourse were Communist organizers, who were particularly successful in rapidly establishing a strong position in the new industrial unions. As Hugo del Campo has observed, "In contrast with the long and slow road traveled by the Socialists before achieving a prominent position in the trade union movement, the climb of the Communists was rapid and spectacular" (Campo 1983, 94). The Communists displaced Syndicalists and Anarchists alike and actually challenged the prevailing hegemony of the Socialists within the labor movement.

Communists succeeded because of their ability to raise and meet the economic demands of unionized workers.[59] The organizational success of the Communist trade unions soon became evident within the organized labor movement. As David Tamarin noted: "Whereas the members of labor organizations grew by about 18 percent between 1936 and 1941, the number of union members among industrial workers almost doubled. Communist-led organizations accounted for nearly all of this advance. The growth of the four most important communist-led industrial unions contributed roughly 93 percent of the total expansion in union membership between 1936 and 1941" (Tamarin 1985, 152).

The rapid expansion of industrial trade unions disturbed conservative political circles. Violent strikes and demonstrations were blamed on

56. *La Prensa*, 28 Sept. 1939, p. 15. Similar rallies were held throughout the provinces of the interior. On these issues, see also Matsushita (1983, chap. 8).

57. In 1941, for example, construction trade unions actively opposed executive actions dissolving the Buenos Aires city council, arguing that "today it starts with the City Council, and perhaps tomorrow the same will happen with the National Congress." *La Prensa*, 11 Oct. 1941, p. 11.

58. *La Prensa*, 12 Dec. 1942, p. 11.

59. According to Tamarin, "the Communists' influence in the labor movement, and in particular with the unions they led, was not necessarily a demonstration of the workers' ideological affinity with the Communist Party or even with its political line. As long as Communist labor leaders delivered practical gains to industrial workers, ideological questions remained secondary" (Tamarin 1985, 152).

Communist organizers, and repeated efforts were made to ban the political action of Communists.[60] The 1935 annual police report discussed in detail the spread of Communist influence within trade unions, mainstream political parties, and student organizations, warning that legal measures should be taken immediately for its suppression.[61] State authorities introduced regulations directed against the trade unions believed to be influenced most by Communist militancy. Various laws prohibiting Communist activities and coordinating their suppression were passed during 1936 in Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Corrientes, Córdoba, Mendoza, San Juan, Salta, Tucumán, and Catamarca, and a national law to suppress Communism was finally approved on 31 December 1936.[62] These laws were used repeatedly in the late 1930s and early 1940s to deport trade-union militants, restrict workers' right to assemble, and arrest strikers and labor leaders during outbreaks of labor unrest.

Reflecting on the initial set of measures suppressing Communist activities enacted by his administration in Buenos Aires, Governor Manuel Fresco said in February 1937, "[T]he example set in this regard has been followed subsequently by other provincial governments, assuming the character of a true national campaign (culminating in the new law passed by the national Congress). Hence undermining, subversive, and antinational doctrines have received a harsh blow, and so have the political parties that support them ostensibly or with guilty and shameful complaisance." He ended by observing that "the suppression of Communism

60. In defending his proposals to suppress the Communist party and Communist influences within trade unions, Senator Matías Sánchez Sorondo argued in the Argentine Congress on 24 Nov. 1936, "I assert with a profound faith in the congenital moral health of our people that these reformers with bombs, pistols, and daggers are neither of Argentine origin nor of Argentine roots. They are a backwash of the species that foreign waves have flung to our shores, which we accept unaware without realizing that they [will] contaminate our life. But [soon] the country becomes sick and confirms that the germs of the sickness are brought precisely by their arrival, those undesirables, and also that many of the economic disturbances are due to sectarian intrigues; and then a state imperative arises, the need to dictate urgent rules, severe and drastic rules that can eradicate the sickness while limiting its effects" (Sánchez Sorondo 1938, 22).

61. *La Prensa*, 8 Mar. 1936, p. 12. The 1937 yearly report of the police reiterated the continuing need for police intervention in labor unrest because "the Confederación General del Trabajo . . . is governed by Socialist militants who have received the support of important Communist forces, who are carrying out the new directives of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International with the intention of penetrating political territory with respect to democracy and international labor federations in the arena of trade unions, as has been observed in the trade unions in railroads, construction, and, to a lesser degree, textiles. This tactic aspires to [take over] the key positions in the CGT, [thus] assuring that the future organization of union headquarters will be under Communist control." The police report concluded: "The propaganda of this undermining idea in the main democratic institutions that rule this country continues to be promoted by the principal centers of Moscow, and thus it continues to be appropriate to legislate in order to defend society from a serious threat that remains latent." *La Prensa*, 15 Feb. 1938, p. 14.

62. *La Prensa*, 4 Nov. 1936, p. 22; 11 Nov. 1936, p. 13; 19 Nov. 1936, p. 18; 13 Dec. 1936, p. 15; 25 Dec. 1936, p. 12; 1 Jan. 1937, p. 7; and 14 Aug. 1941, p. 12.

has become generalized in the whole country and justified in the world."[63] This kind of political discourse was not limited to state authorities and employers. Leaders of the Unión Sindicalista Argentina argued in 1937 that the organization had been formed in order to "fight the extremist ideas that try to undermine our nationality, especially Communism and Socialism, as well as all political ideologies and other tendencies, in order to imbue the men gathered in our ranks with love for the homeland and respect for our tradition and our symbols."[64]

But state authorities also argued that suppression and the use of police to mediate labor conflicts were insufficient mechanisms for ensuring greater labor collaboration and social harmony. As indicated by the director of the labor department in the province of Buenos Aires, "[T]hrough all the efforts carried out to build union organizations and in their struggle for improvement, the police have always appeared as a repressive institution, with little capacity for reaching satisfactory solutions." According to this argument, police should not be used in labor conflicts "to avoid having the coercive weight of a state enterprise lean toward or against any parties in conflict."[65] National as well as provincial state authorities eventually argued instead that greater efforts should be made to improve the ability of the labor department to intervene in such conflicts.

STATE REGULATION

In terms of state regulation, the mid-1930s represented a major transition. Overall, prior to 1935, the national labor department conducted little mediation of labor conflicts.[66] In March 1935, when asked by employers to mediate their conflict with construction workers, the director of the national labor department responded that his organization had no legal right to intervene in such conflicts and that even if asked to mediate by both parties, it could only facilitate meetings between workers and employers. As late as mid-November 1935, amidst a major strike by construction workers, the head of the labor department complained that neither striking workers nor employers had requested public mediation of the conflict.[67]

The changes brought in response to labor unrest are highlighted in table 3. As it suggests, state mediation existed in the early 1930s but re-

63. *La Prensa*, 18 Feb. 1937, p. 19.
64. *La Prensa*, 28 Sept. 1937, p. 21.
65. *La Prensa*, 24 June 1935, p. 22.
66. A brief exception can be noted in the initial months following the 1930 coup, when the new regime briefly played with the idea of promoting the corporatist control of organized labor. This effort was quickly abandoned, however, and replaced by more repressive measures toward existing trade unions.
67. *La Prensa*, 27 Mar. 1935, p. 13; and 17 Nov. 1935, p. 22.

TABLE 3 Recorded Mediation of Strikes by Argentine State Agencies, 1930–1943

Year	Recorded Strikes (N)	Strikes with No Recorded Mediation (%)	Strikes with Recorded Mediation by Labor Depts. (%)	Strikes with Recorded Mediation by Other Agencies (%)
1930	124	74.8	3.7	22.4
1931	18	76.5	11.9	11.9
1932	149	85.8	13.4	11.8
1933	87	75.0	15.5	9.5
1934	60	76.7	16.7	6.7
1935	169	78.1	16.6	5.3
1936	189	64.6	28.6	6.9
1937	109	45.9	42.2	11.9
1938	102	46.1	49.0	4.9
1939	117	45.3	47.0	7.7
1940	129	38.8	53.5	7.8
1941	91	50.5	42.9	6.6
1942	77	45.5	40.3	14.3
1943	63	28.6	50.8	20.6

Source: *La Prensa*, 1930–1943

Note: Percentage distributions do not necessarily add up to 100 percent due to instances that involved mediation by labor departments and other state agencies.

mained at relatively low levels involving a multiplicity of state actors other than departments of labor (such as chiefs of police, ministers, and special congressional commissions). Between 1935 and 1937, in contrast, instances of labor unrest reported by the press as mediated by provincial and national labor departments escalated. Thereafter, the numbers remain around the same level. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, a large number of conflicts between labor and capital were being effectively mediated and resolved by the labor department before they actually disrupted production via any form of unrest.[68]

Substantial research needs to be done on patterns of state mediation during the 1930s (one topic would be the relation between the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo and its provincial counterparts). But trends in state mediation and intervention prior to the emergence of Peronism have been examined in some detail by Ricardo Gaudio and Jorge Pilone (1983, 1984). They found that state mediation and intervention occurred across a broad range of occupational categories that included railroad workers, garment workers, construction workers, tailors, textile workers,

68. Between January and August 1942, for example, the Buenos Aires provincial labor department reported that seventy of ninety-nine conflicts had been resolved through its mediation without any disruption of work. See *La Prensa*, 15 Nov. 1942, p. 11.

salesmen, and many others.[69] In numerous instances, state mediation pushed employers into different courses of action: refraining from retaliating against striking workers, increasing wages, creating joint commissions between workers and employers to regulate and improve working conditions, regulating the pace of work, ensuring adherence to previous agreements, and introducing family wages. Finally, commissions formed of employers and representatives of the labor department and labor were established in many industrial enterprises to regulate wages, hours, and working conditions.

After the strike of late 1935 and early 1936, the construction trade union actively sought state mediation to resolve its conflict with employers (see Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* 1936, 4460–86). Also, the trade union joined state efforts to institute permanent mixed arbitration committees involving workers, employers, and state authorities. Tamarin has pointed out that a political orientation prevailed within the FONC throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s: "The . . . response to police intervention was to appeal directly to the national and provincial labor departments for state arbitration of disputes. The FONC and the Sindicato Unico, like the UF [Unión Ferroviaria], sought state benevolence and arbitrated outlets for labor disputes wherever possible with the hope of dissuading police intervention. Every major construction strike (involving at least a thousand strikers) between 1937 and 1940 was settled through the mediation of the national labor department, usually at the request of the union" (Tamarin 1985, 148). Through these efforts, the FONC achieved a broad range of agreements involving not only wages, hours, and working conditions, but also such issues as "the percentage of local workers that would be employed at each site."[70]

Similarly, state intervention in capital-labor relations in the rural areas underwent two significant changes. First, after the wave of labor unrest of 1935 and 1936, direct state intervention in rural labor-capital relations increased in the national and provincial labor departments. This is another area that awaits further research, given the little that has been written on the historical trajectories and differences between national and

69. In the case of railroad workers, negotiations with state authorities were particularly important because railroad nationalization began to appear to be a potential means of increasing wages. For example, when workers from the Central Córdoba railroad met with President Agustín Justo, they were told that wage discounts would immediately cease if the state acquired the railroads. See *La Prensa*, 13 June 1937, p. 13. Unlike the situation of other workers, however, public mediation of conflicts between capital and labor in the railroads was seldom carried out through the labor department because the agency lacked jurisdiction in this area of economic activities. In the 110 instances of labor unrest in the railroads recorded in *La Prensa* between 1935 and 1943, all instances of mediation (one-quarter of all reports) involved higher authorities in the executive branch, most predominantly from the Ministerio de Obras Públicas but also senators and the president himself.

70. *La Prensa*, 29 Apr. 1939, p. 15.

provincial labor departments. Clearly, some provinces (like Santa Fe and Buenos Aires) had very active provincial labor departments. For example, a majority of the strikes mediated by labor departments in the early 1930s involved the Santa Fe provincial department. As a preliminary hypothesis, it appears likely that provincial agencies were most active and influential in those provinces experiencing relatively high levels of labor unrest (see table 2).

But even in Santa Fe as late as 1935, mediation by the labor department in agricultural areas was generally denounced as inefficient or nonexistent. Rather, state authorities generally responded to labor unrest via police actions directed against union organizers and strikers.[71] After the wave of strikes accompanying the 1935 corn harvest, however, farmers and grain merchants responded to widespread rural labor unrest by asking state authorities to intervene more directly in regulating capital-labor relations in the countryside. Arguing that workers' demands were no longer reasonable and the costs of production from area to area were anarchic, grain merchants called on the national executive to sanction "a law intended to submit rural work to uniform norms and strict equity."[72]

Mediation by the national and provincial labor departments in agricultural areas was being widely reported by 1936. In December 1936, meetings were held frequently with state representatives, employers, and workers to establish agreements and prevent the recurrence of strikes during the following harvest.[73] Measures were also initiated by provincial authorities to regulate working conditions in rural areas. In November 1937, following recommendations made by the national labor department, a national executive decree established minimum day and monthly rural wages for the national territories. This law also regulated rural working conditions, the form of payment of wages, housing, hours of rest, and other rural labor issues. These regulations were to be used henceforth by the labor department in mediating conflicts between rural employers and workers.[74]

By the late 1930s in Buenos Aires province, the executive branch of

71. During the 1935 corn harvest in the province of Buenos Aires, for example, the government minister called on the police "to guarantee, in a strict but just manner, the freedom to work of the rural worker, removing to a distance those elements that are subversive and enemies of peaceful work." See *La Prensa*, 12 Apr. 1935, p. 13. The provincial chief of police responded by calling on his subordinates to control labor unrest: "It is worthy and necessary to protect the worker against the subversive and disruptive action of those whom, in the guise of legal purposes, are nothing more than professional agitators who act against the wealth and the interest of the nation and who in short conspire against the country." See *La Prensa*, 13 Apr. 1935, p. 12.

72. *La Prensa*, 19 June 1935, p. 20.

73. *La Prensa*, 14 Dec. 1936, p. 22.

74. *La Prensa*, 28 Nov. 1937, p. 15. Representatives of rural employers asked that the newly established wages be reduced by 15 percent, but this request was rejected by labor department officials. See *La Prensa*, 15 Dec. 1937, p. 12.

the government was setting wages, hours, and working conditions for most agricultural and livestock workers (excluding harvest workers). Province officials justified their new regulation of labor-capital relations in agriculture as changes required by a structural transformation in the relationship between workers and employers: "It is fair to acknowledge that the patriarchal treatment of the old *estancieros* was, for them, humane and understanding. But the new conditions of exploitation are very far from the patriarchal action that implied, among other things, direct contact between the *patrón* and his people."[75]

On a national scale, growing state regulation of capital-labor relations was introduced partly in response to calls made by social and political organizations.[76] The Liga Patriótica Argentina argued that the labor department should be given broader responsibilities for intervening more effectively in mediating labor conflicts to avoid repetitions of the labor unrest like that of late 1935 and early 1936.[77] Later the same year, the Comisión de Damas presented President Justo with a list of requests for government action. They wanted the government to build cheap housing for workers; to enforce greater controls over wages among homeworkers through inspections conducted by the labor department; to establish a family wage, regulating compensations according to the degree of family responsibilities; and to set minimum wages according to regions and type of work "regardless of age or sex so as to avoid, among other evils, adult workers being replaced by minors and women who are paid lower salaries."[78] In 1937 an assembly of the Partido Demócrata Nacional launched the presidential candidacies of Roberto Ortiz and Ramón Castillo and called for creation of a Ministerio de Trabajo, Asistencia y Previsión Social, and for new labor laws regulating wages, social security, trade-union activities, and channels of official mediation.[79]

For a similar purpose, Monsignor Miguel De Andrea argued a few years later, "[W]e are not revolutionaries but opposed to all that is incubating the revolution. In this regard, we are collaborators of a state agency that we hope will be invested with greater autonomy, efficiency, and authority: the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo."[80] Here Monsignor De Andrea was speaking for the Catholic Church in calling for more active state intervention to ensure full employment and good wages. As he indi-

75. *La Prensa*, 22 Dec. 1939, p. 25.

76. As indicated in Korzeniewicz (1989b), initial efforts by state agencies to mediate capital-labor conflicts can be traced back to the turn of the century. According to one anonymous *LARR* reviewer, the nature of the relationship between the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo and the provincial agencies warrants further research.

77. *La Prensa*, 10 Jan. 1936, p. 11.

78. *La Prensa*, 10 Nov. 1936, p. 12.

79. *La Prensa*, 26 June 1937, p. 11.

80. *La Prensa*, 14 May 1939, sec. 5, p. 1.

cated in an organizational meeting in May 1937, "I must insist on calling attention to a fact that is not understood. Among the ranks of the people, the area most disposed toward revolutionary cultivation is the stomach rather than the brain. The popular vehicle for Communism is not ideology, but hunger! . . . Today the crusade of social pacification is identified with social improvement."[81]

Calls for greater state regulation were also made by employers, who often argued that issues like hours, holidays, piecework rates, insurance, and workplace safety were already regulated by state policies and hence fell outside the scope of contractual agreements between workers and employers, requiring workers to address their grievances to political institutions (see Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* 1936, 4467). In 1936 the Asociación Textil Argentina called for the congress to enact a law regulating minimum wages, with wage scales to be established by a tripartite commission made up of workers, employers, and representatives from the labor department.[82] Similarly, the Unión Industrial Argentina proposed that minimum wages be fixed in collective agreements by industry and region, that arbitration courts be set up to resolve conflicts between capital and labor and to avoid strikes and lockouts, and that employers and workers alike be formally organized "so that the defense of the interests of these two forces can be exercised by organizations that are truly representative of the title they lay claim to and responsible for the determinations they adopt."[83] Employers clearly viewed widespread enforcement of labor regulations as essential to minimizing competitive pressures among themselves.[84]

Not all employers were happy with the outcome of state regulation, however, and some viewed mediation by the labor department as detrimental to their interests. In 1938, for example, grain intermediaries in

81. *La Prensa*, 14 May 1937, p. 11. Monsignor De Andrea later applauded the decision of some employers to raise wages, indicating his further expectations: "I want the gradual replacement of classes via the progressive establishment of professional organizations." *La Prensa*, 22 May 1937, p. 8. See also *La Prensa*, 19 Nov. 1939, p. 12.

82. The proposal also stated, "Wages for women will in no case be inferior to two-thirds of those prevailing for men in any of the categories." *La Prensa*, 19 Sept. 1936, p. 12.

83. *La Prensa*, 22 Sept. 1936, p. 12.

84. After reaching a new labor agreement in construction, the employers' representatives requested that the government not give any contracts to companies that failed to observe the new schedule of hours and wages (Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* 1936, 4471). Similar requests were made by textile employers and vegetable-oil companies following their new labor agreements (see Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* 1937a, 4852–57; 1937b, 4983). In January 1939, when meeting with representatives of the labor department on a new agreement with their workers, textile employers emphasized that a collective agreement mediated by the state was necessary "to rationalize the textile industry in all aspects, avoiding a competition that can cause great damage." See *La Prensa*, 8 Jan. 1939, p. 16. These statements corroborate the conclusions of Gaudio and Pilone: employers often supported regulation of labor conditions to ensure homogeneity in relative labor costs among all enterprises.

Santa Fe founded the Centro de Acopladores de Cereales del Sur de Santa Fe in an effort to organize "the defense of the interests of the merchants in the southern area of the province, threatened . . . by the policies that the labor department of the province is following in response to labor conflicts."[85] In that same year, the Sociedad Rural in Santa Fe criticized labor legislation introduced in the provincial senate as favoring labor and failing to take into account

> the influence that those organized trade unions, with enormous privileges and empowerments, will have on the political destiny of the nation; or . . . the coercion of labor, which is well organized in trade unions, will be exercised against capital, which is disorganized and obliged to compete in domestic and foreign markets; or the faith of the tenant farmer who will experience, if the trade unions desire it, the loss of his harvest on the farm or will work without incentives because his rent will be absorbed by labor [costs], particularly if he is not allowed to thresh and transport the harvest by using his family and his own means.[86]

Finally, calls for greater state regulation were made by workers themselves.[87] Organized labor actively pursued state mediation because it implied official recognition of trade unions and their leaderships by the labor department (as well as employers themselves).[88] Throughout the mid-1930s, labor organizations tried to maintain official open channels with the government, and the Socialist and Communist discourses increasingly emphasized that trade-union practices should be subordinated to the strategies formulated by the respective political leadership.[89] Tam-

85. *La Prensa*, 19 Apr. 1938, p. 18.

86. *La Prensa*, 11 Aug. 1938, p. 19. According to the grain merchants belonging to the Sociedad Rural de Cerealistas in Rosario, the need to compete in the international market had led them to adopt improvements in agricultural machinery and transportation that would allow them to lower the costs of production. These improvements were causing growing rural unemployment, leading the labor department to support the demands of workers. According to employers, this intervention by the labor department was neutralizing the impact of innovations on costs by artificially raising the level of prevailing wages. See *La Prensa*, 29 Nov. 1937, p. 20.

87. State regulation was also criticized. The Federación Socialista Bonaerense criticized the labor department in the province of Buenos Aires for subordinating the interests of trade unions to the policies of the provincial government and for favoring the "interests of *la clase patronal* and large enterprises." See *La Prensa*, 17 Apr. 1939, p. 23.

88. Many trade unions with strong Communist influence—like the Sindicato Obrero de Albañiles, Cemento Armado y Anexos, the Unión Obrera Textil, and the Federación Obrera del Vestido—openly supported labor department actions in enforcing regulations of hours, wages, and holidays. The labor department eventually used these written statements of support in congress to defend its policies and mediation efforts (see Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Boletín Informativo* 1937b, 4994).

89. A somewhat common assumption in labor studies has been that Communist strategies within organized labor in Argentina were shaped primarily by shifting foreign-policy needs in Moscow. For examples, see Marotta (1970, 375) and Matsushita (1983, 163-66, and 219-21). This issue requires further research into the institutional history of the Communist party, but it is doubtful that such subordination was actually significant. Durruty (1969) was among the first to suggest a wide gap between the strategy of leaders of the Communist party and the practices of Communist labor organizers. Even Matsushita acknowledges the strong pos-

arin notes that by the late 1930s, "the CGT along with its leading unions called for a greater state role in the amelioration of labor relations, urging the national labor department to take more initiative in arbitrating disputes between labor and capital. The CGT frequently drew examples from the New Deal in the United States or from Cárdenas's *obrerismo* in Mexico to support its arguments" (Tamarin 1985, 146). In the view of the labor organizations, state mediation could also be an effective mechanism for pressing their demands. For example, in accepting an offer by the labor department for mediation and suspending its threat of a general strike among rural workers in Santa Fe, the Federación Santafesina del Trabajo indicated that "its methods of struggle are to conquer the sanction of laws that regulate relations between capital and labor in an equitable form. . . . The strike is the last recourse to which it will appeal as a means of conquering indispensable improvements in the welfare of workers."[90]

State authorities themselves justified state regulation as necessary to control labor unrest. Calling for the creation of a labor council to mediate labor conflicts, Governor Fresco argued, "it is necessary to create a tribunal charged with resolving conflicts between capital and labor so that [capital] will not arbitrarily use the levers of influence and great power within its reach, and so that [labor] too will not arbitrarily use force of numbers, agitation, and Communist propaganda."[91] Governor Fresco advanced a similar argument at a rally held by rural workers in support of his administration's labor reforms: "[W]ithin legality and peace, we seek the essential procedures to avoid strikes. Strikes that today are a weapon in the service of the utopias of the left, strikes that in 99 percent of the cases can be avoided. . . . Our policies are not about class struggle but about class harmony."[92] National state authorities justified greater state regulation in similar terms. Speaking to commercial and industrial employers, presidential candidate Ortiz argued, "It must be a concern of the government . . . to raise the living standard of workers, which will immunize the social organism against the dangerous infiltration of extremist ideas, which are generally the fruit of anguish and helplessness."[93]

sibility of such a gap (1983, 232). As indicated earlier here, the similarities between the two world wars in dampening labor unrest suggest that other processes (such as the decline of migration or slower economic growth) may account for this decline in unrest more than shifts in the strategies of the Communist party.

90. *La Prensa*, 6 June 1938, p. 24.

91. *La Prensa*, 2 Apr. 1937, p. 20. The proposal was approved by the Buenos Aires senate soon afterward and evaluated in positive terms by editorials in *La Prensa*, 24 Apr. 1937, p. 6, and 29 Apr. 1937, p. 7.

92. *La Prensa*, 19 July 1937, p. 21. After a limitation of working hours on Saturdays was approved by the Buenos Aires legislature early in 1938, a provincial government official indicated that the new measure "constituted a stage in the process of labor pacification in the province." *La Prensa*, 14 Jan. 1938, p. 17.

93. *La Prensa*, 10 Aug. 1937, p. 12.

Participating in the new institutional arrangements did constrain trade unions and labor militancy by making them accountable to state regulations and collective agreements. For example, agreements signed between workers and employers in wool textile production included clauses stating that "the parties agree not to resort to strikes or lockouts without having exhausted all reasonable requests for mediation by the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo."[94] Similarly, in signing an agreement with management of the Pacífico railroad, the Unión Ferroviaria pledged "to fulfill the agreement, without allowing under any circumstances that its sections [union locals] appeal to means of direct action, pledging itself in addition that when such [an event] occurs, to exhaust the means within [the union's] reach to avoid [direct action]."[95] This kind of agreement led to more frequent conflicts between the national leadership of the unions and their individual locals and also among competing labor organizations.[96]

The assumption was that state mediation would succeed as long as the terms of the exchange implied gains for workers but also greater control over labor unrest. For example, in responding in 1937 to demands for greater state intervention in regulating wages for seamstresses, the head of the labor department argued that labor organization was necessary to enforce these gains because "the intervention of the state to increase wages can only be effective when it can count on the support of professional organizations capable of maintaining certain principles of discipline, order, and legal concurrence among the workers. . . . The best justification of the laws of minimum wages lies in the fact that they stimulate the birth or growth of labor organizations that will later endorse them."[97] This statement is significant in indicating the degree to which trade unions were expected to develop internal mechanisms of control to discipline their rank and file.[98] It also suggests that state officials in the labor department

94. *La Prensa*, 20 Feb. 1937, p. 15.

95. *La Prensa*, 28 Mar. 1935, p. 16. After a series of brief strikes, the public works minister warned the Unión Ferroviaria and La Fraternidad that they would be punished unless they controlled the union locals so as to avoid interruptions in railway service. See *La Prensa*, 8 May 1938, p. 9.

96. According to observers from the press, the high level of labor unrest among railroad workers resulted from "the strong effort [by competing trade unions] to increase their respective contingents, stimulating a constant effort to demonstrate the greatest efficacy in their . . . defense of the interest of labor." See *La Prensa*, 19 July 1939, p. 11. In 1937, for example, the Central Córdoba section of the Unión Ferroviaria was censored for carrying out a stoppage that contradicted the decisions of the last union congress. See *La Prensa*, 25 June 1937, p. 21. Between 1935 and 1943, the press explicitly noted no official sanction in nearly 15 percent of all instances of labor unrest involving the railroads. None of these instances of labor unrest appear to have involved public mediation.

97. *La Prensa*, 21 May 1937, p. 12.

98. These mechanisms of internal control did not develop without challenges. Beginning in the 1920s but mostly during the 1930s, the established leadership of the railroad union had to face three closely related challenges. First, unskilled workers on the railroads began to

were already convinced that political reforms would eventually provide a new incentive for labor organizations to develop.[99] Clearly, this argument gained momentum following the coup of 1943.

State regulation became pronounced in one other area: workers and employers alike sought to improve their standing by pushing for protectionist state measures. This trend was marked in textile production. In 1937–38, textile factory owners were facing stagnating markets, and they blamed the unfair competition and "dumping" practices followed by Japan, Italy, and Germany. According to the Argentine owners, Japan and Italy were enjoying a particularly unfair advantage because of the low wages they paid their workers.[100] The Unión Obrera Textil (UOT) seconded the demands of factory employers by meeting with the interior minister to complain about stagnation in the industry and to call for state intervention to prevent "dumping" practices and unfair competition.[101] Likewise, a delegation of the Unión Industrial Argentina visited the president to protest "dumping" and to request public intervention on behalf of manufacturing. *La Prensa* reported that "the outcry pertains not only to industrialists but to thousands of workers without employment."[102] The newspaper even acknowledged that "we cannot base our economic plans for the future on the illusion of continuing to be one of the granaries of the world."[103]

Soon after, the executive sent a plan to the congress for enforcing restrictions. The Unión Obrera Textil supported this plan by declaring that "the measures initiated against the introduction of commodities at

question the hegemony of skilled workers in the union. Second, the established leadership encountered growing competition from other political tendencies within the railroad union, the most important challenge coming from Communist factions that were particularly successful in organizing dissatisfied unskilled workers (Tamarin 1985, 154). Finally, railroad union leadership (along with trade unions in the port and those of public workers and employees) faced a challenge regarding its dominance over other trade unions in the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT).

99. The latter point generated significant debate. An editorial in *La Prensa* strongly criticized the idea that the labor department should promote the development of labor organizations: "It is not fitting for [the labor departament], it seems to us, to incite thus the creation of new factors in the class struggle. The state should lean toward eliminating it as much as possible by imposing norms that ensure the effectiveness of a distributive justice, thus making it unnecessary [for workers] to organize for their defense by eliminating the causes that drive the collective reactions." See *La Prensa*, 22 May 1937, p. 8.

100. *La Prensa*, 18 June 1938, p. 11.

101. The interior minister later responded, "The main thing, at this time, is to give employment to workers; 'dumping' affects workers, industrialists, and the state, and the latter will not allow commodities to be introduced at lower prices than the local value of production, whatever the causes may be." See *La Prensa*, 30 June 1938, sec. 3, p. 3.

102. *La Prensa*, 8 July 1938, p. 10.

103. *La Prensa*, 4 Dec. 1942, p. 4. On occasion, opposition was also expressed to the growth of state regulations. As early as 1942, according to a *La Prensa* editorial, a ship captain observed that he "preferred to confront a dozen of German submarines rather than the regulations of the port of Buenos Aires." *La Prensa*, 19 Apr. 1942, p. 6.

lower prices than the real cost of production are necessary for the economic independence of the country." The union cautioned, however, that the measures should go hand in hand with greater regulation of capital-labor relations: "Unless the establishment of measures against 'dumping' is accompanied by the regulation of labor, registers, and remunerative salaries for workers . . . , the magnates of the industry will turn it into a monopoly, leaving the workers in the same precarious situation in which they find themselves today, if not worse, to the detriment of the development of the industry, turning consumers over to monopolist avarice."[104] To avoid this outcome, the UOT argued, it was crucial that labor be represented on any commission established to defend the public interest.

The significance of protectionist legislation is that it resulted from joint efforts by industrial employers and workers to shift state policies in their favor. This origin was openly acknowledged by the Unión Obrera Textil, which in 1938 called for establishing formal ties with the employers' Confederación de Industrias Textiles "to resolve, jointly, the serious problems that shackle the development of the industry and paralyze factory activities to the detriment of industrialists, workers, and the national economy."[105] With the onset of World War II and growing unemployment, state officials began to acknowledge openly the need to improve the purchasing power of the population in order to sustain domestic industrial production and protect industry from possible dumping after the war.[106] Echoing these sentiments, a brief editorial in *La Prensa* criticized wage deductions forced on railroad workers for greatly reducing "the living standards of thousands of Argentine families" and hence undermining the national economy.[107] Thus the language adopted by the organizations of employers and workers alike began to delineate a common political ground in which state regulation was identified as a necessary mechanism for meeting the economic needs of not only the parties involved but the nation as a whole.[108] This new discourse provided a foundation for the

104. *La Prensa*, 15 Sept. 1938, p. 11. See also *La Prensa*, 12 Aug. 1938, p. 12; 6 Sept. 1938, p. 12; and 7 Sept. 1938, p. 12.

105. *La Prensa*, 30 July 1938, p. 10.

106. *La Prensa*, 7 Nov. 1940, p. 13.

107. *La Prensa*, 19 July 1939, p. 11.

108. Calls for protectionism were not restricted to textiles. The Sindicato de Obreros de la Industria Metalúrgica called for greater state intervention in developing national mineral resources. See *La Prensa*, 14 Nov. 1939, p. 22. Similarly, the Mercado de Haciendas y Carnes released a study in 1939 calling for state policies to encourage greater domestic consumption of beef: "Growing domestic consumption of livestock products, which would result from regulating the beef trade, will help resolve a fundamental problem of our economy, freeing us in part from the worry involved in placing these products abroad." See *La Prensa*, 11 Feb. 1939, p. 14. Railroad companies, facing competition from alternative means of public and cargo transportation by road, promoted the Ley de Coordinación de Transportes to limit competition along established routes of transportation. This move was opposed by farmers, who argued that "transport by truck is the only means of lowering the cost of railroad freight"

new political program that would be developed by state authorities after the 1943 coup.[109]

Tensions between labor organizations and state authorities heightened under the Castillo administration. In 1942 and early 1943, the government escalated an offensive against Communist labor organizers, raiding union meetings and conducting massive arrests of labor militants.[110] Rejecting demands by trade-union representatives that Communist leaders not be interned, the interior minister argued: "the government has respected and protected the interests of workers but will not allow ideological infiltrations foreign to Argentine institutional life, be they Communist or totalitarian."[111] Anticipating the arguments that would be put forth by the labor department after 1943, steelworkers were told to end their strike prior to mediation by state agencies. They were warned by the interior minister, "it is necessary that workers act in defense of their interests without the intervention of elements that are alien to the labor organizations and, of course, foreign to the real needs of the work force."[112]

The offensive against the Communists was provoked in part by strong fears of an explosive wave of labor unrest once the war ended. Monsignor De Andrea made this concern a central theme in speaking at a

as well as the overall costs of transportation. See *La Prensa*, 22 July 1935, p. 9. On this issue, see Matsushita (1983, chap. 7).

109. The May Day celebration in 1936 revealed workers' adoption of new language and symbols in Argentina. Union spokesmen not only shared their platform with representatives from various political parties during the rally, but *La Prensa* applauded the event as the first time when workers sang the national anthem during a May Day celebration. See *La Prensa*, 2 May 1936, p. 7; see also an editorial praising workers for their gesture on 3 May 1936, p. 8. By 1942, *La Prensa* was applauding Labor Day celebrations as an "occasion to reaffirm the social solidarity that has evolved over the four decades of this century." See *La Prensa*, 1 May 1942, p. 6. The adoption of this new language was also evident at a labor rally in support of democracy: the crowd jeered when they were addressed by CGT leader José Domenech as "*ciudadanos*," and the leftist elements chanted the term *compañeros* instead. See *La Prensa*, 17 Aug. 1941, p. 14. Elements of the post-1943 political discourse were also evident among conservative circles. In criticizing bicyclists who rode in their undershirts, a *La Prensa* editorial commented: "Democratic habits should not be confused with the tendency toward a lack of correctness and culture, because this, rather than awakening ideas of equality and consideration toward their fellow men, reveals a lack of civility that goes against the comfortable coexistence that is the ideal of any democracy. Willful *descamisados* denote a lack of respect toward social exigencies that find an undeniable echo in all civil spirits, so that to rise against them is to favor a regression at variance with one basis of the system that governs us: general improvement through the collaboration of everyone, with reciprocal consideration." See *La Prensa*, 31 Oct. 1938, p. 10.

110. Horowitz argues that state channels of mediation were closed to Communists in 1941 and 1942: "In the period from April to December 1939, the textile trade union, dominated by the Communists, presented 331 matters to national and provincial authorities. Under [the] Castillo [regime], these channels were partially closed. In 1941 and 1942, the National Department of Labor refused to negotiate with any of the most important Communist unions, thus denying them the only mechanism for external pressure" (Horowitz 1984, 293).

111. *La Prensa*, 7 Feb. 1943, p. 6.

112. *La Prensa*, 1 July 1942, p. 17.

rally organized by the Federación de Asociaciones Católicas de Empleadas in mid-1942:

> The most frightening and widespread problem that will [emerge] at the end of the war will be the labor question. The problems of demobilization and unemployment in the warring countries will have an enormous repercussion on the neutral countries. Huge debts will have overwhelming weight; the transformation of the industry of destruction into an industry of production will not take place in a day, and the reconstruction of families and equitable distribution of exhausted resources will demand unanticipated efforts. The possible substitution of this war among governments by the revolution of the people . . . will cause convulsions whose effects will transcend the Old World. Given these prospects . . . , in order to preserve social peace it is necessary not to allow ourselves to be surprised.[113]

Similar fears—along with the idea that state policies on labor should be transformed to avoid the potential explosion of labor unrest—played a crucial part in the coup of June 1943. At least this argument is the one later presented in speeches by Colonel Perón, who had witnessed some of the rallies in which Monsignor De Andrea predicted the dangers of the postwar period:

> A war in Europe is about to end, and those of us who are not very young understand what the consequences of the ends of wars in Europe are. Today's rulers should fix their attention on the postwar period that is arriving loaded with dark, black clouds. The postwar [era] will bring profound problems. Fortunately, we have had time to foresee many of these problems. . . . The postwar [era] will bring, first of all, stagnation and unemployment. It will also bring natural agitation among the masses, but also agitation among those masses that will be artificial rather than natural. All the circumstances of the social terrain will be well used by the true enemies of national unity. That is why we maintain that it is essential to arrive at that moment totally and absolutely united.[114]

Viewed in this context, several elements under discussion here can be perceived as crucial in shaping the development of state policies after the 1943 coup: the rapid growth of industrial trade unions in the 1930s and early 1940s in many sectors of the labor force (including construction and agriculture), the crucial role played by the Communists within these unions, and the widespread belief that the labor movement was likely to lead a new wave of unrest after the end of World War II.[115]

113. *La Prensa*, 6 July 1942, p. 7.

114. *La Prensa*, 6 Aug. 1944, p. 8.

115. Other authors have indicated the growing importance of Communists among organized workers during the 1930s, including Campo (1983) and Durruty (1969). On the role of the Communist threat in shaping the political discourse of military leaders after the 1943 coup, see Campo (1983, 121) and Matsushita (1983, 276). More recent works emphasizing the importance of the perceived Communist threat are Bergquist (1986) and Waisman (1988).

CONCLUSION

During the period between the two world wars, labor in Argentina adopted new forms of action and organization that were designed to enhance its political bargaining power, giving rise to a new and distinct set of institutional arrangements among labor, capital, and the state. Prior to the 1920s, industrial unions organized at the national level had only begun to emerge, with great difficulty, among skilled workers on the rail roads and in the port. Most labor organizations, particularly those in manufacturing, were small, usually organized at the company level, and controlled by skilled workers. Political interaction between organized labor and the state continued to be irregular, lacking any established institutional mechanisms for mass political participation. After the 1920s and particularly in the 1930s, in contrast, workers organized trade unions on a national scale and an industry-wide basis. The rank and file of these organizations included a larger proportion of semiskilled and unskilled workers. Unlike skilled workers on the railroads, in the port, and even in manufacturing, semiskilled and unskilled workers could derive little bargaining power from their position in the labor market, particularly in the middle of the depression. Just as important, their position in the production process was not strategic to the nation's export structure (with the possible exception of agricultural workers), which further undermined their relative strength. Realizing their overall weakness in bargaining power in the marketplace and workplace, semiskilled and unskilled workers turned to the political arena in search of more effective mechanisms for pressing demands on employers. In other words, as the ranks of semiskilled and unskilled workers grew, it became increasingly difficult for labor to maintain a bargaining strategy based primarily on craft unionism. The formation of new industrial unions was thus symptomatic of these difficulties.

The new industrial unions were characterized by centralized decision-making structures and by greater institutional controls over the rank and file. The internal structure of these trade unions involved a hierarchical bureaucracy staffed by paid employees. In their goals and methods of action, these organizations were geared toward developing political alliances with other social sectors and toward seeking active state mediation. During the strike wave of the mid-1930s, these unions began to acquire national strength, as indicated by the large proportion of strikes and other manifestations of labor unrest involving workers in the provinces of the interior. After this wave of strikes, industrial unions appeared to take over the entire labor movement rapidly. Again, as in the previous phase, the older craft unions did not simply disappear but became a residual category within the labor movement.

In Argentina, Communist organizers were particularly successful in promoting the new industrial unions. Their success resulted from adopt-

ing a political strategy that improved their ability to influence the changes taking place within the labor movement. By the 1930s, Socialists and Syndicalists alike had become enmeshed in existing institutional arrangements. They were neither capable of nor interested in supporting disruptive forms of action among semiskilled and unskilled workers. The Anarchists, who had never consolidated leadership of the labor movement, were finally displaced by the interwar breakdown of craft systems of production. The Communists successfully subsumed many of the older Anarchist craft unions under their own leadership, while challenging the Socialists and Syndicalists in the older unions and in the central labor federation. This challenge and the growing strength of Communists within the labor movement became particularly evident during the strike wave of the mid-1930s.

Labor unrest and Communist influence within the labor movement in the 1930s yielded two important consequences. First, the state responded to these changes by enlarging the scope of official mechanisms for regulating capital-labor relations. The number of capital-labor conflicts mediated by state authorities increased significantly. The national labor department intervened in a growing number of labor issues, and trade-union formation even began to be encouraged by government officials at the national and provincial levels. At the same time, state regulation of capital-labor relations was increasingly viewed as an essential mechanism for sustaining adequate levels of national consumption and economic growth. The second consequence was that the rapid success of Communist militants in the new industrial unions generated growing resistance across a broad political spectrum, including other political factions within the trade unions (particularly the Socialists and Syndicalists), conservative political leaders, business owners, and the armed forces. By the 1940s, the foreseeable end of World War II was generating fears among these groups of an international Communist offensive, and this array of political actors became increasingly willing to unite in an effort to reverse the gains made by Communists within the labor movement. Both consequences were central in shaping the emergence of Peronism.

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