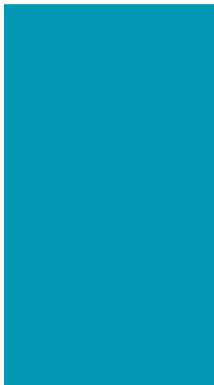# Center for Latin American Studies
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INTRODUCTION

Can a society be imagined where the struggle for work is collective, strongly organized and a permanent social phenomenon? The experience of Argentina in the last seven years shows a pattern of intense mobilization around demands for jobs. However, this mobilization was not sparked by established labor organizations. Neither was it the initiative of any political party. Instead, it was the result of demands by unemployed people who, beginning in 1996, started to set up road blockades in reaction to long term unemployment. Thereafter, a movement of the unemployed started to coalesce. It came to be called colloquially the *piquetero* movement—due to the pickets they established in the roads. Its formal title, the Unemployed Workers Movement (Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados), emphasizes its members' identity as "workers" in addition to their condition of unemployed.

One of the factors shaping the context for this mobilization is the fact that the Argentine state did not intervene in the labor market during the years of peak unemployment and sweeping market reform, beginning in the late 1980s. In 1995, the unemployment rate reached 18.5 percent in a country where it had rarely topped 4 percent of the economically active population. On the contrary, the state reacted to the problem of unemployment only after the popular protests had already escalated.

In 1996 and 1997, the first massive social outbursts arose in the oil enclaves of Cutral-Có and Plaza Huincul, in Neuquen, in the south of Argentina, and in Tartagal and General Mosconi, in the northern province of Salta, where local unemployment rates were 32.5 percent and 42.8 percent, respectively. It was after these riots that the government decided to

launch an emergency employment program called Plan Trabajar, as a way to respond to the social disturbances. However, rather than restraining popular opposition, this measure unintentionally paved the way for the formation of multiple groups of defiance. These groups found in the Plan Trabajar resources that enabled them to reinforce their new organizational structures, as well as material incentives to attract members.[1]

From 1997 to the time of writing, more than a dozen organizations of unemployed workers consolidated in the Greater Buenos Aires area (See Appendix)**.** They spread the road blockades as their method of claim-making, and used the unemployment subsidy as an instrument to enhance their organizations. To the extent that they succeeded in extracting unemployment compensation, the unemployed groups used the Plan Trabajar funds to organize themselves and meet the basic needs of their members. Unemployed organizations thus developed collective work projects which ranged from soup kitchens, bakeries, small textile factories, orchards, and even pharmacies, to brick works and laboratories for clinical tests.

This working paper focuses on the emergence and development of the organizations of unemployed workers in the area of Greater Buenos Aires. As I will explain below, these organizations emerged as a result of people struggling for jobs, on the one hand, and fighting against local Peronist bosses, on the other. As such, these organizations were born with not only a social orientation—namely, reacting to unemployment and hunger—but also a political orientation, in the sense that they competed with the local power networks already well established by the Argentine mass-based Justicialista (Peronist) Party.

This study stresses the importance of this political dimension of the mobilization of

unemployed workers. The paper aims to understand the extent to which the organizations of the unemployed have changed political frames of action in a decade dominated by the Peronist party, which has traditionally based its support among the lower and working classes. Therefore, the analysis concentrates on the construction of political meanings around the forms of action adopted by the unemployed. This construction is the result of seven years of collective mobilization as well as of the strategic and internal evolution of the organizations over time.

Before addressing the political aspects of the organizations of the unemployed, this working paper will look at the processes which constitute the historical background for that mobilization. The first section presents an overview of the impact on popular sectors of structural reforms carried out in Argentina in the 1990s. The second section provides a brief description of the transformation of the Peronist party in the 1990s, focusing on the way it redefined its relationship with organized labor. The third section, then, concentrates on the constitution of the organizations of unemployed workers in Greater Buenos Aires. This section highlights three analytical levels in the study of the modes of action adopted by the unemployed: social integration dynamics, the political and strategic profile of the organizations, and internal politics—namely, the incorporation of practices of direct democracy into the organizations of the unemployed. In order to illustrate the last two levels, the fourth section provides a brief analysis of some of the organizations of unemployed workers. The final section summarizes these questions and offers some conclusions.

POPULAR SECTORS AND ECONOMIC REFORMS OF THE 1990s

As is well known, Argentina changed dramatically as a result of the market reforms carried out by the Peronist administration of President Carlos Saúl Menem during the 1990s. The country went through a process of deindustrialization which brought about increasing unemployment. At the same time, public services such as health services, the educational system and the pension system were reduced in scope and quality. Broad sectors of the population, including both wage earners and independent workers, fell rapidly below the poverty line.

Given that Greater Buenos Aires was the most industrialized area of the country, with a high concentration of working class residents in its neighborhoods, these reform policies impacted strongly on this social space. The levels of poverty soared after the end of the decade: in 2000, 28 percent of the Greater Buenos Aires population was below the poverty line, and by 2002 this number had increased to 49 percent.

The main point is that all these policies and processes affected not only the material conditions of popular sectors, but also the repertoire of collective actions through which they traditionally participated in labor and social life. On the one hand, the retreat of the regulatory state at the beginning of the decade made the previously established forms of collective claim-making in the formal sector inefficient in the struggle for rights and economic demands. On the other hand, high unemployment levels imposed social discipline on the people who had kept their jobs. Under these circumstances, unions could no longer act as the main engine of labor and economic claiming. Indeed, the old collective solidarities that articulated the social expectations of working and lower sectors vanished. In Greater Buenos

Aires, where almost half of the population became unemployed or was employed in the informal sector, the state retreat prompted the impoverished popular sectors' expectations to increasingly fall back on their neighborhoods.

This displacement had first begun in the 1980s, when the impact of the so called "new poverty" was initially felt among the popular sectors.[2] Squatter settlements organized in specific areas of Greater Buenos Aires (mainly in La Matanza), as a result of a process of collective mobilization around public services provision. This massive mobilization in the urban periphery gave rise to a social organization based in a shared sense of community, which extended into the subsequent decade.

In the 1990s, however, this withdrawal into the neighborhoods favored the institutionalization of clientelistic practices. These practices were the result of both the logic of the state's social intervention during the 1990s,[3] but, most centrally, of the political needs of the Peronist political machine in terms of collecting votes.

The clientelistic strategy sought to monopolize the delivery of basic resources, to which the incumbent Peronist party had access, in order to reinforce its political presence in the neighborhoods. In contrast to the experience of the 1980s, this strategy inspired a sense of identity among the popular sectors that did not reduce but instead strengthened social fragmentation and the retreat to the private sphere. This identity relied on promoting personalized and instrumental exchange relationships, even if they were oriented to help the needy. The extension of these patronage networks throughout Greater Buenos Aires consolidated a specific pattern of social and territorial intervention, and transformed the political ties between the popular sectors and Peronism.

In fact, what came to be at stake between the process of de-unionization of the popular sectors and the reshaping of their social expectations within the limits of their neighborhoods was the Peronist party strategy of changing political alliances and social supports, within the general framework of its market-oriented program. As a consequence, this strategy produced sharp transformations in the social practices of the popular sectors.[4]

THE PERONIST PARTY SHIFT

During the 1990s, Peronism underwent important organizational changes. Principally centering on Greater Buenos Aires, this shift produced serious effects into the popular sectors' social relationships.

As argued by Levitsky (2003), the Peronist party redefined its relationship with organized labor in the 1980s and paved the way for the development of patronage practices as its unique "game" in the 1990s. The party produced a surprising coalitional shift that occurred at two levels. At the national level, reformers dismantled traditional mechanisms of union participation in the party. At the local level, Peronist politicians used their access to public offices to build patronage-based support networks, at the margins of the unions. Over time, patronage networks replaced unions as the primary party linkage to its working and lower class base. By the early 1990s, the Peronist party had transformed itself from a labor-based party, in which unions were the dominant partner, into an increasingly clientelistic party, in which its union-based mass linkages had been replaced by patronage-based territorial organizations located in poor areas.

The Peronist governor of Buenos Aires province from 1991 to 1999 was one of the first politicians who, making use of his public office, built a broad patronage network based on

his control over state resources. During his government, Governor Eduardo Duhalde made the delivery of material goods and public jobs in return for political benefit the regular practice of provincial Peronist networks. These networks were accomplished by building alliances and co-opting the vast majority of local leaders and Peronist activists, the so-called *punteros*, through patronage based financial schemes (Idem: 128-129).

During the 1990s, the punteros played a major role in delivering resources in lower-income neighborhoods of Greater Buenos Aires. Peronist activists distributed social assistance, namely food and medicine, provided jobs for their constituencies and participated directly in implementing government programs targeting poverty. That means that Peronist activists acted as a nexus between the neighborhood, the city and provincial government.

As Javier Auyero (2001) argues, the intervention of the Peronist party in the neighborhoods helped the survival strategies of the impoverished people who suffered from both unemployment and state abandonment. Peronist networks provided the poor with financial aid and food resources in the absence of other organizational resources and bargaining arenas.

On the other hand, the Peronist strategy helped sustain a kind of Peronist subculture. However, this identity had nothing to do with the old Peronist identity based on social integration. On the contrary, new linkages relied on the shared memories of certain aspects of previous, better times under the governments of Peron and Evita. This contributed to the legitimacy of current political practices.

In short, while the urban Peronist base had once been composed by workers, in the 1990s it was increasingly made up of "clients." The party was not supposed to be responsible

for the mounting unemployment, widespread material deprivation and symbolic rejection, but for helping the poor in their neighborhoods and setting up the most important webs of relations among the impoverished ex-workers during the 1990s.

In other words, my argument is that not only did the formerly proletarian workers retreat to their neighborhoods as conditions for survival became more challenging, but also the Peronist party politically constructed these neighborhoods as a set of specific social practices, that had previously been largely unknown to the powerful Argentine organized worker class.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS

These processes form the sociopolitical background for the vast mobilization of unemployed workers that has been taking place in Greater Buenos Aires. Beginning in 1997, various unemployed workers groups that had grown rapidly outside the traditional mainstream unions[5] took their grievances of hunger and joblessness to the roads. In the process, they attracted the attention of provincial and national governments. Over time, unemployed organizations opened new channels of communication with the state and displaced municipal authorities and local political networks from the main bargaining arenas.

Our extensive fieldwork examines the way the displacement of the organizations of the unemployed from local arenas to broader political arenas took place.[6] If impoverished people were leaving their houses and neighborhoods to wage the struggle in the roads, if they were raising their negotiations from the local level to regional and national roads and other public places, did this tactical shift imply the broadening of the protestors' goals from merely fighting for jobs? Taking a political rather than a geographical definition of territory,[7] the purpose of this study was to find out how unemployed workers organizations were giving up

local territory and building a new one.

The unemployed workers organizations, from the creation of the first unemployed commissions in 1995 and 1996 and the first road blockades in 1997, confronted a double challenge. On the one hand, they faced the consequences of economic policies implemented at a national level. On the other, they were dependent on political structures that ensured a system of patronage. The question of jobs emerged as the movement's central demand concerning the national economic model. The second issue of patronage dependency sparked a struggle for autonomy. The demand for work was tempered by the governmental emergency employment program (Plan Trabajar) implemented after 1996. The quest for autonomy is the combined effect of both confronting territorial Peronist structures governing the distribution and management of state subsidies, and the creation of new social and political meanings beyond current neighborhood practices.

Focusing on the process of building autonomy,[8] this section will distinguish three levels of analysis of collective action where the organizations produced a displacement from neighborhood politics and territories to other political spaces.

BUILDING A NEW SOCIAL NETWORK

When the pickets and road blockades begin to achieve results, the enemy or the system, as a way of putting out the fire, throw us the Planes [Trabajar]. But, immediately, the people take them as a tool of construction, and, later, come back to the streets. And, it is a vicious circle that the system, as planned, has not changed since 1995 to the present. But, within this logic, the response they implemented, the only thing it gets is that the people reassess it and transform it into a tool of struggle. (Unemployed workers organization activist, Avellaneda district)

The first level of analysis concerns the evolution in the struggle for the employment programs, the Planes Trabajar, which resulted in a significant change regarding social

inclusion in the system. We can distinguish two phases in the fight for labor subsidies. The first consisted of a direct confrontation with the Peronist municipal authorities in order to gain control over distribution of the subsidies. During the first years of implementation, subsidies were distributed and implemented by the municipalities, in line with the decentralizing trend that had inspired the reform of the state. But in practice, local mayors and Peronist punteros made an arbitrary and political use of the Planes. They directly selected the beneficiaries and chose how to implement the work projects. Sometimes, the municipalities did not provide the necessary materials to carry out those public works. On other occasions, they recruited people simply to work on officials' own properties or in their zones of influence. At the beginning, the unemployed workers groups began to fight against the local mayors and political networks in an attempt to end political extortion and set new distribution criteria. These new criteria would oblige the programs to distribute aid according to the number of claimants or to the number of unemployed people. During the process in which organizations contested the bosses' influence, other people joined them and rejected the political manipulation of the Planes. Therefore, a second phase in the struggle for the subsidies arose. It started with the "exodus," as one interviewee called it, of the unemployed from the local political territory and the generalization of massive blockades on the arterial roads into the city of Buenos Aires, as a means of gaining access to new arenas of negotiation located at the national government level.

This process of winning autonomy from local political structures was unintentionally reinforced after 1999 when the government of President Fernando de la Rua allowed unemployed organizations to directly administer the Planes by presenting social and labor

projects to the national Labor Ministry. Indeed, this was the peak moment of autonomy: at this point self-management formula replaced the clientelistic uses of Peronism regarding the implementation of subsidies.

What was the result of this evolution in the struggle for jobless subsidies? The organizations continued to depend on state assistance. Yet the access to state subsidies became autonomous from the direct control of the Peronist network in local spaces. In other words, the subsidy quotas, extracted and expanded as a consequence of collective action, turned what had been a political favor into a right obtained in the struggle. This right was no longer defined in terms of clients. Instead, it was defined in terms of the category of unemployed workers. Following Granovetter's definitions (1973, 1982), it is possible to say unemployed organizations broke up the strong network, made of personalized, informal and hierarchical ties, and replaced it by a weak, more bureaucratic network providing resources that help the organizations and their members to expand the opportunities for action. Even though this new network maintains organizational dependence from the state, it allows more personal mobility, itself facilitated by the mobilization, and gives the organizations more leeway for managing their immediate demands and discussing their strategic objectives.[9]

THE ORGANIZATIONS OF UNEMPLOYED AS POLITICAL ACTORS

In a second level of action, all the organizations of unemployed workers constituted themselves as collective actors with various political projects. Crucially, all the organizations articulated the social dimension of their actions, namely the struggle for employment and food, into a broader and more defiant political vision of society. Schematically, we can distinguish three clusters of unemployed workers' organizations: 1) those which evolved

from community-based organizations towards an alliance with new union structures born in the formal sector; 2) a set of various organizations that were initially mobilized by social or political activists and developed into a political movement (Some espoused varieties of populism, while others promoted radical post-Marxist conceptions about "counter power" or "double power" outside of institutional politics); and 3) a vast number of organizations linked to the more traditional, smaller leftist parties, including Trotskyite and Marxist-Leninist organizations (see a map of the organizations, below).

It should be stressed that, in general, the development of this political dimension among unemployed workers' organizations represents a rupture with the Peronist idea of the political territory restricted to instrumental and social welfare action. Various unemployed organizations proposed a kind of political or utopian foundation of social action, giving a new meaning to the uses and limitations of local space. Founders and new leaders performed a principal role in the constitution of these new ways of political intervention emerging out of the neighborhoods.

CREATING NEW FORMS OF PARTICIPATION AND AUTHORITY

The third level of collective action is internal politics. The assembly is the method of decision-making that internally governs unemployed workers organizations. Assemblies are mechanisms of direct democracy which potentially allow for the full participation of all the organization's members. In practice, however, the specific assembly dynamic that unfolds within each organization reflects the particular way in which leaders, partisan structures or militant groups relate to the social bases and vice-versa. It shows the way in which traditional constructions of authority relate to the new forms of horizontal participation. Far from

overstating the importance of this democratizing method, it is necessary to understand assembly practices as an exercise in creating new forms of participation, building leaderships and legitimating them.

A Map of the Organizations of Unemployed Workers

Organizations that evolved from community-based groups towards an alliance with new union organizations

➢ Federación de Tierra y Vivienda (FTV), *Housing and Land Federation*, integrated into the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA), *Argentine Workers' Union*

➢ Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC), *Combative Class Movement*

Organizations that were initially mobilized by social or political activists and turned into political movements

Neopopulists

➢ Coordinadoras de Trabajadores Desocupados Anibal Verón* (CTD Anibal Verón)/ Movimiento Patriótico Quebracho, *Anibal Verón Unemployed Workers Coordinating Comittees /Patriotic Movement Quebracho.*

➢ Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados Resistir y Vencer (MTD Resistir y Vencer)/ Movimiento Patriótico Malón, *Resist and Overcome Movement of Unemployed Workers/Malón Patriotic Movement.* (New movement: Movimiento Patriótico 20 de Diciembre (MP20), *Patriotic Movement December 20.*)

➢ Barrios de Pie**/Movimiento Patria Libre, *Neighborhoods Standing Up**/Free Country Movement.*

Radical autonomous post-Marxist organizations

➢ Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados Anibal Verón (MTD Anibal Verón), *Anibal Verón Movement of Unemployed Workers.*

➢ Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez* (MTR), *Teresa Rodríguez Movement.*

Organizations linked to the small, traditional leftist parties (Trotskyite and Marxist-Leninist organizations)

➢ Polo Obrero/Partido Obrero, *Workers' Pole/Workers' Party.*

➢ Movimiento Sin Trabajo Teresa Vive/Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (MST), *Teresa Lives Movement Without Work, Workers' Socialist Movement.*

➢ Movimiento Territorial de Liberación* (MTL)/ Partido Comunista, *Territorial Liberation Movement*/Communist Party.*

*Anibal Verón and Teresa Rodríguez were protestors who had been killed in riots.

**These organizations actually "evolved" from another cluster to the one they occupy in present time.

ASSESSING THE ORGANIZATIONS: THREE CASE STUDIES

This section will illustrate the functioning of unemployed organizations on the last two levels mentioned above. The constitution of the organizations around strategic and political goals and, in some specific cases, the way these goals had to be "negotiated" inside the movement, will be examined. Also, this section will emphasize the way in which leaders and social bases have recreated their links inside the organization, as a result of their active participation on assembly practices over time.

In order to account for the entire organizational spectrum, one case in each of the clusters described above will be analyzed. In each cases, the evolution of the organization towards strategic and political goals will be examined first, followed by the internal articulation of the organizations through members' participation in the assembly life.

THE FEDERACIÓN DE TIERRA Y VIVIENDA, LA MATANZA DISTRICT[10]

> The highest objective of the FTV is to rebuild the organization of popular power, to generate popular power that can support a popular government … I believe that a popular government does not exist without very strong popular power in the streets. These are the real objectives. The rest of them are tactical and strategic objectives, such

as the struggle for land and the struggle for jobs. We think that we will have to do all these things for life if we are not able to achieve institutional power, be part of the government, if we are not able to put people in the streets. (President of the FTV in Buenos Aires Province)

The history of the Federación de Tierra y Vivienda (FTV) has evolved through a number of stages; organization of a group of neighbors around self-management of urban services in the 1980s, struggle against local bosses and authorities for the control over social organization in the mid 1990s, road blockades to express demands for work from 1997, and, in 1998, a great leap toward national politics. That was the year the FTV joined the independent national union confederation Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA).

What does the great leap towards national politics mean? In contrast to interpretations that focus on the affiliation to the CTA only as an attempt to add the claim for jobs to previous demands for land and housing, it can be argued that its admission into the CTA implies a sharp shift to new modes of intervention in social reality. It is not only an organizational change towards a national structure, but also a major move from the social and working struggle to the political scene. More than shifting to the industrial world of unions, the integration of the FTV into the CTA involves the adoption of a reformist program that completely transforms the relationship between local life and politics.

The FTV-CTA slogan is "the new factory is the territory." Here, territory has two connected meanings. On the one hand, territory is the space of confluence for all the claims directed at the state which lie outside the formal labor market's ways of representation. On the other hand, it is the space for generating political unity among the popular sectors.

The CTA is a union confederation that has launched two political movements in the last

four years. It aims to organize popular sectors by promoting political proposals through their organizational bases, and then by publicly presenting these proposals for discussion and even referenda by the wider population.

In short, the FTV-CTA maintains a strategic approach involving both the struggle for the recognition of citizenship rights and for a transformation of political territories away from partisan structures fighting for neighborhoods into the construction of a collective political project from below. Through electoral means, this political force would encourage the idea of a new state based on regulatory competences.

Regarding the social bases, it should be emphasized that both the collective work in the neighborhoods and the historic practice of petitioning the authorities, reinforced a collective link among the members that facilitated the FTV's integration into the CTA.

For the members of the FTV, there has been a central notion that has given meaning to the collective struggle, which is the notion of collective rights. From land occupations during the mid-1980s to the claim for jobs and the integration into the CTA in the late 1990s, the social bases of the organization understood their actions in terms of a struggle for rights and the search of another type of state.

The linkage between social bases and public leaders is representation. This implies a relationship of equality among all the members of the organization but a specific difference admitted to leadership given its role in representing.

First, representation means functional representation, that is to say, the representation of collective interests on a different scale and level. Yet it also becomes political representation in that the organization evolves into a political movement that emphasizes a political

interpretation of poverty and unemployment in the context of a new socioeconomic model.

THE CTD ANIBAL VERÓN AND THE MTD RESISTIR Y VENCER, LANUS AND AVELLANEDA DISTRICTS

> As we rose up before the Plan Trabajar, we did not have this tool and actually, what we thought at that moment did not only have to do with the very demand of the unemployed. This is because we did not surge as an unemployed commission, but as a political organization that raises other things. Then, we said that it was necessary to organize the unemployed, but as we have the experience of a political organization, we raised the political axis of the confrontation. (Activist, MTD Resistir y Vencer)

> For example, I and my companion from La Plata, belong both to Quebracho, but it does not mean that everybody belongs to Quebracho. What we did from the beginning was to whitewash our political situation, the activism. We never hid our ideology. Every center we opened, I told the people I am a political activist from Quebracho but come here in a social role […] We do politics but do not get profit from the situation, because everything we say we talk it in the centers too. People know what I am, what I do. Sometimes they question me and I adapt to the circumstances and to what the people want. We actually want to do the revolution, but we can not do the revolution without anything behind. Then, I have to go reaching consensus with all the companions because it is very long the history of doing the revolution, it is not from one day to the following. (General Coordinator of the CTD Anibal Verón)

The following cases do not expose such an articulation between strategic goals and social demands within the unemployed organization. These groups do not share a history of collective action that can give rise to an egalitarian and at the same time complex link among all the members and positions inside the organization. In contrast, the CTD Anibal Verón and the MTD Resistir y Vencer were originally mobilized through the initiative of social or political activists.

These are two organizations in which leading members defend the constitution of a massive political movement that struggles for the government of the people and the economic independence of the country. Indeed, before starting to mobilize unemployed people in their neighborhoods in the mid 1990s, these activists already participated in two

political groups named Movimiento Patriótico Quebracho and Movimiento Patriótico Malón. Immediately after they had founded the unemployed organizations CTD Anibal Verón and MTD Resistir y Vencer, respectively, they went to occupy leading positions in the social movements.

The cases of the MTD Resistir y Vencer and the CTD Anibal Verón share the same difficult relationship between, on the one hand, the broader political goals of their founders and, on the other, the struggle for jobs and food, which is the principal activity that the movement carries out. Whereas the political leaders found their identities on the ideological field, rank and file members tend to identify the organization's action either through the absent state responsibilities or self help. The evolution of this relationship took different patterns. In the first case, the MTD Resistir y Vencer, the political activists withdrew from the leading positions they occupied in the organization and formed an autonomous political group, independent from the main organization. The CTD Anibal Verón, by contrast, never solved the tension between the development of a mass political movement and the struggle for jobs and food, and continues to function in practice as two overlapping organizations. Strategic political confrontation, which is the terrain of political activists, and social organization around basic needs and collective work, which is the everyday activity of the movement, co-exist as differentiated constructions.

In the two cases we do not find a sociopolitically articulated organization, but in fact two functionally autonomous organizations that are tactically unified. Indeed, the assembly is the bridge which allows the organizations to decide to sometimes act separately and, at other times, in common, by means of a more horizontal debate. Through the assembly, members of

these organizations give sense to that functional separation as well as legitimate the relationship.

In both organizations, political leaders split their role into a "social" one, which is exercised in relation to the unemployed movement fighting for economic and social goods, and the political role, which is accomplished on the political front. At the same time, this division of roles is the result of pressure from below. During the assemblies, members question the political action of the leaders and urge them to avoid mixing roles. Trust in the leaders rests on maintaining a kind of separation between political strategic goals and "everyday politics." In opposition to ideological proposals, "everyday politics" may be characterized as the whole set of self-management practices that take place inside the organization. Through them, the rank and file of both organizations have achieved new competences (for deciding their own priorities and acting upon them) and developed new horizontally reciprocal relationships, in sharp contrast to the well-established political practices based on vertical ties. Even though rank and file members of both organizations do not become highly politicized, they have produced these other subtle changes that bind them collectively.

THE POLO OBRERO, BERAZATEGUI DISTRICT

> I came from participating in the Peronist party, always with Peronism, in various places, and then I saw things in a different way. Within Peronism we did assistance, people came, I gave them the small bag and I felt happy with this. Now, in the organization there is another system, we go and fight for the people to have their soup kitchens or whatever. Here, we fight, go looking for a solution and trying to teach the companions to fight, to organize themselves. When I gave them the small bag, I did not teach them how to look for a job or how to struggle for getting it. In the organization we are taught to make claims and ask for a response. (Neighborhood activist, Polo Obrero)

The Polo Obrero belongs to the group of unemployed workers organizations created by traditional leftist parties which sought to integrate the unemployed into a political organization. In contrast to the organizations described before, all of which found some way of balanced coexistence between the "social front" and the political front, in this case the parties managed to integrate the unemployed as a wing of their political organization. The party political view tended to be presented, right from the beginning, as either the only or the most efficient way to transcend any social interest inside the unemployed organization.

In the specific case of the Polo Obrero, which is the unemployed workers organization created by the Trotskyite worker's party, the Partido Obrero, the political organization considers that there exists a qualitative difference between practical or "minor" issues to be dealt with through the unemployed organization, issues such as work for food, control over the distribution of the Planes, union dues, and other specific tasks, and political, "major" or revolutionary issues, such as the debate on the evolution of the political struggle and the party program. As a consequence of this division, creating consciousness around the party political line becomes the main organizational axis, well beyond any other definition of collective interests.

Since the membership's education within the party program as well as its reading of the party publications actually structure the assembly dynamic, the question that arises is the competence that the assembly has to make decisions by itself. The case is interesting, for it illuminates again the relative uncertainty that affects hierarchic relationships when the organization functions through assembly logic.

The point here is that even though the party structured a kind of "pedagogical" linkage

between the party dictates and the unemployed organization's members, it could not take members as simple subordinates. In fact, the "pedagogical" relationship of teaching-learning has shown a great potential in transforming the political linkage from below and, as a consequence, its criterion of legitimacy. Unemployed workers within the organization seem to be motivated less by the contents of the party proposal than by what they understand is the Polo Obrero's distinct position among all the unemployed organizations, namely its disposition to fight. They say that the party teaches them to fight.

This effect of the "pedagogical" linkage is certainly unexpected and has turned the unemployed organization's claims oriented to the achievement of goods and jobs into a struggle for rights, in opposition to clientelistic practices. Finally, it has given a political dimension to "practical or minor issues," which was initially a subordinate task to the party's strategic priorities.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted some specific aspects of the unemployed workers organizations of Greater Buenos Aires, taking them as a single set of protests running counter to dominant modes of social action. From this point of view, the history of the organizations can be analyzed as a changing pattern of practices among the lower classes, moving from the well established instrumental exchanges along vertical ties in their neighborhoods to politically broader and more horizontal collective practices. The paper has developed this argument by analyzing three aspects of the unemployed organizations' activities. First, we explored the way in which the organizations built a weak network of social welfare, based on demanding certain rights, which evolved as relatively autonomous from the patronage structures and

established clientelistic networks. Second, we examined how the organizations developed strategic and political profiles and articulated them, in different ways, with the social aspects of the struggle of the unemployed. In the last part, the focus was on the forms of assembly, putting them in a broad context of meaning and suggesting that they are more a way of connecting and transforming the relations between leaders and social bases than a completely dominant new method of decision-making.

This study has avoided a static analysis of the unemployed workers organizations. Neither the acronyms with which the organizations renamed themselves, nor the road blockade as an isolated event, *form* the identity of the mobilized unemployed. Rather, this identity is the result of an ongoing struggle that has changed political meanings of social action among theoretically powerless sectors. In the bigger picture, these sectors have evolved from simply demanding food and jobs to their current role as national political actors. In the local milieu, they have moved toward participatory practices, eroding old and new authoritarian forms of producing political certainties.

In sum, the physical displacement of poor and unemployed people from their neighborhoods through picketing the roads that connect their settings with the center of political power (the Federal Capital) is not only a physical journey through distinct geographies. This represents a political shift through collective action and demands a discussion of new political territories mapped by the organizations of unemployed workers. This mapping comprises the definition of new bargaining arenas, new horizons of action and new forms of internal functioning.[11]

APPENDIX

The Greater Buenos Aires Area

URUGUAY

TIGRE

SAN FERNANDO
SAN ISIDRO
VICENTE LOPEZ

PILAR

LUJAN

MALVINAS
ARGENTINAS

JOSE
C. PAZ

SAN MIGUEL

GRAL.
SAN MARTIN

CAPITAL
FEDERAL

RIO DE
LA PLATA

GRAL.
RODRIGUEZ

MORENO

HURLINGHAM

ITUZAINGO

TRES DE
FEBRERO

MORON

AVELLANEDA

MERLO

LA MATANZA

LANUS

QUILMES

LOMAS
DE ZAMORA

BERAZATEGUI

ENSENADA

MARCOS
PAZ

ALMIRANTE
BROWN

BERISSO

EZEIZA

ESTEBAN
ECHEVERRIA

FLORENCIO
VARELA

PTE.
PERON

LA PLATA

SAN VICENTE

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NOTES

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[1] The Plan Trabajar (in its three versions I, II and III) was implemented between 1996 and 2001. The program targets unemployed people who do not collect social security or any other kind of unemployment benefit by offering a temporary public or social job for a maximum of six months and a monthly salary of 150-250 US dollars. According to regulatory terms, provincial and municipal governments, NGOs and/or private organizations are required to present community projects that could be accomplished by public works. The plan provides the funds for paying the beneficiaries, while the implementing organization provides the materials and hires the skilled workers. In Greater Buenos Aires, a similar program called Barrios Bonaerenses (Buenos Aires' Neighborhoods) was created. This was like a regional version of the national Plan Trabajar. The mechanism of implementation of these programs changed under the Alianza's government (December 1999-December 2001), opening more opportunities to the already established organizations of unemployed, as we will see below.

[2] "New poverty" refers to the process of extension of poverty among nonpoor sectors as a result of the welfare state crisis that begun in the 1970s. It implied an increase in the levels of unemployment and under-unemployment, a reduction of real salaries and a decline of social security networks.

[3] See the relationships that existed in Argentina between structural reforms, technocracy and clientelism in Cardarelli and Rosenfeld (2000) and Chiara (1998).

[4] The habitat refers essentially to social relations. It defines the way people who share a housing environment interact and relate. It indicates also how the inhabitants relate to the space they occupy and its relationship with/within the "big city." See the concept in Merklen (1997: 25).

[5] The Peronist traditional Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) [Workers' General Confederation] remained loyal to Menem's government and policies. By contrast, in 1992, the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA) [Argentine Workers' Union] was formed in opposition to adjustment policies and the old-established CGT. Composed mainly by teachers' and state workers' unions, the CTA was granted legal status in 1997. In 1994, on the other hand, the Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC) [Combative Class Movement] was formed by a group of municipal unions and internal factory commissions. It is an independent union confederation that defends principles of class-based unions. Both newfound opposition unions will incorporate the demands and representation of some of the organizations of unemployed workers since 1998.

[6] This article is based primarily on research carried out between October 2002 and February 2003 in five districts located in the industrial suburbs of Greater Buenos Aires, that have larger working and lower-class populations: La Matanza, Quilmes, Lanus, Avellaneda and Berazategui. This research included interviews with national and provincial representatives of the organizations of unemployed workers, neighborhood activists and members of the organizations. I also participated in various assemblies and meetings of these organizations.

[7] This means that the territory is not demarcated by certain natural accidents or geographical coordinates. By contrast, territory is constituted by the set of rights and prerogatives that come to dominate within specific limits, according to their inhabitants or neighbors. See Van Gennep, in Ortiz (1996: 29).

[8] We are focusing on the substantive issues that the organizations of unemployed workers fought for, and, within them, on the political dimension of emancipation that is developed through the struggle. Nevertheless, other important aspects of collective action carried out by the unemployed can be analyzed. The increasing number of road blockades produced in Greater Buenos Aires and all the country during the 1990s, compared with the decreasing quantity of strikes, shows not only distinct forms of popular protest developed through the decade, but also a changing pattern in the forms of social and labor protest. Moreover, this can be related to changing capitalist relations in the country, evolving from industrial to primarily financial and commercial relations. In this sense, we can appraise the following table as protests evolving from acting in the centers of

production (strikes) to disrupting the distribution and circulation of commodities and persons, thus preventing, at least momentarily, the realization of profit (road blockades).

Strikes and road blockades (cortes de rutas): changing forms of social protest:

Industrial Conflicts (all Argentina)

1986-1989	3575
1990-1994	2222
1995-2000	1228

Cortes De Rutas (Road blockades)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Buenos Aires Province	23	9	82	119	452	587
Capital Federal	11	9	58	51	170	299
All Argentina	140	51	252	514	1383	2336
	1997-2002			4676 (all Argentina)		

Source: Centro de Estudios Nueva Mayoría, Buenos Aires

[9] As collective action continued to be the key tool for unemployed organizations to obtain money and rights, this pressured the new national government of Peronist Eduardo Duhalde (January–May 2002), to institute the Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar (Men and Women Household Heads Plan). The new plan covers more than two million unemployed people (slightly less than the total of unemployed people) and offers a monthly salary of 150 Argentine pesos (50 U.S. dollars). Greater Buenos Aires receives 800,000 Planes for a population of nine million persons, 24 percent of the national population.

[10] The district indicates that the fieldwork on the organization analyzed has been done in this precise area. However, the four districts indicated in the course of the section represent the geographical setting where each of the organizations under analysis developed from the beginning. Later, the same organizations scaled up their organizational structures. See locations on the map below.

[11] This can also be appraised by looking at the map of Greater Buenos Aires. The disruptive "exodus" of unemployed people from various districts located in this area to the Federal Capital or even to La Plata, site of the provincial government, comes together with the political displacement. It is possible to imagine this other movement from neighborhood politics and specific political territories (namely, those based on patronage and clientelism) to national politics (broad bargaining arenas such as the state and party politics), from individual strategies to collective action, from social needs to political rights.