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Mobilisation theory, workers solidarity and the evolution of conflict: collective action in multinational companies in Argentina

by

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The thesis represents the candidate’s own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another University.
“La Revolución es un sueño eterno” (Andrés Rivera 1987, La revolución es un sueño eterno)

“The organisation does not supply the troops for the struggle, but the struggle, in an ever growing degree, supplies recruits for the organisation” (Rosa Luxemburg 1971, p.66)

“For ever non e' solo un individuo: e' un tipo sociale. Da questo punto di vista non deve essere trascurato: deve essere conosciuto, studiato, discusso e superato” (Antonio Gramsci 1969, p. 210, Lo Stato e il Socialismo)

For ever is not just an individual: it is a social type. In this perspective it does not have to be dismissed: it must be known, studied, analysed and surpassed
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Abstract:

In this research is provided a comparative analysis of workers' mobilisation through a qualitative interpretation of processes, dynamics and effects of collective action in two car multinationals in Córdoba, Argentina, during 1996/1997. What drives workers to periodically contest their surrounding reality and how do they structure their protests? The thesis is based on the view that conflict is inevitable, mobilisation representing one possible form of it, due to the position workers have in the employment relation and for the constant existence of a gap between social needs and commodities produced within capitalist systems. Mobilisation is based on these theoretical objective conditions but subject do not immediately realise this and in the same terms, the process of collective protest implying in itself a deeper consciousness among workers of the meaning of their action. When subjects contest the inevitability of the social system surrounding them remains unpredictable, but the thesis has identified some factors whose absence or presence profoundly influences the chances for collective action to start and be maintained. At the same time the emphasis on the factors that are obstacles to mobilisation allows us to understand the concept of solidarity and its importance within the same process of mobilisation. Contrary to theoretical perspectives that intend collective action as based on individuals' sense of injustice, this thesis emphasises the need for a reconceptualisation of solidarity within a theory of mobilisation. More generally the thesis calls for a re-evaluation of collective action as a process intrinsically collective whose nature disappears within a social
context that constantly tends to individualise and divide. The case of Argentina and the historical perspective within which the mobilisations analysed are inserted, invite us to reconsider the role of traditional trade unions as organisers of protest and the relations between isolated workers' struggles and more generalised social protests.
Introduction:

This research started in October 2000 as a comparison of labour relations in two factories owned by the same multinational, FIAT, in Brazil and Argentina. The original idea was to look at the forms and methods of adaptation to new working practices used by trade unions and workers of the same company but within different industrial relations environments. The research seemed initially feasible as access to the plants for interviews and data collection was guaranteed by previously established relations with executives of the same enterprise. But as often happens to those who investigate into sensitive business areas, the economic crisis of the company produced, with workers' redundancies and plant closures, management's decision to suspend any co-operation with researchers and, in my case, making it impossible to enter into the factories and develop the empirical part of the research.

During November 2001 and February 2002 I did the first field trip to Córdoba as a sort of ritual way to put an end to my original research project but also with the aim and hope of finding sufficient elements for a reformulation of the whole dissertation. I needed more details to explain myself why a modern plant inaugurated in 1997 and built to employ 5000 people and to produce 120000 cars a year was, after less than four years, practically inactive. I was not certainly interested to write a thesis on how this happened. At the time of my visit to Córdoba, Italian newspapers in particular pointed to managerial mistakes and a short strategic vision of
the enterprise as the causes of the unsuccessful Argentinean case. But in the plant closure there was something more important for a researcher in industrial relations. It was somehow essential to find an answer because the crash of FIAT in Argentina could also be seen as the confirmation that the paraphernalia of those practices labelled as human resource management (workers' involvement, empowerment, participation) was more rhetoric than reality, as Legge (1995) reminds us. At the same time the failure of such managerial strategies, whose real effects both on the increase of productivity and individualisation of the employment relations have been extensively criticised during the 1990's, was also questioning my approach to research. Was there any valid reason to look at industrial relations continuing to insist on the analysis of the differences of workers' and unions' reactions to a managerial established agenda? Even from a perspective sympathetic with a "new" model of labour relations based on reciprocal advantages for workers and companies, what happened at FIAT was the analysis of a failure.

The two factory occupations that took place in the Fiat Ferreyra's plant in September 1996 and January 1997 were certainly a surprise. I knew that the company had problems with its labour force in Argentina (trade unions have an old mentality once said to me the Industrial Relations Director) but I could not imagine that a severe labour conflict was lying behind the triumphalism that the inauguration of the new plant was receiving in both Argentina and Italy. In particular, for the European standards, factory occupations were almost a relic from the past. The
search for more data on conflict in local newspapers revealed that another factory occupation occurred in the city, in the Renault plant at approximately the same time, I approached persons who could help me to establish further contacts with those who directly participated in the mobilisations and that were not working any more in the plants. My original research had changed completely and was now a comparison of workers' mobilisation. It was an investigation into the causes that produced it and into the social processes that took place among workers in such events. Within this broader scope, the following questions, in particular, represented the framework within which the entire research has been structured: is it possible to offer a reconstruction of mobilisation around a set of categories not entirely correspondent to those provided by mobilisation theory? From a more theoretical point of view, into which epistemological field should we inscribe mobilisation? Can we identify different dynamics in the two cases analysed? Are there any special conditions that can influence the ways and the times of workers' mobilisations? Is there any common denominator in the two cases analysed? Which type of long lasting effects can mobilisation produce? To what extent may the conclusions offered by the research be applied to other realities?

This long autobiographic introduction is important because it fixes the concrete bases and the motivational impulse around which the whole research has been developed. First preparing the theoretical and historical background for the field work and later on in the elaboration and writing
of all chapters. If any bias is detectable from the argumentation and findings of this research it has to be referred to my own personal experiences. The plant closure and the decision of the company to suspend its co-operation with researchers, left me unexpectedly "on the road", touching probably the same emptiness, worries, fears and anger that is to a certain extent common, notwithstanding material differences, to all those who have just lost a job. The study of workers' mobilisations became my own, almost natural, response to a passive and uncritical acceptance of the inevitability of the social system. The need to look at industrial relations as the study in which labour could be considered again as the central concern was, also because of my own experience, becoming urgent.

The thesis is organised around four chapters.

In the first, the methodology used for the collection of data is described, justifications for the preference of qualitative analysis are offered and problems and difficulties encountered during the field work are also outlined in order to test and scrutinise the reliability of the research findings. The justification of the appropriateness of the methodological approach has been based on four basic principles: a tradition in the field of study, coherence with the aims and hypotheses of the research, feasibility and data availability, accuracy and rigour in the collection and analysis of data.

In the field of industrial relations both the quantitative and qualitative
methods have been used alternatively. Mobilisation is intended here as the study of the social processes involved in collective action and the importance the micro contexts have in shaping and influencing the ways in which mobilisation is produced, requiring the adoption of a qualitative approach to the study. This is in the tradition of the 1970's workplace studies in industrial relations and sociology of labour but is also common to other related disciplines (cultural, political and criminal sociology, social anthropology, oral history) when people at work are the subject of these studies. In particular I have used unstructured interviews because mobilisation often appears in workers' accounts as a single, unitary event whose flow has to be observed with scarce external intervention. Just once the particular event considered has been fully described, we could be able to detect and analyse specific turning points in the development of collective action and to give meaning to the theoretical categories we are using.

This research is also based on a comparison of two different mobilisation events. As mentioned before, in November 1996, soon after FIAT's first plant occupation and a few months before the second one, Renault's workers too mobilised and occupied the plant. Despite the fact that both companies operated in the same political and social context and with a labour force sharing identical labour culture, the level of conflict and mobilisation shown by Renault was much less intense than in the case of FIAT. The comparison is evidenced in that there are certain factors that can hamper and be an obstacle to mobilisation. In the case studies under
examination it has been possible to identify two distinct conditions, a specific managerial approach to conflict and trade union bureaucracy, whose "absence" or "presence" has alternatively influenced the process of mobilisation. As is going to be presented more clearly in the empirical chapter, the companies have reacted to the need to reduce labour costs trying to dilute conflict in complicity with the trade union (Renault) or implementing straight away salaries reductions in a momentary absence of union control on the shop-floor (FIAT). We can explain mobilisation and its different outcomes on the base of the alternation of these inhibiting factors but it will remain open if we can generalise them.

Data have been collected in different moments. A first visit to Córdoba was used to make an exploration on the feasibility of the research. In particular it was necessary to find those people who were directly involved in the events considered and due to the conflict and economic crisis the majority of them were not working any more in the same plants. Through local contacts I established a relationship with the leader of mobilisation at FIAT who provided, during the second visit to Córdoba, the first names of people to interview. At the same time access was gained, through the company (FIAT), to the plant where 180 workers were still working and many of them had participated in the conflict. A third group of interviewed was formed of both people that were introduced to me by those already interviewed and others presented by people who knew of this research. A total of 36 interviews has been collected among these three groups of workers that, considering the source of origin, can be
labelled respectively as the more militant, the less militant and heterogeneous. In addition to this, four interviews with managers, the analysis of company's documents and local newspapers have also been used and contributed from another point of view to the understanding of mobilisation. In the case of Renault, 16 workers have been interviewed from different departments and of different ages and working experience. However, due to the difficulties of access to the data, selection did not follow any precise strategy and people were approached basically through community channels at the beginning and direct presentation and by a snow ball effect with the rest.

The theoretical chapter is built around the need to offer a framework and a base for the interpretation of mobilisation that I intend here as a social process which can be better understood by examining it from three different empirical dimensions. First each event of mobilisation is the direct or indirect result of external social conditions and it has always to be considered as inserted into a context of national and increasingly international competition. The second dimension that explains the process refers to those internal conditions and contingent situations specific to each plant and working environment. Third, and of paramount importance while studying social processes that produce struggles and collective actions, we should understand how actors have perceived those external and internal conditions that were changing their daily understanding of the workplace and of the employment relation. Within this latter dimension, in particular, we should investigate to what extent consciousness,
solidarity and leadership have strengthened workers' mobilisation and provided a base to resist employers' repression. These three dimensions in the study of mobilisation require us to adopt a theoretical framework flexible enough to account for the complexity of workplace relations, as directly depending on the interplay and alternation of the three dimensions mentioned above, always show.

On the base of these considerations one aspect of the theoretical background refers to the theory of mobilisation as recently re-proposed by Kelly (1998). This framework for empirical analysis offers both a general vision of society and a set of categories (injustice, agency, attribution, leadership, repression) through which to understand social relations and collective action in the workplace. These two dimensions of the theory can be used separately and the categories outlined could still maintain their validity to explain what happens in micro contexts. But the theory loses its ground if not inserted into a Marxist interpretation of societies and political economy and Kelly's emphasis on this is important. In particular, these two aspects of the theory are fundamental when a process that is dependent on both external and internal conditions is investigated. Mobilisation is not just one of the possible outcomes of the employment relation, something that we can technically and somehow aseptically analyse, but is also a process that, because of increasing international competition and the level of radicalisation in Argentina, is influenced by and influences waves of social mobilisation. Considering the undergoing relation between micro and macro factors, the theory offers the
opportunity to look at the cause/effect nexus between mobilisation and counter-mobilisation and, within the same perspective, at the use and role of enterprise and state repression.

However, the findings of this research are not always in agreement with the existing arguments of the theory. In particular, empirical evidence suggests that the concept of injustice, for its own subjective nature, cannot be considered as the base of mobilisation and should be best seen as a concept acquiring a meaning in action. At the same time and as a more general consideration, there is determinism and fixity in the development of the different moments that should produce a process of mobilisation that does not, always, produce results beneficial to the validity of the theory.

Workplace analyses have often shown how complex is this specific reality and how difficult it is to establish fixed patterns in the understanding of people's interactions at work. Although a number of "objective" rules and trends surround the understanding of conflict at work, our knowledge remains fragmented because the specificity of each case, with its local culture, traditions and labour legislation, and the continuous changes in the forms of labour/capital relations, constantly raises new questions and doubts. That is why the second aspect treated in the theoretical part refers to the way conflict at work has been interpreted, its centrality and inevitability being fundamental in the study of mobilisation, and this with particular reference to both Marxist and pluralist accounts of it. But a
further dimension to understand objective tendencies in labour/capital relations is also offered, looking at a reconceptualisation of workers' needs intended as the base around which the objective conflicting interests of workers and capitalists are structured.

A third aspect of theoretical importance is related to the definition of those concepts, like solidarity, that operate at a subjective level setting the boundaries within which the character and the nature of the employment relation acquire more significance. In this part it is argued that it cannot be offered as a static or predefined vision of solidarity, since it is in its own nature a concept whose meaning can be better perceived looking at it from a dynamic perspective. At the same time this discussion is the base for a more general consideration on the epistemological stance adopted in the research.

The third chapter of this thesis is dedicated to an historical analysis of mobilisation in Argentina and this with the aim to identify the existence of factors that could have both hampered or triggered the processes of mobilisation that occurred in the plants. The interviews with workers of both plants indicate that three major factors could have affected mobilisation: the inheritance of the last military repression, the relations between workers and trade unions, and the socio-political and economic context at the time of mobilisation. The historical analysis starts from these data extracted from the interviews but these latter let emerge just part of the truth, of a much more complex and debatable reality.
Following the main concerns of workers, the chapter is structured into three main sections. The first refers to the role played by the last military regime on workers' potentials for mobilisation. The second focuses on specific aspects of Argentinean unionism, its relation with the state and governments in power and workers' criticisms of it, often expressed and resumed in the bureaucracy/anti-bureaucracy dichotomy. The third puts the cases analysed in the socio-political and economic context existing at the time of conflict.

To sum up, the chapter can be considered as both a way to explore some issues relevant for the cases studied and, for the historical perspective that it offers, as an attempt to highlight the overall mobilisation capacity of the Argentinean Labour Movement.

In the fourth chapter the cases are introduced by first presenting an overview of the companies and the unions involved. Empirical evidence and data concerning the two cases of mobilisation analysed are organised by the identification of five major issues/thematic areas, each representing a separate section of the entire chapter: dynamics of mobilisations, solidarity and mobilisation, leadership, evolution and radicalisation, repression. Alongside these areas of enquiry is also developed the comparison between FIAT and Renault.

The five thematic areas identified can be considered to refer to the causes and effects of mobilisation. The comparison of these two categories
indicates that they are clearly influenced by the alternation of some contingent factors whose absence or presence profoundly shaped the cases analysed. At FIAT, the introduction of a new contract, with the salaries reduction it implied, and the contemporary change in workers' representation created a vacuum of power within which an antibureaucratic organisation, result of the action of cohesion leaders exerted on the solidarity movement that was at the origin of the mobilisation, first established and later on consolidated. The same organisation led workers throughout nine months of open conflict with the enterprise during which another factory occupation occurred within a process of increasing company's repression and workers' political radicalisation. Also influenced by the social unrest present in the country at that time, conflict remained a dominant feature in the FIAT plant and contributed to workers' more conscious understanding of the relations between their workplace and the society as a whole.

In the case of Renault we have a company which managed to cope with the pressure of international competition by externalising some of the production sections in agreement with a bureaucratic and business union (SMATA). This arrangement favoured the dilution of conflict and maintained workers' grievances within the limits of traditional unionism and of the critics to it. But an attempt to build an internal opposition to the union's leadership was frustrated by the co-optation of former opposition leaders at the top of the organisation.
A concluding chapter resumes and highlights the main findings of the research while it points out some limitations. The main idea outlined in the chapter is that mobilisation should be seen as a social phenomenon whose forms and meanings have to be analysed from a double dimension. We could see it as from a static or dynamic perspective and this by looking more at the "technicalities" and contingent causes that have produced it in specific cases or by stressing more on mobilisation as a process inserted into a complex social reality. But underlying this double dimension means that it is necessary to decide within which methodological and epistemological perspective we may prefer to insert the main findings of the research and how to consider them as applicable to other cases.

Summarising, we can consider that the empirical evidence collected shows how it is the alternation of the absence or presence of certain specific factors that create differences in the dynamics and causes of mobilisation. We can also add, and the research undertaken has determined this, that in the cases studied these factors are namely: the company's strategy and the union bureaucracy. But other authors may reach a totally different conclusion and show that their empirical analyses of mobilisation indicate different dynamics, causes and factors whose influence may be considered determinant. Potentially an infinite number of cases can be added and all being equally valid but an emphasis just on "findings", the empirical chapter of this research providing the reader with full details of them, does not help to understand mobilisation as something
more than a pure mechanical artefact. Not denying the importance of empirical analysis, this thesis aims to intend mobilisation as a moment of collective rupture and opposition to a formerly taken for granted reality. In this moment subjects react to a system of impositions previously accepted or socially hidden (for instance the existence of a labour market, subordination within the employment contract, ideological dominant values) and their action changes the way they look at the reality surrounding them. Although mobilisations cyclically appear in workplaces and societies as expression of one of the forms of the labour/capital opposition, it still remains unpredictable to establish precisely the time and circumstances in which mobilisations develop. The thesis may have added some suggestions in this direction.
Chapter 1: A Discussion on the appropriateness of the methodology used.

1. Introduction.

This chapter will attempt to justify the methodological approach that has been followed in the research process. As a general consideration we can say that each research method used in the social sciences has, at least in theory, an intrinsic validity as an instrument to translate data into explanations and interpretations of the reality analysed. Studies on industrial and labour relations have used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse similar issues. For instance, Kelly (1998) has supported the validity of his mobilisation theory and of the rise in collectivism world-wide using long wave series and survey data, while this research aims to explain mobilisation relying more on workplace interviews. Other authors researching similar issues have preferred a different methodological approach, using in depth ethnographic case studies (see, for instance, Edwards and Scullion 1982, Batstone et al. 1977 and 1978). The existence of a plethora of different approaches to examine similar issues shows that there is no definite formula that defines the methodological approach to be used. The appropriateness of the method adopted has to be assessed on its coherence with the data available at the time of the project or that could be available and gathered during the temporal limits of each research assignment. Once this requirement has been satisfied, personal choices, opportunities and preferences of each
researcher also have an important role in shaping the methodology adopted.

Summarising, we could say that the appropriateness of a research method is justified and strengthened if:

- It is related to a specific methodological tradition in the field of study under consideration
- It is coherent with the aims and hypotheses of the research
- It is feasible in terms of data availability
- It is scientific and rigorous in terms of data collection and analysis

The development and selection of the methodological approach adopted in this research has been based on these principles. The research attempts to study workers’ mobilisation and management counter-mobilisation through an historical analysis of the events that occurred at FIAT and Renault, in the city of Córdoba, Argentina, during the period September 1996/May 1997. I have adopted a qualitative approach based on in-depth, unstructured interviews with workers, managers and unionists who took part in the events analysed. This latter method is in the tradition of the 1970's workplace studies and has been widely used in many fields of the social sciences (from sociology to social anthropology, from oral history to development studies) when investigating into the world of Labour. The use of unstructured interviews, in particular, seems better indicated to explain and analyse the subject under study. In workers' accounts,
mobilisation is represented as a unitary event, a whole undisrupted series of actions, apparently a single moment rather than a process. Because of this representation and to let the flow of workers' reconstructions follow its own rules, the use of unstructured interviews seemed to be the proper one. Limiting external interventions to few questions, I have obtained detailed accounts of what happened in the moment of mobilisation and on the base of these descriptions I have been able to detect and analyse specific turning points in the development of collective action and to give meaning to the theoretical categories used in the research.

The Renault factory has been used as a control case/comparison that has been developed alongside four thematic areas of enquiry: dynamics of mobilisations, solidarity and mobilisation, leadership, evolution and radicalisation. Renault did not show a level of conflict similar to that of FIAT, nonetheless it operated in the same political and social context and with a labour force sharing an identical labour culture. Why this did happen? Can we identify those factors whose alternative presence and absence has generated different results in the two cases? The comparison can certainly offer some elements to identify tendencies and, possibly, generalisations. However, on this latter point, caution is required, not just because the history of Argentina shows contradictory trends in the forms and models of mobilisations, but also because to identify "lessons" and "best practices" is often difficult. Certainly, the validity of data is also strengthened, together with interviews and comparison, by the use of documentary data on previous researches and analyses on other
geographical settings so as to cross examine and evaluate the overall findings. This is something that, considering the limit of a doctoral thesis, has been attempted in this research.

We should however admit that, despite efforts and accuracy, we could be able to reach just a relative level of objectivity and this is a common concern to all social sciences. We can nicely describe and explain mobilisation but this will always be just a picture of a bigger movie representing our journey toward an approximation to objectivity. Objectivity represents an aim and a target not just because the same concept, as is intended in the natural sciences, does not apply to the social world. Furthermore in the case of mobilisation and conflict, we cannot avoid considering that the social system surrounding us is unbalanced and unequal and this, inevitably, alters our perceptions and behaviours in social reality.

This brief introductory statement on the methodological approach used in this research needs to be explained and justified. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to do this, in particular grounding my discussion on: qualitative against quantitative methodologies, researching by interviewing, limitations of qualitative methods, validity and reliability of qualitative methods, issues of generalisation and some epistemological considerations on the way we can interpret mobilisation within social reality. In addition to these more theoretical considerations, a final paragraph will describe the problems encountered during the field work
and how data have been collected.

2. Quantitative or qualitative?

Emphasising the mutual exclusion of these two research approaches is probably misleading since research practice has often shown that quantitative and qualitative methods can easily co-exist and be mutually used as control tools of the research findings. For instance in development studies, where numerical data are often incomplete and not always representative of ethnic diversities, populations are studied using statistical data together with ethnographic methods (Fern and Jasper Ingersoll 1987). In international comparative studies of industrial relations it has gained increasing attention, also for researchers that adopt a more pronounced quantitative approach, to select statistical variables bearing in mind variations in meaning of the same concept in different countries (this is, for instance, the case of strikes and data on the measurement of unemployment). Recently, the influence of leadership in workers’ mobilisation and participation in union activities has been studied, relying alternatively on semi-structured interviews (Green, Black and Ackers 2000 and Darlington 2001), or on questionnaires (Metochi 2002), depending on the educational and professional background of the researchers. But in both cases preference for one method did not necessarily exclude the other, if we consider that also the theoretical foundation common to these researches (Kelly's mobilisation theory) is the product of an investigation based on both qualitative and/or
quantitative approaches. These examples can, indeed, prove that quantitative and qualitative methods should be intended as complementary. This seems particularly necessary in the current society that while stressing homogenisation and standardisation allows space for a renewed role of subject’s specificity in each social context.

Bearing this in mind, the dichotomy of qualitative/quantitative should, however, be maintained since it performs a very useful function. It helps to distinguish between two groups of methodological orientations that have, in turn, their origins in a clear cleavage in the general understanding of social phenomena. If we follow the framework proposed by Burrel and Morgan (1979) quantitative methodologies should be based on a realist ontology, on a positivist epistemology, deterministic in terms of human nature and deductive in scope, while, conversely, qualitative approaches should tend to be nominalist, anti positivist, voluntarist and inductive. These opposed categories echo the historical aspiration of the social sciences to reach the scientific status and transparency of natural sciences.

From a positivist perspective, Durkheim argued that social scientists should investigate social reality “in the same state of mind as the physicist, chemist or physiologist when he probes into a still unexplored region of the scientific domain” (as quoted in May 1997, p.?). There is undoubtedly a set of philosophical assumptions within which each social researcher feels more comfortable but, since we are investigating into aspects of human life and behaviours and not into natural/physical phenomena, a consistent amount of relativity is inherent in our activities.
whether the methodological approach adopted is qualitative or quantitative. In this sense I agree with Weick (1979, p. 52) when he states that we should be able to ‘think in circle’ and to intend mobilisation, I would like to add, as a circular process. This means to consider and to analyse the reality not as a static and monolithic entity but rather as a dynamic process where voluntarism/determinism and realism/nominalism interact with each other.

Social sciences are, always, to a certain degree an approximation and interpretation of human events. There is, I would argue, a constant state of conflict inherent in the nature and goals of these sciences. On the one hand, we can identify a tension toward the scientific status and objectivity of research methods which is, in turn, based on the illusion to reach the same tangible and testable results as the natural sciences. On the other hand it is recognised that we are, essentially, dealing, from a human being perspective, with phenomena belonging to human nature. This objective/subjective counter opposition is at the roots of the quantitative/qualitative debate within the social sciences.

It is useful for a better understanding of the different positions within the debate, and before the justification of my methodological stance, to summarise briefly some of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Qualitative research seems particularly indicated to investigate highly
sensitive social contexts. Sociology, Anthropology, and, to a certain extent, Industrial Relations aims to enter into and explain uncovered social interconnections and processes. In these settings a more individualistic approach is necessary and researchers operate, most of the time, through in-depth case studies and analyses. This method is for its own nature concentrated on the explanation of the particular and for this reason is open to criticisms because it does not allow for generalisations. This is, in turn, what can be obtained using surveys and questionnaires that, determining associations between variables, are able to depict a broader picture of the issues under investigation. Mitchell (1983), however, prefers to defend the validity of case studies and of qualitative methods, reformulating the concept of what we should intend for generalisation. He argues that there are different kinds of generalisations because different is the scope of each method. A qualitative analysis aims to uncover the causal links of social action, the “why” of social phenomena, while a quantitative analysis tends to represent social facts in a statistical manner, the “what” of social phenomena. The objective/subjective counter opposition which is at the roots of the quantitative/qualitative debate is here, once again, evident. The advantage of a certain method is at the same time, at least from the perspective of its critics, its worst disadvantage and a justification for the adoption of the alternative method: both seem to offer valid solutions to ground scientifically the research.

These considerations lead us to reformulate the question placed at the beginning of this discussion, that is whether, in research, we should adopt
a qualitative or quantitative approach. Qualitative and Quantitative are attributions that express tendencies and orientations within social scientists on the most appropriate methods able to create, transfer and diffuse scientific knowledge of a certain field of studies among the society (or, as often and regretfully happens, among other academics with similar interests). In this sense the distinction maintains its value. But if we want to avoid the generalisation that each method is valid in its own, we have to move to a specific research context and in relation to this justify the coherence of the methodological stance adopted with the research hypotheses formulated. Other researches in the same field and with the same method can further support our positions. The next paragraphs intend to review the validity of the qualitative approach, in particular, within studies on workplace industrial relations.

3. An overview of the qualitative approach in labour studies.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph the distinction between quantitative and qualitative method is not always clear. The difficulty of putting a clear demarcation line is also increased by the fact that it is not unusual in social sciences to elaborate new theories and assumptions working with a quantitative approach on secondary literature based on qualitative fieldwork and vice versa. Notwithstanding these problems of definition, we could say that workplace research in industrial and work studies has mainly tended to adopt a more qualitative approach. The following are examples of researches that have positively contributed to enrich the knowledge of the field of study under investigation.
In Argentina, labour movement historians (for instance Pozzi 1988, James 1988, Gordillo 1999) have often explained social protests and uprisings on the base of oral testimonies with direct protagonists of the events. The scarcity of documentary data on trade unions and political movements' activities, due to military repression, often imposed the reconstruction of history through this method. The work of Brennan (1994) on 20 years of labour conflict in the city of Córdoba is particularly relevant for this purpose. But also in Italy, Turin’s working class during fascism has been the subject of Passerini’s oral history research (Passerini 1984) and, more in general, there is an established tradition in oral history (see, among others, Thompson 2000, Yow 1994, Portelli 1991).

In Britain the Manchester School during the 1950’s and from the early 1970’s scholars of the Industrial Relations Research Unit at the University of Warwick have consistently contributed to imposing the ethnographic method in industrial relations research. Studies such as that of Edwards and Scullion (1982) on the social organisation of industrial conflict and the works of Batstone, Borastone and Frenkel (1978 and 1977) on shop stewards and strikes have consistently enhanced our understanding of conflict, accommodation and resistance within the workplace. The same approach is currently used to investigate similar issues within a global comparative perspective (Belanger, Edwards and Haiven 1994, Waddington 1999, Meardi 2000). The influential work of Burawoy is in the ethnographic tradition. He extensively worked on the labour process
and on workplace relations with the state (particularly in *The politics of production*, 1985) using participant observation in the analysis of the American workplace (1979) and later comparing factory regimes within capitalist and socialist economies.

The rapid expansion of multinationals and the introduction of new production technologies have, in turn, created new work and organisation practises (that commonly go under the label “lean production”). These changes have been, in the last decade, the material base for a vast academic production. Critical case studies research has been conducted on Human Resource Management (HRM) putting in evidence, in particular, the difference between theory and practice and that these managerial strategies are in reality more sophisticated forms of workers' control than an instrument for the achievement of the so called “*mutual gains enterprise*” (Kochan and Osterman 1994).

In the field of the sociology of labour we can refer to the ethnographic work of Beynon, and in particular to his *Working for Ford* (1984), and to Fantasia’s (1988), *Cultures of Solidarity: consciousness, action and contemporary American workers*. Both researches approach the issues of leadership, union representation and mobilisation through a direct participation (as in the case of Fantasia), or a deep involvement of the authors in the events described. Similar to this is also Linehart’s (1978) research on Citroen in France. These contributions, even if written in a historical context dominated at production level by Fordism, still represent
very important documents in the understanding of working conditions and workers' lives in big manufacturing industries. The shift in focus, from Fordism to Post Fordism, of current studies in the sociology of organisation did not change the confidence in the methodological approach (in Italy see, for instance, the works on FIAT of Bonazzi 1994 and Pulignano 1999). Last, but not least, we should mention the work of Touraine, in particular *Workers' Movement* (1987), and the French school of sociology of labour on trade unions and workers' movements.

4. Oral history and interviews.

The first problem concerning oral history is related to its meaning, since the same instrument, recorded or transcribed interviews, has been used by social scientists in different fields of enquiry. Life history, self-report, personal narrative, oral biography, taped memories, life review, are all words that have been used to basically identify this particular methodological tool that

"implies that there is someone else involved who inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memories, and records and presents the narrator's view" (Yow 1994, p.4).

This seems the base on which a common agreement on the meaning of oral history could be found. Ethnographers and anthropologists will then integrate in depth interviews with participant observation while quantitative sociologists may prefer to test it with aggregate data or surveys and historians with the analysis of documentary data from
archives. More, in general, it is probably the scope of each research that will give the answers to the question “how and why do I use interviews?”

As far as this research is concerned, the use of in-depth interviews is fundamental. Oral sources are the base for an historical, even if a recent history, reconstruction of conflict and mobilisation in a particular setting. From an historical point of view, in the case of the events that occurred in Córdoba during September 1996 and May 1997, the scarcity or the impossibility of accessing documentary data from both the company and the unions gave no other choice than the use of interviews as the base for the reconstruction of the events that occurred. The use of in-depth unstructured interviews has proved to be also the best instrument to achieve detailed accounts of the mobilisations analysed. As mentioned in the introduction, particularly in workers' reconstructions of the events, what happened was described as a whole whose parts almost naturally seemed bent together, an automatic succession of actions and agents. Because of this, efforts to direct and fragment the interviews according to the categories of the theory adopted would have been in vain and could have altered or confused the description of the events.

From a theoretical point of view, the specific issues under investigation, conflict and mobilisation, have to be studied, as tradition in the field has shown, from a methodological perspective that allows the investigation of motivations, identities and attitude of the people at work. On the one hand, the conflictual nature of the employment relationship, the need to
transform labour power into labour, does not always produce a state of constant conflict and workers' reaction to managerial control may vary from resistance to accommodation to consent (Edwards 1986). On the other hand, as Kelly suggests in his mobilisation framework, mobilisation is not an immediate consequence of the existence of conflict but a phenomenon that could be explained in presence of a diffused sense of dissatisfaction and injustice among workers within a context in which facts can be attributed to the action of a specific agent and where collective interest also has room for representation. Interviews allow us to observe more closely and intensively a subject’s perceptions, views and motivations. The interpretation of the data recorded in the interview and the possibility to interact (unobtrusively) with the interviewees, uncover hidden facts and causal connections (Gordon 1980). For these specific reasons this instrument seems the best methodological tool that can be used in this research.

I am here concerned, in particular, with unstructured interviews. This method tends to generate a discussion, to create room for interchange between interviewer and interviewee in which is likely to be produced that kind of knowledge on a subject’s perceptions, points of view and motivations necessary for the research. The fact that the interview is unstructured does not mean that the discussion does not have an underlying framework. The interviewees should be free to talk of the issues they consider more relevant, but the researcher is guided by his research hypotheses; otherwise we should be considered just as story
tellers, in the selection of general arguments around which the discussion can start.

"From general discussions on these matters it (is) possible to follow up specific aspects of them and, as always happens in this kind of research, (facts) which had not been thought in advance" (Edwards and Scullion, 1982 p. 18).

There is no one specific technique or procedure more valid than another in conducting this type of interview. We could cite and refer to many methodological textbooks (see, for instance, Thompson 2000) as useful to learn some of the techniques adopted by the most skilled researchers, but there is still a set of attitudes, codes of conduct, while interviewing, that are probably related to the sensibility of each researcher and just the fact of being involved in fieldwork can explain this. There is, indeed, a consistent amount of variables that can influence an interview. For instance, from the point of view of this research, the geographical setting and the nationality of the researcher matter. What is driving an Italian researcher to do historical research on conflict and mobilisation in an Argentinean plant owned by an Italian multinational? Prejudices, suspicions, misunderstandings are the unavoidable part of each research by interviews and in this case is confirmed, once more, the need to listen to the interviewee in a sensible, friendly and smooth way.

5. The validity and reliability of qualitative methods.

Thus far we have tried to justify the methodology used in this research
referring to other works in the same area of study using similar approaches and in parallel explaining the coherence of the method used with issues, hypotheses and subjects under study. This is just part of our assignment since internal coherence and tradition in the field of study are necessary but not sufficient to give solid consistency to our research findings.

When discussing the validity and reliability of qualitative methods and moreover of the methodologies in social sciences, a premise is necessary: there are no valid criteria that could give absolute scientific nature to our findings. As we have argued in the first paragraph, it is the intrinsic nature of the social sciences, the human dimension, which is object and subject of the study that do not allow us to reach an uncontested and demonstrable result. Nonetheless, all the criteria and methods that have been developed to reduce this approximation are of a fundamental importance, since they form the base of accepted knowledge in the social sciences.

Reliability and validity are interconnected and interdependent concepts. Reliability, as Gordon states,

"refers to the probability that an observation if repeated at a different time by the same person, or at the same time by another competent observer, will give the same results" (Gordon 1980, p.39).

In comparison to this latter concept, validity has etymologically (the term comes from the Latin word *validus*, strong) and in the common practice a stronger meaning. Reliability is a *conditio sine qua non* but not sufficient
for the validity of the research. This is particularly evident in cases in which the complementary nature of the relation reliability/validity becomes conflictive. This is likely to appear when the subject under investigation is of a particular abstract nature (as in this research workers' sense of dissatisfaction, injustice). Here reliability tends to decrease because "there is a strain between the true essence of the highly abstract construct and measuring it in a concrete manner" (Lawrence Neuman 1997). In these cases, common to the majority of qualitative research, a strict adherence to the concepts of validity and reliability as proposed by quantitative traditions could be confusing (Janesick 2000). A detailed questionnaire could give highly reliable measures but the validity of the data could be questioned for its deficiency in grasping the subjective essence of the concept.

Having agreed on the need to define some precise rules and procedures to obtain credible data as a precondition for validity, this does not solve the problems and the controversies on the same concept of validity that, among methodologists, still remains a discussed topic. Lincoln and Guba argue that what is questioned is not the necessity to develop or maintain rigorous methodological criteria but rather to reflect on the existence of a rigorous approach in our interpretation. "Can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?"(Lincoln and Guba 2000, p.179). From this post-modern position the issue of validity is strictly related to that of interpretation because that it is the way in which we interpret social
reality, whether we consider it objective, scientific or based on individual experiences, moments, emotions, that profoundly influence our understanding of validity.

"Social scientists concerned with the expansion of what count as social data rely increasingly on the experimental, the embodied, the emotive qualities of human experience that contribute the narrative quality to a life [...] (in order to) overcome the abstractions of a social science far gone with quantitative descriptions of human life and to capture those elements that make life conflictual, moving, problematic” (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.179).

Among other radical writers, Schwandt (1996) suggests that we should tend to abandon what he calls "critenology" and approach social research as a form of practical philosophy where knowledge is produced from moral critique. Richardson (1997), metaphorically, proposes the image of a crystal as a form to look at social realities and intends validity as an examination and interpretation of the many different faces the same crystal can assume.

Validity is not objectivity. There is always a high level of subjectivity and contextual elements that have to be taken into consideration and we are, probably, in condition, from our human point of view, to describe just part of a reality or, in the words of Hammersley (1992, p.50), we can represent but not necessarily reproduce reality. But this apparent weakness of the qualitative methodology is at the same time a powerful instrument of knowledge in specific contexts where the same protagonists of events
could have been, at their time, involuntary subjects of representations. Portelli, for instance, in his historical account of Terni’s workers' struggles in post war Italy, reports that almost half of the workers he interviewed, unequivocally, placed the killing of a worker by the police in 1953 when it is uncontested that the same event happened in 1949. In the words of the same author

"Oral sources are credible but with a different credibility[...] the importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism and desire emerge" (Portelli 1991, p.51).

The same argument could be used in the case reported by Weller (1994) of workers evidently not telling the truth.

Even though the concept of validity is, as we have seen, questionable, it remains essential to set criteria and procedures to test the validity of our findings. Methodologists from many fields of social investigation have offered solutions to this specific problem identifying different research procedures for different research techniques. As far as the case of interviews is concerned, particular importance is assumed by the selection of the sample of people that has to be interviewed. The selection is highly dependent on the nature of issues under investigation and on the case studied.

When the information we need is related to subjective orientations or personal opinions about events that everyone, in the specific group of
persons under investigation, knows, we should select randomly. In this case, assuming that the sample is representative, we could argue that the opinions of few tend to correspond to that of the entire population (Gordon 1980). On the contrary when the information we need belongs to the memories of certain specific persons, we are forced to build our sample so as to include in it as many informants as possible. This selection, of course, does not always provide true and authentic opinions of the facts we are analysing. As stated above in the case of Portelli’s workers, the representation of a reality does not necessarily correspond to the reality. Despite this evidence, there is a social value and cultural substratum embedded in this representation of “reality” which is extremely important to take into consideration especially when the research, as in this case, aims to investigate the motivational processes that could have generated workers' mobilisation.


Another very important issue that needs to be addressed is the generalisation of research findings. Can we extend the conclusions drawn from a specific case to similar settings and situations? The criteria commonly adopted in oral history and in research on social and political processes are based on the concept of saturation proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This principle is particularly useful in interviews since it gives a criterion to determine when the quantity of information obtained is enough to reach conclusions. Saturation means completeness, therefore.
Once the researcher is not getting, from his interlocutors, any new information or variety of interpretation of the same facts, there is no need to continue with interviews since this will be a repetition of what has already been obtained. In this case a saturation point has been achieved and the research could be considered as complete. If this stage has been reached we can be confident in the validity of what we discovered from the analysis of our case. However the issue of generalisation could be partly solved just through a comparison with other settings similar or dissimilar to the one previously analysed. If the findings of the two cases tend to show similarities, the strength of what is discovered increases, and generalisations (tendencies) might be established. This is true in the case of comparison with contexts presenting features totally opposed (for instance unionised vs. non unionised workplaces).

In the field of ethnographic workplace studies, in particular, five ways to generalise the lessons learned from case studies have been considered (Edwards 1992 and Belanger, Edwards, Haiven, 1994):

- The discovery of hidden forms of behaviour
- The identification of critical cases
- The exploration of causal mechanisms linking phenomena
- The explanations of variations
- The understanding of the nature and the sources of variation

These patterns of generalisation rest on a conceptual base that considers
qualitative research as the method oriented toward the explication of the analytical connections existing among social processes (see Mitchell 1983). In this perspective considerable emphasis, as a way to proceed to a scientific examination of the research hypotheses, is put on comparison with similar or dissimilar settings and on cross-country comparison. Undoubtedly the importance of comparison, particularly in studies of unionism and industrial relations, does not have to be underestimated. Hyman (2001), for instance, argues that we should use this latter method to give ground and general applicability to theories and to identify “lessons” and “best practices” (even if he questions, considering the distance between practice and theory, the compatibility of academic and practical motives for comparative research). But there is also the risk that “a research design featuring comparison substitutes the comparison for the case as a focus of the study” (Stake 2000, p.444). This position, while not undervaluing the importance and usefulness of research by comparison, refocuses our attention on the nature of case-study research and on the possibility of incoherence between this method of investigation and the space for its generalisation, as this is commonly intended. Stake supports the view of constructivists that there is a transfer, a creation of knowledge, in the dialectic relation researcher/reader. The translation into narrative and report operated by each researcher doing case research is perceived by readers and interpreted in a process of naturalistic generalisation.

"The reader comes to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced it. Enduring meanings come from encounter, and are
modified and reinforced by repeated encounter” (Stake 2000, p.442).

If we intend this process of “natural generalisation” as the base for a first generalisation of the findings of case study research it will be possible to restore the original function of this methodology as thick description (Geertz 1973), in-depth interpretation of particular contexts and situations. In this sense I agree with Stake when he criticises the improper use of comparison in actual case study research since it tends to cover and to decrease the importance of the knowledge we could extract from the single case:

“Comparison is a grand epistemological strategy, a powerful conceptual mechanism, fixing attention upon one or few attributes. And it obscures case knowledge that fails to facilitate comparison” (Stake 2000, p.444).

In conclusion, while the tendency to theoretical generalisation of qualitative research has to be emphasised, not less valuable have to be considered the insights coming from the in-depth analysis of each case studied. Regarding this research, particular attention has been placed in the selection of interviews so as to obtain, through a constant diversification, reliability and validity of reporting and analysing factual information. In addition to this and to strengthen the generalisation of the findings a direct comparative case, Renault Córdoba, has been used to control and test the hypotheses of the research. Furthermore, and within the same aims, documentary data (from the companies, unions, local and national newspapers) on the conflict have been used. Reference to historical trends of mobilisation in Argentina during the last 50 years is
also offered as a way to test the findings of the research.

7. Mobilisation and social reality

Mobilisation is certainly a social phenomenon of which we can take a nice and detailed picture and, if colours appear very clearly, we can also think that the same picture is very well representative of the social reality and that it deserves to be put into a (theoretical) framework. More analyses will then be added, our understanding of mobilisation will be greater, the picture will be much more detailed, we will know more about how and why workers act collectively. This dimension of knowledge, when an historical series of cases is put together as the thousands of pictures that make a movie, is the best way to proceed in our journey toward an approximation to objectivity.

Those who will read and comment on this research will probably accept this reconstruction, symbolised by the idea of a picture and a movie that the static and dynamic dimensions can respectively suggest. Yet there is a tendency in the social sciences and in case study research in particular to analyse processes of social interaction with too much attention to the technicalities and specificities of the case and this inevitably leads us to underestimate the whole picture. This does not mean that in the attempts to generalise the findings of our own research we should dismiss as irrelevant and exceptional the cases that present a different reality. The results of this research are ultimately the product of a comparison and
other "pictures" have also been taken into consideration.

But, often, the impression is that many things are taken for granted, are not considered because obvious and, it follows, the analysis of all this does not add much to what we already know. As far as mobilisation is concerned, I think of the "obvious" pressures the labour market constantly produces on workers, of the repressive methods used by enterprises all over the world, of the cultural values produced in a workplace in a global era. We should avoid dismissing these issues as "old" or ideological. All this points implicitly to a critic of the social system that we are living in; however critics are fundamental if research can contribute to a better society.

These considerations are important to establish our epistemological stance. Workers have always mobilised, everywhere, for different reasons, in different ways. We may have some suppositions about what's the common denominator of all these cases, we can show which factors, at least in our social system, favour or hamper mobilisations, we can establish differences and believe that subjectivity and objectivity both play a part in the determination of these social processes. But we cannot avoid emphasising that we live and reproduce a system that is profoundly unbalanced and that this influences our behaviours and perceptions of the social reality.

Refusing both mechanistic objectivism and marginalist subjectivism,
Bourdieu has expressed the following view:

"In the determination of the collective classification and the hierarchy of the fiduciary values set on individuals and groups, not all judgements have the same weight, and the dominant groups are able to impose the scale of preferences most favourable to their own products (in particular because they have a de facto monopoly over the institutions which, like the educational system, establish and guarantee ranks). Moreover, the representations that agents have of their own and other agents' position in social space (and also the representations they give of them, consciously or unconsciously, through their practises or their properties) are the product of a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is itself the incorporated product of a class condition (that is, a particular position in the distribution of material properties and symbolic capital)"

(Bordieu 1990, p.139-140).

8. How and what to compare?

We can say that comparison, more than a method in the social and natural sciences, is an almost spontaneous way to articulate our thoughts and ponder our judgements. Everyday, to different degrees, each of us engage in some sort of comparison, independently of whether this may concern the quality of food, the beauty of a landscape, job attitudes or politics. In the current global world the increased knowledge of societies and cultures
of previously geographical forgotten places, the tendencies of the world economy, migration, the homogenisation of consumption models, regional processes of integration, all contribute to the need for comparison (May 2001).

However, and especially in the social sciences, the boundaries of what should be compared may be uncertain, and the way to define the categories we want to use in the comparison, arbitrary. According to Hyman (2001), in cross-national research on trade unions, these problems may be circumscribed if a clearer understanding of the limits of social research is established. Going beyond nomothetic or idiographic perspectives, "we may identify an iterative process: through our inadequate attempts to understand the "peculiarities" of "the other", we can better appreciate our own uniqueness, constructing a basis for a better approximation to truly comparative knowledge" (Hyman 2001, p.223).

If in cross national comparison it may be difficult to identify analytical categories with similar meaning and common use in different national systems; in the other cases of comparison the risk is to use categories whose conceptual definition is not flexible enough to account for variations among cases or whose peculiarities do not allow for a systematic analytical understanding. Particularly when studying the social relations among people at work, the interaction of power, opportunities, agents, organisation, and interests may profoundly change from place to
place and differently influence collective action and workers identities. The unstable equilibrium between conflict and accommodation, structure and agency that characterises workplace relations is the most important reason for adopting a research method that, although comparative in perspective, "sensitizes the researcher to particular areas of study rather then providing specific hypotheses…….(and) permits a high degree of flexibility and the maximum collection of data in a form which can cater for the richness of social life" (Batstone, Borastone and Frenkel, 1977, p.13).

This kind of approach, that tries to maintain a strong interrelation between evidence, ideas and theories, focuses on a type of comparison constructed around thematic areas rather than on fixed rules and strict matches between the cases. The same idea seems to inform much of the academic production at the Warwick ER-RU during the 1970's but also more recent work, for example, by Darlington (1994) and Green (2001). Moreover not necessarily a systematic comparison offers elements for generalisation, having sometimes the knowledge produced by the case as an intrinsic value (es. Beynon 1984, Burawoy 1979), a comparability in historical perspective or, considering the issues under investigation, the potential for comparison with future research (Fantasia, 1988).

As far as this research is concerned, because of the subject under investigation and empirical data availability, the comparison between mobilisation at FIAT and Renault has to be intended not in terms of systematic matches between the cases but rather as asymmetrical. But
reflecting on the asymmetry between the cases, with FIAT showing an entire process of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation and a much higher level of conflict, means setting patterns of diversity among apparently similar cases (same production, workforce, and city) and establish causal links (Ragin 1994, p. 105-130).

Thus in the empirical chapters the cases will be developed around:

- the dynamics of mobilisation
- solidarity and mobilisation
- leadership and the consolidation of mobilisation

In the first section, comparing how differently the companies have mobilised will give us elements to identify the internal and external factors influencing the cases and this will contribute to spread light on workers’ perceptions of injustice and the role this latter should have in the theory of mobilisation. In the second section the transformation of solidarity from compañeroism (the cultural and social ties that are normally produced among people working in the same environment) into mobilisation is considered. This point may create problems depending on the way we intend the concept of solidarity. In the theoretical chapter solidarity is defined as a “process” with its basis in human beings' tendency for mutual help when involved in collective action and in joint production activities. If we assume that the abstract minimum for a definition of solidarity is an outcome belonging to the human condition,
we may then identify how dominating social relations alter and modify this basic experience and consequently in the cases analysed how specific factors have altered the possibility for workers to establish solidarity links. Following this perspective solidarity is analytically distinct from mobilisation but at the same time represents, even in its minimum form of compañeroismo, a necessary condition of the same mobilisation. In the third section, included in a separate chapter, the focus will be on the emergence of leadership and the effects of mobilisation considering exclusively the case of FIAT.

For a more precise understanding of the method used, in paragraph 9, “methodology in practice”, a list is provided of all the issues/subjects treated while interviewing people and in the annex is included the transcription of the entire interview with FIAT mobilisation leader.


This research intends to analyse from a historical perspective conflict, mobilisation and counter mobilisation in the plants that FIAT and Renault own in the outskirts of Córdoba. In the analysis the categories of dissatisfaction, injustice, solidarity, leadership, collective interest and mobilisation have been used as a methodological framework in the historical analysis of labour conflict in the plants during the period 1996/1997.
It is worth mentioning that these categories should not be considered as static and unchangeable. These have on their own a subjective dimension that powerfully influences the meanings people can attribute to the concepts. Dissatisfaction and injustice, in particular, change their essence in parallel to variations in ideologies. Each subject attributes to the same concepts a different colour depending on the idea of society he/she has and the objective political conditions of a specific moment. On the other hand, this subjective dimension and the influence produced on it by the ideological sphere has to be inserted within the employment relationship and the Argentinean context. These subjective/objective conditions have been taken into consideration while talking with people and justify the decision to conduct unstructured interviews. In particular, while looking at the different meanings and articulations of dissatisfaction/injustice, collective interest, leadership, mobilisation, the dialogue with the interviewees went through the following issues/arguments:

- Workers and their relations with the employer
- Workers and the socio-political environment
- Workers and the union
- Workers, leadership and activism
- Workers and the dynamics of mobilisation
- Managers and the dynamics of mobilisation

As far as issues of validity and reliability are concerned, special attention
has been given to the selection of the sample. In the case of research by interviews this could probably have been obtained building a random sample in the selection of the interviewees. The random sample has proved to be, as this method usually is, impracticable because the events investigated were very specific. Not all the workers necessarily participated in mobilisation or in all the phases of it. To overcome this problem all the interviewees have been selected, when possible, through a systematic diversification (generations, working position, and union affiliation) in both comparative cases. As will be evident from the empirical section of the thesis, in all the interviews quoted those who speak are males. It is legitimate to believe the thesis is gender blinded and that female opinions should have been added to the analysis. This can be considered a limitation of the whole research with which I am concerned. But unfortunately, and despite the efforts to add more balance in the gender distribution of interviews, female workers in the production sections of both plants were absent at the time of conflict. Consequently we have to consider that, with a mixed composition of the labour force, mobilisation patterns and managerial strategies may have been different.

FIAT's management allowed me to enter in the plant and to hold interviews with workers, middle managers and managers that took part in the mobilisation of 1996/1997. With workers in particular, when possible, interview meetings were held outside the plant in the facilities of the Fundación Milesi, at workers' houses or somewhere else where a long interview session was comfortable to be held. Another source of
information came from the independent union (SITRAMF) that established the representation of workers in the days of the mobilisation. Interviews have been held with the former secretary, union activists and ordinary members. A third source of information came from a group of people introduced to me by those already interviewed or by those who knew of my research. In the case of FIAT a total of 36 interviews have been collected among the three groups mentioned above that, according to the level of involvement in the conflict, can be defined respectively as the less militant (workers still employed), the more militant (activists) and the heterogeneous.

The Renault (CIADEA) factory of Córdoba has been used as a control case of the research hypotheses. This company did not show a level of conflict and mobilisation similar to that of FIAT, nonetheless it operated in the same political and social context and with a labour force sharing an identical labour culture. In particular, as previously stated, during November 1996 conflict at Renault followed patterns and times similar to that of FIAT. But in this latter case mobilisation continued soon after the opening of the new plant. Why did workers mobilise again at FIAT and not at Renault? Answers to this and other fundamental questions can be offered by the comparison. Sixteen interviews have been collected among workers of different departments and with different ages through already established contacts and the snowball effect. The interviews' structure and content were similar to that of FIAT and, in particular, special attention was given to workers' opinions on conflict and mobilisation in the
company different from the one to which they belonged to. Inviting workers to express their point of view on issues external to their company could help to test and to enhance the research hypotheses and the research findings in general.

Other interviews and/or informal discussions were held with reporters and people that had the opportunity, directly or indirectly, to be part of the mobilisation events. In all the cases interviews were approximately of one hour each and have been fully transcribed and recorded (transcript examples in the annex). When for technical or opportunity reasons this was not possible extensive notes were taken.

The validity of data has been strengthened also by the use of documentary data. In the case of FIAT, company's internal reports, security videos and press conferences have offered a different point of view of the event and more clarity on the strategy pursued by management during mobilisation and counter mobilisation. Archives of the local newspaper and of the university's television channel have also been scanned for references to the time of conflict, adding in this way a further perspective to the events analysed.

10. Conclusions.

This chapter has dealt with methodological aspects concerned with the current research. In our analysis we have considered the appropriateness
of the use of a qualitative, case study based on unstructured interviews, method as the one that best fits within the aims and the scope of the research. This conclusion has been reached through: an evaluation of other works in the same field of study using similar methods, the importance of interviews in the understanding of social motivational processes, the adequacy of the method as the only instrument to gather historical data relevant to the research issues, a detailed exposition of the interviews' style, selection method, total number and issues discussed during sessions with informants, a list of sources used in the data collection.

As far as the method in itself is concerned, as previously discussed, the issues of generalisation, validity and reliability of the research remain consistently influenced by personal/subjective interpretations. The concept of objectivity in social sciences is always, for its own nature, an approximation to reality. This seems particularly evident in a case of historical reconstruction of events and social decision-processes through unstructured interviews. This method involving a direct participation of the researcher in the collection and interpretation of data. In addition to this, a case study research tends to be concerned with the analysis of the particular.

Nonetheless the theoretical weaknesses of the method adopted, devices to increase the validity, reliability and generalisation of the findings have been outlined. In particular has been underlined the usefulness to establish some validity criteria in the selection of interviews and to identify a comparative case to test the research hypotheses. In the first case, and
considering the subject under study, we have followed the criteria of constant diversification of the interviewees. In the second case, and to extend the generalisation of our findings, the case of a similar factory, operating in the same environment and during the same time, has been used as a control case. Both criteria seem accepted and used among social scientists dealing with similar issues and this, together with accuracy and transparency (records of interviews) in the collection of data could help to strengthen and give credibility to the findings of the research and to depict a balanced picture of events and issues analysed.

1 At the time of conflict 1700 workers were employed by the company but less then 200 were still working when the data were collected. Many of those formerly employed were retired, jobless, emigrant and these situations, inevitably, created difficulties in the way interviewees were selected.
Chapter 2: Mobilisation and its theoretical foundations, between subjectivity and the inevitability of conflict.

1. Introduction.

This research is based upon a comparative analysis of how mobilisation and collective action have been produced within two different workplaces. There are three dimensions that we consider to explain mobilisation and collective action through empirical analysis. First, we should investigate how external social situations have produced the base for mobilisation and eventually conditions for demobilisation. Second, we should look at how workers and management have shaped their relations as a consequence of predetermined external conditions and in which sense mobilisation has also been determined by internal dynamics. Third, and most importantly, while studying social processes that produce struggles and collective actions, we should enhance our understanding of how actors have perceived those external and internal conditions that were changing their daily understanding of the workplace and employment relations. Within this latter dimension we should investigate, in particular, to what extent consciousness, solidarity and leadership have strengthened workers' mobilisation and provided a base to resist employer's repression.

This framework for analysis should be maintained even when our attempt is to build a theoretical foundation on the base from which further to
develop and ground empirical data. It does not seem superfluous to stress this point since the danger is to offer detailed, empirical accounts that do not allow for any type of generalisation or artificial and fictitious connections between Grand Theories and concrete realities. The complexity of workplace relations and the study of them in a context of mobilisation justify the search for a theoretical background that could be flexible and varied enough to account for the "in progress" social processes that the study of mobilisation implies. In this research a series of theoretical debates and positions are used as a framework, as a direction in the development of the issues analysed and as reference points in the discussion of empirical data.

Considering the three dimensions of analysis mentioned above, the following paragraphs focus on the theory of mobilisation, on studies of conflict at work and on issues of consciousness, solidarity and action. Kelly's theory of mobilisation offers both a set of categories (dissatisfaction, injustice, leadership, repression), through which social processes at work can be analysed and a more general view of society as a totality, that provided by Marxist analysis, within which the cases of this research can be explained. Theories and studies addressing the concept and function of conflict in the workplace and on behavioural patterns of labour/management relations, help us to understand the contradictory nature of the employment relationship and the consequences this has for collective action. Issues of consciousness, solidarity, collective action and their interrelations are fundamental in the study of mobilisation. This
study is based on the idea that workers structure their perceptions and identities, the cost and opportunity of collective action, their organisational resources and their capacity to resist counter mobilisation around the level of consciousness and solidarity achieved in and through the struggle. This may appear and, in part, is a circular argument, with collective action dependent on the level of subjects' consciousness and perception which in turn depends on collective action. However my point here is not to determine which one comes first, but rather to underline the mutual interrelation and influence that moments of struggle have on workers' consciousness of current or future struggles. My argument here is referred to the ways the same dynamic of mobilisation acts on those who mobilise.

The three theoretical sections mentioned above have been written, on one side, with the aim to maintain a direct connection with the levels of empirical analysis; and on the other side with the idea of offering an understanding of mobilisation as a process whose determination has both a subjective and an objective dimension. Based on this, the first part of this chapter is concerned with mobilisation theory and presents a critique of the category of injustice by arguing that the concept is subjective and volatile and that a reconstruction of mobilisation as a process based exclusively on injustice is reductive. Injustice, in my view, is just one form of subjective intervention whose importance remains unquestioned in shaping workers' grievances and, eventually, in maintaining action, but not as a basis for mobilisation.
Once it is assumed that injustice alone does not explain what has produced mobilisation, the theoretical discussion moves to the sphere of objectivity. The second part of the chapter intends to look for "objective" rules and/or for the possibility of identifying general tendencies in the ways workplace conflict has presented itself and has been investigated. By arguing that under capitalist labour relations, conflict is a general feature and that there is a constant dialectic between working class struggles and the way the system adapts and changes itself, some objective conditions are set, whose influence on the process of mobilisation has to be taken into consideration.

However, the identification of some objective, historical and theoretical directions in the ways workplace conflict has evolved is not sufficient to explain why in a specific case mobilisation has happened. In the last part of this chapter both structuralist and post-structuralist interpretations of the reality are critically reviewed and subsequently, according with the work of several authors who have studied mobilisation in workplaces, a point is made for the importance of solidarity and the need to conceptualise it. It is necessary to look at the reality of the workplace as something in which a constant interrelation of objective conditions, depending on the fluctuation of the market economies and on the institutional factors produced by the same system, and subjective interventions are at work. In other words there are moments in which the inevitability of the daily reality, the impossibility of changing the system
of rules at work and of influencing the social system into which we are inserted, become questioned. In these moments there are "eruptions" of subjectivity, more space for solidarity, and the system is contested.

The importance of studying mobilisation in specific settings and in a comparative way, relies certainly on the need to understand its different dynamics and effects. But, more fundamental, is to identify those elements that have opposed and/or triggered mobilisation and to establish under which conditions the same elements have operated differently. This can give, in turn, insights into those moments in which systems are contested.


John Kelly’s mobilisation theory put together the result of the work done by North American social movements’ theorists and in particular Tilly (1978), McAdam (1988) and Gamson (1992, 1995) on collective action and social conflicts. Central to Kelly's theory is a Marxist vision of economy and society. This is also common to Tilly which is, with the exception of Kelly, the only one who explicitly bases his model of mobilisation within this theoretical framework, even if concessions to Mill and Weber exist when he recognises that the analysis of certain political processes and interests could be read in a form not directly connected with class conflict (Tilly, 1978, p.48). An explicit reference to Marx and his vision of society is important because it sets the basis around which a
"theory" of mobilisation is possible offering the categories of interests, dissatisfaction and injustice solid boundaries for their interpretation. As we will see later in this section, the works of McAdam (1988) and Gamson (1992, 1995) provide useful categories for the analysis of mobilisation as social process but are flawed over the problem of establishing a connection between micro contexts and macro political conditions.

In Marx's view the organisation of production is the starting point in understanding society and, with it, the possibilities of collective action, which is seen as emerging from a class conflict on the disposal of the means of production. In his view political action is collective and rational. Within this broad perspective, Tilly identifies interest, organisation, mobilisation, opportunity and collective action as the conceptual basis for a theory that aims to explain why people act together and the potentiality social groups have to engage in collective action.

Interest is interpreted by Tilly (1978) in a way that immediately draws our attention to the relation between individual and collective interests. He starts recognising that Marxists have, often, tended to define interests a priori on the base of the social relations to the means of production and that other theorists have too closely related to groups' concrete actions as the only way to detect these latter interests. To overcome these positions he proposes to operate a distinction between short and long term run interests analysis. In the first case interests could be better defined by
groups' concrete actions while in the second case the social relations of
production should assume a more important role. In other words there is a
sort of overlapping between individual and collective interest that
consequently affects collective action.

“We should deliberately treat the degree of conflict between individual
and collective interests......as increasing the cost of collective action to
the individuals and to the group as a whole” (Tilly, 1978, p.62).

As this dichotomy and overlapping between individual and collective
interests and the cost for collective action of the mediation among these
two categories implies, it also represents the basis around which McAdam
(1988) develops his argument. For the author the couple
individual/collective and the social mediations underlying it, is reflected
in the micro/macro conditions for collective action. Although he
recognises the importance that macro political conditions (regime crisis,
political opportunities, absence of repression, and politicisation of private
life) have in the generation of a social movement, he is mainly concerned
with the forms through which subjects start to believe that a situation or
relation is unjust and that it could be changed. He identifies, following
Piven and Cloward (1979), three moments in which a change in
consciousness, a “cognitive liberation” is produced:

The system loses legitimacy

People begin to assert rights and to demand change

People perceive that a change in their condition is feasible (personal
This individual change in consciousness, the cognitive liberation, is favoured by improved political conditions that while altering the status quo, provide insurgents with an alternative to what they believed was a legitimate system of rules. This causal connection has undoubtedly the advantage of underlining the role each individual plays in the understanding and mediation of his/her social reality, but it does not provide with a satisfactory explanation. It remains still unanswered why political conditions change. In which moments can this change happen? Which factors influence the political level?

Opinions are not uniform and Marxists claims that economic crises and class conflict can contribute to the understanding of the logic of politics have been highly criticised. The same concept of class, in particular, has been contested from a post-modern perspective. The passage from Fordism to Post Fordism and the informatisation of production have reduced the importance of manufacturing and agricultural workers. This, together with the ability of companies to produce more, faster and with fewer employees, has put into question the role of the working class as promoter of social change. In Bauman's (1998) view capitalism needs people more as consumers then producers and this change involves reconsidering on which elements to build a new anti-capitalist alliance. At the same time these perspectives, denying the actuality of class, are contested on the basis of the fact that class is nowadays hidden in gender
and ethnic differences and that work is decentralised rather than disappeared (Aronowitz and DiFazio 1994). In the theoretical field a reconceptualisation of class is proposed from different parts (see for instance, Edwards, Belanger and Wright 2002, Wright 2000, LabourAgain debates 2003). Even against those who support the view that class and workers have currently not much importance, in Latin America, for instance, popular mobilisations in the last years have been led by alliances of traditional trade unions confederations, rural workers and the unemployed. In Brazil a former trade unionist and leader of the Workers' Party has been elected to the presidency of the Republic. These trends in the levels of workers' mobilisation were also typical, more generally, of popular protests during the 1980's and 1990's (Eckstein 2001).

The existence of class, its capacity to mobilise and the extent to which talk about class conflict is currently a valid interpretation, may be questioned. Despite these opinions, an emphasis on political change and on the causes that could have provoked it is still fundamental to understanding issues of mobilisation.

At the same time, returning to McAdam's analysis, this is not to argue that a cognitive liberation does not exist at all. Individuals do not immediately perceive their sense of belonging to a class or opposed group. This is in part a consequence of the repression, that acts on individuals restricting the room for solidarity, and in part because their lack of access to the means of production and their need to survive imposes the acceptance of
rules and systems of dominance on which they have scarcely any influence.

These assumptions have direct consequences for the way we understand the categories of dissatisfaction and injustice and if these exist as such. Kelly is correct in underlining the importance ideologies have in the way people understand social reality and feel "cognitively liberated", but he does not explicitly consider that the influence of ideologies has to be detected in all the three instances of cognitive liberation mentioned by McAdam: the system loses legitimacy, people begin to assert rights and demand change, people perceive that the moment offers opportunities to change their conditions (personal efficacy).

The breach of existing rules or of consensual social values by management, for instance, is possible at a time when a system, along with its codes of written and oral rules, loses legitimacy. Macro political changes (regime crisis, political opportunities, absence of repression) can offer workers the possibility to interpret their conditions and rights fixed by the employment contract in a more open and favourable way because they can perceive that solidarity for their action is widespread. In a generalised political and social opposition to labour flexibility, an employer's decision to violate established rules (for example, traditions of workers' protection), putting into practise new flexible contracts, undoubtedly offers support to workers' reaction. But in many countries, during the Second World War, managerial control over the labour process
was strict and authoritarian and, most of the time, respect for established rules (e.g. overtime, workers representation) was neglected. In the majority of cases nationalistic and patriotic propaganda supporting the war efforts on the front line and on the assembly line imposed socio-political conditions not favourable to insurgency and protest. How many times have workers been forced to accept reduction of labour rights, salaries, union representation? Did they always feel managerial violations as unjust?

Moreover how should we interpret variations in salaries within the same country or geographical areas? For instance, workers employed by multinationals in new decentralised areas of Brazil are paid consistently less and show low levels of conflict if compared with their counterparts in old industrial districts (see Fiat in Minas Gerais and VW in Resende). The same can be said of Spanish workers whose salaries are inferior to those of their German colleagues. These cases cannot certainly give the opportunity to establish a sort of general theory of justice based on equal salaries around the world but can put in evidence how the definition of a situation as unsatisfactory and/or unjust cannot be evaluated just in money terms and that mobilisation should be rather intended as a social process built around a determination of what are the needs of a certain group of workers/people. The level of what they consider as necessary for their lives, in a certain society and considering the levels and differences of redistribution, geographical location, historical moment, are as well what can define their level of tolerance. Within this perspective, injustice is a
manifestation of the impossibility to satisfy all those needs, concerning both the material reproduction and the social/cultural achievements that a specific society creates with its development.¹

Barrington Moore Jr. (1978) analysed in detail different societies in different historical contexts to reach the conclusion that a sense of injustice is inevitable if a state of "social reciprocity" has to be re-established. In his conclusions reciprocity assumes the meaning of "mutual obligation, a term that does not imply equality of burdens or obligations" (Barrington Moore Jr. 1978, p.459). Assuming that reciprocity does not mean equality he recognises that within societies the tendency is to protect individual and group's interests and that this attitude has inevitably created an acceptance by certain groups of subordinate positions.

"People are evidently inclined to grant legitimacy to anything that is or seems inevitable no matter how painful it may be. Otherwise the pain might be intolerable. The conquest of this sense of inevitability is essential to the development of politically effective moral outrage (injustice)" (Barrington Moore Jr., 1978, p.459).

In order for people to feel aggrieved they should start to question the concept of inevitability of a system or a social arrangement, the social contract on which reciprocity is rooted. It is possible to argue that he is, implicitly, attributing to ideologies the power to change social perceptions of the sense of injustice.
Also, on the basis of these considerations, we can say that the concept of injustice is extremely volatile and subjective. People tend to adapt and accept a changed situation in many different ways and the limits of tolerance vary depending on the ideological position of each one, the economic conditions of the moment, the priority in the life of each person. Workers develop needs that are dependent on and are the product of a specific society and this implies that a reflection on the concept of injustice and the limit of tolerance to it is an endless exercise without a consideration of the objective social conditions within which subjects are inserted. Injustice is a self-evident concept, is too common and at the same time serves to justify feelings that often do not have any relation with a mobilisation. It creates confusion. It is pleonastic to think that people before a mobilisation have to feel somehow affected, of course they are. But considering injustice as the starting point for reflection is probably misleading and to think about a mobilisation as a process which has its base in the concept of injustice does not help to understand more in the process of collective action. The empirical part of this research, for instance, will show that workers become conscious of how “unjust” a certain situation is once action has already started, once collectively they can share and strengthen the same perceptions. We should then investigate the emotions, sensations and beliefs of the actors and the way they process them as built and made explicit in the moment of collective action and not before. There are no mechanical, predetermined movements from injustice to mobilisation: but it is the status of mobilisation, the action in itself, that allows a “conscious” injustice and consequently an operative and cohesive
function of it within the whole process of mobilisation. This does not necessarily mean that without collective action injustice does not exist at all, the sentiment can be to different degrees perceived but is dominated by the acceptance of the inevitable, the actor has already processed the changed situation and has accepted it, willingly or not.

Within this line of argumentation we also have to understand the relations between dissatisfaction and injustice. Workers' vulnerability to employer's decisions on redundancies, wages, working time, productivity, discipline in the workplace comes from the fact that "objectively", by contract, workers are selling, with their labour power, their right to dispose of it during and within the limits defined by the employment relation. There could be, using Barrington Moore, a sense of inevitability of their conditions depending on the fact that a contract binds them. Moreover, workers often depend on their employment to survive and have to accept compromises, especially in moments of economic recession, with the system. Due to their position in the employment relation workers can, and have to, tolerate a certain degree of dissatisfaction if their relation with the capitalist system is not seriously questioned. In this perspective injustice, if we really want to look at it as the basis around which a collective interest can coalesce, appears as a variation of the same concept of dissatisfaction but not as a theoretically different one. Injustice may be seen as the moment in which tolerance and acceptance of the compromise with the system is no longer sustainable, when too many violations (both to rules and social values) have been perpetrated. It is then the extent to
which workers are prepared to tolerate their subordinate position that determines the emergence of injustice.

For this analysis the use of the concept of injustice is misleading. Injustice does not have any abstract and predetermined form, it is a general concept that does not refer to anything specific in the employment relationship, it varies in different historical moments and geographical places, it is volatile and fundamentally mobilisation does not depend on it. The cases of this research, for instance, show that it is action that gives meaning to a sense of injustice specific to the situation of conflict. Injustice becomes explicit in action when is collectively shared and that is why it does not make any sense to consider it as the base in a theory of mobilisation. In addition to this and as a general consideration, the impression is that, by emphasising and analysing mobilisation as the result of the sum of individuals' sense of injustice, we may lose the collective nature of the same mobilisation and with it all those moments of collective determinations on which all social conflicts are necessarily based.

The fact that a reference to a sense of injustice, intended as a subjective element in a process of mobilisation, does not satisfactorily explain why people mobilise, creates the need to look at some objective determinants. This means, in the case of formal workers in particular, to reflect on the way to understand the nature of the employment relationship, to analyse the role of conflict in it, to establish the needs around which workers constitute and place themselves within the system.
3. Conflict in the workplace, the nature of the employment relation and workers' needs.

In a capitalist system "the capacity to work is thus bought and sold, rather like fruit and vegetables (though unlike fruit and vegetables, workers can band together and at times stand up and fight)" (Hyman 1975, p.19).

"Conflict: the demon that I tried to exorcise through several chapters of countless statistical analyses, through patient reconstruction of the historical record, through a sympathetic ear for the words of many of the participants, through careful mapping of causal arguments, is back, and back with a vengeance, with the passion and anger of the participants, with all the disruptive power of massed numbers (not those of statistics but those of mobilisation). Of conflict I would have expected no less" (Franzosi 1995, p.343).

We can argue that conflict is still at the heart of industrial relations studies both if we consider it as a manifestation of workers' emancipatory potential or as a reality that we can control and eventually eliminate. The impression is that much of the academic debate over the last three decades has been developed around these two main ideological poles with the interest of many researchers shifting, particularly in the last decade, from a Marxist/Labour to a realistic/managerial agenda, from class and class struggle to the paraphernalia of human resource management, from social
sciences to business analyses. But the centrality of conflict remains. In fact, and despite this shift, what goes under the label human resource management, on one side seems to underline the need for participation, co-operation, between management and labour for the benefit (profitability) of the firm and the "mutual gain" enterprise (Kochan and Osterman 1994). But on the other side is an attempt to freeze conflict and eliminate collective action from the employment relation (Lewchuk and Robertson 1997, Harley 1999) or undermine the position of unions as principal organisers of discontent and mobilisation (Milkman 1997, Bacon and Blyton, 1999).

Nevertheless conflict remains central not just because HRM has often proved to be more rhetoric than reality (Legge 1995) but also because even the most successful cases of labour management integration and employee involvements have not resisted market crisis and increased global competition (Waddington 1999). Globalisation has imposed faster rhythms of production, flexibility of the labour force, application on a world wide scale of similar production methods and geographical dispersion of productive sites, as well as a renewal of workers' struggles. Korea, Brazil, South Africa, India, Argentina, Bolivia, for instance, have shown high levels of workers' and unions' mobilisations against privatisation, redundancies, reduction of labour rights, discrimination (see Panitch et al, Socialist Register 2001, Moody 1997, Waterman and Munck 1999).
But is conflict central to our understanding of mobilisation because it is the nature of the employment relation to be in itself conflictive? Or should we rather look at market crisis and capitalist competition, and the effects these latter have on working conditions, as those turning points in which labour management relations become contested?

Starting our discussion from a theoretical point of view, the emphasis on labour as a commodity and its consequent treatment as cost within the logic of capitalism, seems hard to be contested and this, paradoxically, for both Marxists and neoclassical economists. Differences emerge just in terms of which consequences should be drawn and aspects of the relation emphasised but not on the nature of it. Whether the stress is on exploitation and social change or on the pragmatic need to consider human relations as exclusively inserted within the logic of market economy, labour is always considered as a commodity.

If we accept that in the market economies the logic of profit dominates enterprises' decisions, employees have to be considered as one of the costs in the business process, a cost that can be reduced, flexibly used, optimised to the needs of the firms. The fact that labour can be sold and bought is not just part of the social environment surrounding subjects in societies (as the existence of a labour market reveals), but has also been codified in a contract, a supposed free space of negotiation, among two parties. Even historically labour has been treated as a commodity and it has been around the need to defend its value that trade unionism emerged.
as organiser of workers' mobilisations. But those who sell their labour power, are selling with it not just the capacity for their material reproduction but are also trying to satisfy a set of needs whose limits and contents vary depending on the society within which workers achieve their social development (Lebowitz 2003). Behind the image of a free contract, there is a fundamental difference between the interests pursued by the employers and those of workers. We can say that both tend to reproduce themselves, (physically and socially in one case and economically in the other), but going in opposite directions.

The idea of a basic opposition is shared also by a materialist perspective that, trying to overcome Marxists' paradigms, sustains the view that "capitalism is exploitative in that surplus value is generated under the constraints of the accumulation process" (Edwards 1986, p.321) and thus that a "structured antagonism", a notion which avoids the view that capitalists and workers are always opposed classes supporting totally different interests, is the term that "refers to the basic split between capital and labour" (Edwards 1986, p.55). It cannot be objected that conflict is not always open and that workers and managers often find forms of coexistence and mutual adaptation and that their concrete targets can also overlap. Moreover, even from a statistical point of view, conflict is not something that happens daily nor is exploitation in terms of surplus value extraction for workers a self-evident concept. Yet in an historical perspective labour conflict has been a constant feature of capitalist societies that have changed and adapted themselves under the pressure of
working class protests (Hobsbawm 1995). The same idea of an industrial relations "system", with its codes, actors, agreements and regulations, demonstrates the need to institutionalise conflict and to find secure channels into which to manage labour-capital relations both at workplace and national level. Conflict exists but has to be regulated.

As far as the study of mobilisation is concerned, we cannot avoid considering conflict as a dominant feature of the employment relation. This emphasis does not imply making an apology for conflict and for workers' subjectivity as necessarily conflictual but stresses the fact that the mechanism around which the employment relationship is built and the requirements of the form of production determine the creation of contradictions. It is not just the existence, from a more abstract perspective, of a "structured antagonism" between labour and capital that has to be taken into consideration. This situation goes together with the fact that the boundaries of workers' obligations within the employment contract are never easy to define. In fact, despite working conditions and tasks being apparently intended as a free space of negotiation (a contract among two parties), the lack of alternatives in the labour market many times does not offer other possibilities than accepting the conditions imposed by the employer. This situation generates in response a condition of "inevitable" (using Barrington Moore) subaltern position on the part of the wage labourers both in society and in the workplace. In this latter context, for instance, the employer's right to dispose of the labour force and the management right to manage are rarely questioned. The same
unavoidable reality of a labour market imposes the acceptance of conditions decided autonomously by the impersonal law of the market. Workers can be redundant and accept this passively or act collectively in defence of their rights. State repression/intervention and managerial strategies can reduce the possibility of collective action and workers are not always willing to be involved in such actions because their salaries depend on the possibility of maintaining their employment. But nonetheless different outcomes, the fact that workers depend on a salary to live and that this is conditioned by the logic of profit that dominates the system, implies that there is always a state of potential conflict.

Empirically, as mentioned before, both co-operation/conflict, and adaptation/resistance, appear alternatively. These patterns are the natural consequence of the position in which workers are forced by the organisation of production at the workplace and beyond this at the level of society. Because of this workers have to accept compromises, reductions in demands, co-operation with the employer. Hence, as Burawoy (1979) suggests, this condition of dependency and subordination and the need to achieve some rights and gains from their position often helps to incorporate workers in their own exploitation.

It should be clear from the discussion developed until now that by emphasising the centrality of conflict I am not arguing that other forms of labour/capital relations do not exist. It is exactly the contrary because if conflict exists, it is to contest and change a specific social arrangement
previously assumed as "normal" reality. The point is that theoretical and
historical arguments and workers' position within the capitalist system,
justify considering conflict as an unavoidable feature in the workplace.
Conflict is inevitable, mobilisations representing one form of it, not
because social revolution is at the door but because the system has always
developed and has been shaped by the influence of the dialectic and
contradictory labour/capital relation. And of conflict, as Franzosi has
pointed out, we would have expected no less.

But in order to understand the centrality of conflict it is also fundamental
to reflect on what we should consider as "workers' needs" and the inner
connection these have with the way the capitalist system develops. A
recent book by Lebowitz (2003) tries to address these issues, starting from
an analysis of Marx's work inspired by the idea that the book on Wage-
Labour, although planned and scattered in other texts, was never written.
Together with this a renewal was necessary to underline the deficiencies
of the theory for both its faith in a social revolution that never happened
and for its silence over the struggles for women's emancipation, cultural
identities and life's quality.

Three sets of workers' needs can be identified: physiological, necessary
and social. The first group refers to the physical reproduction of the
human being, the second concerns those requirements that have already
entered in human life as the product of uses and customs, the third
represents the upper level of needs created by the developments (cultural,
technological, intellectual and the physical means to achieve it) of a given society in a given time. Considering capitalist relations of production, a capitalist structure of needs can be as well assumed on the side of capital: the need for valorisation and surplus value. Due to the fact that workers as consumers are limited in this activity by what they earn with their wages, there will always be a certain amount of social needs that will remain "hidden" and unrealised. According to Lebowitz, "there is, thus, a critical difference, a gap, between the need for commodities in the market at a given point and the genuine social need........"the difference between the quantity of commodities that is demanded and the quantity that would be demanded at other money prices or with the buyers being in different financial and living conditions" (Lebowitz 1992, p.27).

Wage increases provide workers with the means to access and consume those social needs that before were hidden just as if we assume that the same needs remain constant. But, as in particular the most developed economies can show, capitalism has in itself the capacity to generate new products, new consumers, new wealth and new needs. These latter in turn constitute "a real moment of economic life insofar as they pre-exist the purposeful activity on the part of workers to posit those social needs as necessary, i.e., insofar as they determine the actions of wage labourers. In short, the existence of unfulfilled social needs underlies the worker's needs for more money....... but, that, of course, involves a struggle for higher wages. To
realise unsatisfied social needs involves a struggle in the "opposite direction" to capitalists" (Lebowitz, 1992, p.30)

We can argue that the struggle for social needs can assume different forms considering the levels of development of a certain society and the means workers have to support their demands. If we take the case of Argentina, formal workers will probably go on strike while piqueteros will block the main roads, the first group will ask for salary increases, while the second will demand a job or the means through which its material reproduction can be guaranteed. The level of social needs to which each group tends can be slightly different, depending on the degrees of marginalisation and the lack of access to social development, but fundamentally what they are struggling for (often in alliances) is the satisfaction of those social needs (if not necessary needs) that are present in a given society and at a given time. In the case of advanced capitalist countries, although differences among social classes remain, the emphasis on needs reveals how workers have achieved through decades of struggles better living conditions than those existing in the first industrial factories. Yet the evolution of the system, producing more wealth and more goods, creates new social needs and a gap between what is desired and what can be achieved.

From the perspective of social needs many cases of conflict in the formal sector could be explained as well. The differences between what is promised or expected and the harsh reality of the law of the market, increases in the production rhythms, fragmentation of working time, stress
on the job can be all seen as situations that generate the impossibility of satisfying (both in terms of lack of money, time and freedom of enjoyment) those social needs regularly produced in our societies. Consequences in terms of mobilisation can be expected. Thus the implementation of flexible contracts and working conditions that changed pejoratively previous conditions of employment has, as in one of the cases of this research, provided the spark for mobilisation among a workforce not used to conflict. Barchiesi (1998), drawing examples from the South African automotive industry, concludes that flexibility can provoke conflict also when the expectations of greater workers' control raised by its ideological propaganda are associated with authoritarianism in the workplace. Tuckman (1994) argues that HRM practises, and TQM in particular, generate harsh relations between labour and management. Unions’ non involvement in the new "mutual gains" enterprise could provide the basis for future conflicts (Milkman 1997, Bacon and Blyton 1999).

In many of these cases the paradox is that the same factor, a precise managerial strategy thought of as a way to individualise labour relations and avoid or "freeze" the conflict, produced in reality the opposite effect. Again we find conflict on our road: labour relations were once "conflictual and antagonistic", today not much has probably changed but all efforts are made and strategies are implemented to avoid open conflict. Conflict exists by its negation.
4. Objective and subjective reconstructions of consciousness and collective action.

The distance between subjectivity and objectivity recalls the gap often existing between theory and practice. Epistemologically, subjectivity is not practice and objectivity is not theory but once we try to describe and analyse social reality we naturally swing from one side to the other looking for a case that could fit in a theory and for a theory that could explain the case. This dialectic profoundly enriches our knowledge of social reality.

If we look at how the subjective/objective dimensions have been analysed with respect to labour and workers we can find concrete examples of the polarisation we have mentioned above. From the perspective of structuralism, subjectivity acquires a secondary role since subjects fundamentally react to an objective situation of social relations based on labour exploitation by capital. For the post-structuralist, rational individuals and not structures are central in the understanding of societies.

Both perspectives should be abandoned in the light of the criticisms received and the evidence available. Structuralism has usually been related to many orthodox Marxist/Leninist accounts of societies and of the predestined mission proletarians should have in a future emancipated and capital-free social system. Two hundred years of capitalism and the failure of real socialism, and of revolutionary parties with it, represent just part of
the evidence that could be used to criticise a notion of subjectivity as rooted around issues of false and true consciousness (Lukacs 1971). With this distinction there is also an implicit recognition that a sort of objective, pure and natural form of consciousness already exists and that those forms of acceptance of capitalism have to be seen as deviations, maybe to be corrected by illuminated intellectuals, of unconscious minds. The compartmentalisation of consciousness into "true" and "false" does not take into account all the processes of subjective mediation that take place in a specific working environment and of the pressures and practical necessities that the capitalist system imposes on subjects. At the same time, it does not explain why conflict often emerges out of a direct connection with a clear workers' understanding of social relations of production. Turner's ethnographic account of Japanese workers mobilisations stresses a notion of consciousness and solidarity as the combination of experience as much as ideology and as the result of discursive as well as non-discursive knowledge. "In my experience, people analysed not only their social world and its forms and actions but their own ideas about such things as well. I emphasise the non discursive to balance a too often unbalanced picture of thought and action" (1995, p.18). Fantasia (1988), in his analysis of workers' mobilisation in USA, adopts the term "cultures of solidarity" to give account of forms of consciousness and solidarity that cannot fit within a predetermined, objective notion of them. In the cases presented we can see how action is taken as the result of the interaction of formerly established cultural and identity relations among a workforce not used to conflict. Within a similar
perspective, Aronowitz, criticising the view that all social phenomena have to be seen as functions of capital, argues "for the relative autonomy of labour, culture and consciousness within the broad framework of Marxist theory of capitalist development" (Aronowitz 1992, p.83) and considers subjectivity as having "a material basis within the process of production" (Aronowitz 1992, p. 103). In the cases of FIAT and Renault, solidarity can be similarly understood as something naturally emerging from shared cultural and identity patterns. Workers summarised this as compañeroismo, the fair relations normally established in the workplace with your colleagues.

But consciousness and workers' understanding of their position within the broader society rather appear as post mobilisation achievements and this invites us to look at how other factors acted to motivate collective action and to think about the potential that experience can have in radicalising workers' opinions.

As we have seen, workplace case studies in the tradition of labour process theory have explained conflict, its forms and its appearance on the basis of the alternation of acceptance and resistance. Conflict can emerge at different times and with different forms depending on a variety of variables (Edwards and Scullion 1982) and, as Edwards claims, "workplace relations need to be seen as involving continuing struggles which develop logics of their own and in which the unintended consequences of actions are important" (1986, p.318).
In the same tradition and returning to Burawoy (1979), the fact that workers, while looking for spaces of freedom from capital imperatives, are also reproducing the same mechanisms of production and social dominance, is highly indicative that a notion of subjectivity intended as result of a predetermined social reality is reductive.

But the alternative view offered by post-structuralist analyses, denying the importance of structures and stressing the individuals as the main determinants of subjectivity, are also not sufficient to explain the formation of collective interests and actions. Rational choice theory in particular sees collective action as the result of the sum of individual strategic decisions motivated by calculations on the cost and benefits that each participant in action can expect (Olson 1971). In this perspective, subjects are always considered as rational and this is even truer in cases of collective actions in which individuals are forced to participate. For Olson unions' use of picket lines, for instance, is considered as a demonstration that, for collective action to be successful, coercion is necessary and that without the use of this form of compulsion, rational individuals would not take part in the action (Olson 1971, p.75/76). Rational choice theory has profoundly influenced studies in industrial relations and more generally seems to have achieved a predominant role as a method to investigate in the social sciences. Golden (1997) studied trade unions' actions in different situations of job losses and previously Crouch (1982) established a set of rules to understand the "logic of collective action". Golden's work is of particular importance because it provides on the one hand
conclusions that sound not just coherent with the theory used but also historically credible and, on the other hand, shows the limits rational choice theory has in the understanding of collective phenomena. The main argument is that, despite the slogan adopted during the strikes, in reality with these actions unions were defending their own organisations and activists against management and/or government attacks. Thus, there is an apparent reality of actions (strikes to defend the jobs) that should be intended as irrational, defining irrationality "in the sense of claiming ends that seem inherently unattainable" (Golden 1997, p. 4), and a "true" reality in which actors are perfectly rational in their behaviour and strikes can be fully interpreted as rational considering the interests of the parties involved.

The first problem faced in this analysis is the definition of rational/irrational. What should be the basis to define an action as inherently "unattainable"? Which parameter can establish this? For Goldman it certainly appears as irrational that unions strike to prevent job loss because "prevention of job loss in a modern market economy is hardly a realistic goal" (Goldman 1997, p. 4). It is generally acceptable to consider unions as an integral part of a market economy; but behind the organisations that act in the industrial relations arena, there is a number of living people whose jobs are consistently threatened and that often have no idea of how a market economy works. For them it is perfectly rational to oppose the decisions of the company, even if we assume that they were conscious of the fact that the unions were following their own
organisational interests. There is probably a need, following Hyman (1989, p.112), to reformulate rationality as a less static category. In this sense the rationality of a collective action should be measured in relation to the actors’ own interests, to their knowledge and understanding of the situation and to what extent means and ends form a coherent system.

A second and related problem is, if it is realistic to think of individuals as economists calculating in advance the cost and benefits of their action. Workers have different priorities and could prefer to look at their employment following an individualistic approach rather than a collective one. But, and to what extent, is this decision a simple calculation of cost and benefit? Are workers really free and, in the conditions, to evaluate their actions in purely individual economic terms? Or should we rather connect their behaviour to the rules and impositions in which they constantly frame their working lives? Otherwise how to explain those cases of conflict in workplaces previously described as peaceful and where individual choices seemed to be dominant over collective matters? Thirdly, and as a general consideration, we should be able to analyse collective action not as the sum of individual decisions but as an action with its own character and ends that do not always correspond to the majority of individual opinions. For this reason the focus on the rational choices of industrial relations institutions (unions/employers) explain just one part of the how and why conflict has emerged. The questions and the points raised until now create contradictions with a view of social relations as based on rational and calculating individual decisions and at
the same time have to be seen not as a demonstration of cases of apparent "irrationality", understanding this in Goldman's terms as realistic ends in market economies, but rather as elements that contribute to the complexity of social reality.

Post-structural analyses emphasise the role of rational individuals in shaping and creating social phenomena and claim freedom and independence from any ideological imposition. But the essence of the argument is to see how real is this freedom and how real is subjects' autonomy in the reproduction of social processes. If reality is shaped by the principles of capitalism and the decision-making parameters, rationality/irrationality, are based in market related axioms then collective actions will appear to be constituted as moments of apparent irrationality.

The discussion we have up till now developed, allows us to understand better the complexity of social reality and the difficulties of inserting it under a single formula. The holistic and objective vision of a society that permeates all spheres of individuals' lives, has been proved to be insufficient to account for the diversity and complexity of people's interactions with the capitalist system. It is certainly true that our societies are dominated by social relations shaped by capitalistic modes of production and that, especially in an era of globalisation and improved communication, the ideological and repressive apparatus of power groups tends to unify and standardise individual perceptions of the world. We are all used to relating ourselves to the reality of a labour market, to consider
the value of commodities in money terms, to accept the existence and the future of the world as it is, as something moving independently from us. Acknowledging this, it does not necessarily mean that subjects live their lives unconsciously and uncritical of the system. There is undoubtedly a sphere of individual understanding in those moments in which the imbalances of opportunities and the inequalities are visible and people become conscious. The analysis of these situations, in which objective social relations appear as they are, is the analysis of processes of social mediation that individuals constantly put into practice in the workplace or within the broader society. In this perspective rational choice theory, de-emphasising the influence of social relations and considering individuals as masters of their own will, is deterministic as well as structuralism.

Our attention should then be focused on those moments in which collective subjectivity interrupts the fluidity and inevitability of social relations formerly taken for granted and reproduced. Unquestioningly, in the workplace these "eruptions of subjectivity" (Barchiesi 1996) are most visible when conflict emerges and solidarity and consciousness are shaped and shape collective action.

It is not in the aims and possibilities of this research to establish when and why these eruptions are produced. We have provided certain evidence of the cyclical but constant appearance of conflict in the workplaces and this partly as consequence of the basic antagonism between workers and employers, and because the same system with its development creates a
gap between the new social needs produced and the workers material access to them. This gap can have consequences in terms of conflict at the more general level of society and political and social change is expectable. But despite this evidence, it remains difficult to establish the predictability of conflict, this being the result of a complex interrelation between objective and subjective levels and micro and macro dimensions.

However one of the ways in which subjectivity, that is collective subjectivity, intervenes in the sphere of social relations determining mobilisation, is through solidarity. The empirical evidence provided by the cases of this research and the centrality of solidarity in explaining the origins and the developments of mobilisation invite us to reflect on some practical and theoretical aspects related to this.

5. Toward a conceptualisation of solidarity.

The concept and the function played by solidarity in a process of mobilisation are questionable and certainly raise doubts and concerns. Is it possible to give a definition of this concept? How can we operationalise it? How can we detect it? What's the nature of it? Probably we cannot provide clear answers to all of these questions and there will always be a deficit of knowledge and a possibility for criticism and this depend also on the way we interpret social reality: solidarity is not the sum of individual wishes and it is difficult to think of it as having an economic value that can be calculated in terms of costs and opportunities.
A definition of solidarity cannot easily be grasped from previous works on the issue. Firstly, among commentators of collective action, this one is unthinkable without at least a minimum of solidarity and in this sense we can say that is almost taken for granted and the need to define it does not appear. A partial exception to this is represented by Church and Outram (1998) who studied the historical propensity to strike of mine workers in Britain and argue that solidarity and group solidarity, rather than the occupation, is the central element to explain the mobilisations they have analysed (a point that is confirmed also by the findings of this research).

On the basis of recent anthropological work on social exchange, solidarity appears in their view as based on changes at political level and networks of social relationships strengthened by unionists and leaders. However, a precise definition requires a contextualisation because the concept changes depending on the different historical/social moments, groups' composition and the function these latter attribute to solidarity (defensive, oppositional). Secondly, the difficulties that we encounter in the definition of the concept have consequences with the methods used to detect the presence or absence of solidarity. Due to its inherent dynamism and contextual meaning, solidarity cannot be easily investigated using the structure of a questionnaire or a survey, and quantitative analyses in general have been criticised for this (for instance Fantasia 1995 and Portelli 1991). But qualitative methods as well, although better equipped, could have their limitations because the concept is in itself difficult to grasp even from interviews or participant observation and has often been
studied together with issues related alternately to the labour process (for instance Beynon 1984, Edwards and Scullion 1982), to class consciousness (Rosendhal 1985, Fantasia 1988), within cultural accounts of the working class (Bruno 1999) or in historical perspective (Hanagan 1980).

However, the excess of taxonomy that often in the social sciences creates the problems of definition and classification mentioned above, does not seem to affect workers. A review of historical conflicts from the perspective of those directly involved (with reference especially to oral history works) reveals that their concerns are not about the meaning and the existence of solidarity, but rather about the possibility of establishing and maintaining it in presence of employers, managements or governments attempts to break it. Many of the interviews collected for this research confirm this, and frame the issue of solidarity not within the limits of a definition (often the word does not even appear) but as something that in a certain specific moment existed (sometimes with surprise) or it did not (sometimes with disappointment), it was strong enough to maintain a mobilisation or leave room for divisions and individualism. In a certain way solidarity could be connected to an idea of already established preconditions for the emergence of it (*compañerismo*, the cultural and social ties that are normally produced among people working in the same environment, living often in the same neighbourhood). But the existence of these relations, common within small groups or departments in both factories before the conflict, does not
explain alone the mobilisation and the role of solidarity in it. Thus, at this stage, the point we should stress is neither to offer a static definition nor to look for possible preconditions of solidarity but rather to acknowledge the fact that many factors in different times can shape the forms it takes, the function it assumes, the moments in which it appears, and if it appears at all. This in turn imposes an interpretation of solidarity as a social phenomenon "in progress" whose boundaries are defined by the same process in which it is manifested.

The need to interpret solidarity as adapting itself to the changes of the surrounding social reality has influence on the conceptualisation of it. The importance attributed to this dynamic aspect may, in fact, undermine the existence of an abstract minimum around which a basic definition of solidarity can be formulated. As far as this thesis is concerned, it is assumed that the first level of solidarity lies in human beings' tendency for mutual help when involved in collective action and in joint production activities. The stress on the anthropological/workplace aspect of the concept rather than on the political assumptions that have been attached to it, is fundamental to establish the base around which a further conceptualisation may be formulated. By assuming that the abstract minimum for a definition of solidarity is an outcome belonging to the human condition, we may then identify how dominating social relations alter and modify this basic experience. In fact, once we take for granted that for collective action to be successful a certain level of solidarity has to be achieved, we are also recognising that there are circumstances in which
the original mutual relation among people at work can be strengthened, weakened or eliminated considering the social and power relations influencing the specific reality analysed. These considerations bring us back to the centrality of solidarity in cases of mobilisation and reconfirm the need to investigate it as a social phenomenon “in progress”.

To recapitulate, solidarity is here conceptually intended as constituted of two interrelated parts. The tendency to co-operate among people involved in joint production activities is assumed as the necessary base for the possibility of interpreting solidarity “in progress”. This framework allows us to understand how variations in the social relations existing in a specific context influence the ways, forms and opportunities for solidarity and its function in a process of mobilisation.

Despite similar conceptual problems with injustice, solidarity seems more appropriate as a conceptual category whose centrality within a process of mobilisation has to be confirmed. First, it refers for its own nature to a sphere of necessarily collective relations: its meaning stressing mutual dependence and unity or agreement of feeling or action. Second, and because of its nature, solidarity rests on group identification with those in similar conditions (although not necessarily working together). But at the same time and for its dynamic character, it may also generate moments of “collectivisation”, of grievances and eventual planning of concrete actions. Third, there is historical evidence of the symbolic value attributed within subaltern as well as other groups to the strength solidarity can offer
in the moment of mobilisation. Fourth and of not secondary importance, 
solidarity can be somehow measured considering the number of those who 
concretely participated in action or the existence of previous social mutual 
relations. But as we have previously seen the difficulties inherent in the 
identification of secure indicators, put in evidence on the one side the 
existence of elements that hamper the possibility for the emergence of 
solidarity and on the other side the need to look at the concept as a 
phenomenon in “progress”. A last element to consider injustice not 
completely adequate to analyse mobilisation is probably offered by the 
same Kelly (1998, p.27-32). Kelly seems to move from individuals with a 
sense of injustice to social groups with a collective interest and a 
potentiality to mobilise not by virtue of an abstract common sense of 
injustice but rather for the existence of “attributions” and “social 
identities” constructed by activists within groups (that is collectively 
determined). In this way it is implicitly recognised that injustice alone is 
not sufficient to account for a collective phenomenon.

The perspective on solidarity as a phenomenon that has to be interpreted 
in “progress” seems confirmed also by Fantasia (1988, 1995), who 
analysed a situation of spontaneous mobilisation among a workforce not 
used to conflict and whose representation was in the hands of a 
bureaucratic union, a case with many similarities with the one at FIAT. 
Although the main aim of his research was to investigate mobilisations as 
a way to contend the idea of the supposed classless character of the North 
American workers, the definition he provides of class consciousness as
based on "cultures of solidarity" has profound influence on the way we
have to understand solidarity and its relation with events of mobilisation.
Fantasia, in particular, while arguing on the Marxist concepts of "class for
itself" and "class in itself", raises a point whose consequences are very
important for the concept of solidarity. For Marx what later became the
subjective (for itself) and objective (in itself) dimensions of class were not
distinct aspects but co-existed in the dynamic process that the same
struggle of the working class was creating. Solidarity has then to be seen
by looking at it as a process, as something in movement, as something in
action. Interviews collected for this research, offer an interpretation of the
concept in this way and the emphasis on processes also invites us to look
at those elements/factors whose presence and absence could have altered
the forms taken by solidarity in specific occasions and influenced the
mobilisation.

Fantasia's emphasis on the dynamics of collective action as the formative
moment of a class consciousness, or in his definition "cultures of
solidarity", epistemologically moves our analysis, once more, toward
those moments of subjective interpretation and mediation of the reality
that people at work create by interaction with their environment. The
emphasis on these subjective accounts and their identification as
expressions of workers' cultures has been particularly evident in the
research conducted by cultural sociologists. We have seen how Turner
(1995) stresses the discursive and non discursive form of knowledge as a
way to balance a supposed direct connection between thought and action.
Barchiesi (1998) explains mobilisation as the moment in which an "eruption of subjectivity" could be identified. McAdam (1988) underlines the importance for action of people's interrelations in micro contexts. Aronowitz, in his interpretation of the "logic of capital", while considering deskilling as a tendency in capitalist historical development, argues that "contemporary labour has obliged workers to be more inventive in their resistance [...] and has forced many of them to take their culture underground" (Aronowitz 1992, p.115).

All these researches point to a recovery of the subjective/cultural dimension in the explanation of social realities at work and at the same time they foster a view of dynamism and flexibility in the conceptualisation of solidarity and consciousness. Within this line of investigation that thinks in terms of processes\textsuperscript{iv} we could insert solidarity and consider it as a fundamental element in the understanding of mobilisation. At the same time, the centrality of solidarity in collective interests formation does not have to introduce an idealised vision of workers standing together and always fiercely opposing their employer. We said that it is the same nature of the employment relationship, creating resistance as well as acceptance, and of the social system, creating dependency on consumers as well as opposition to inequalities that alter workers' capacity to band together. In other words, there are factors that favour or hamper the process of solidarity formation that can influence mobilisation outcomes. In this sense we should look at leadership and repression. The importance that the first factor has in strengthening
workers' identities and the function of the second as an instrument available to capital to weaken collective struggles will be best understood within the socio-political context the case studies provide and through the comparison these latter offer. It is, then, to the empirical part of the research that we should now move.

6. Conclusions.

This chapter has explored three main theoretical aspects concerned with the issue of mobilisation. In the first, drawing from Kelly's mobilisation theory, the category of injustice has been analysed and its role within collective action has been questioned. Arguments have been offered to reconsider the category, based on a concept in itself volatile and subjective, as just one of the forms in which subjectivity is expressed within a collective action but not necessarily as the basis of it. In particular the empirical evidence provided by the cases analysed in this research if on one side shows how injustice (or a sense of it) can eventually frame and unify workers' grievances, on the other side also stresses that there are no mechanical determinants in the way collective action is produced.

In the second has been reaffirmed the centrality and inevitability of conflict. Despite recent tendencies to under-represent the importance this latter has in shaping working conditions, and more in general to influence political changes, conflict is fundamental if we want to understand mobilisation, representing this latter natural background. The emphasis on
inevitability does not imply that conflict is the constant and that social revolution is what we can expect in the immediate future. Quite the opposite, conflict can exist just as a moment of rupture with an assumed and previously established social reality. These ruptures can be considered in part as a consequence of the basic antagonism that structures employers/workers relations in the workplace and in part are the results of the gap existing in capitalistic societies between the production of new goods and new wealth and workers' material capacity to possess them.

In the third, attention has been primarily directed to structuralist and post-structuralist analyses of social reality and arguments have been provided to criticise both perspectives. On the one hand, the idea that subjects can scarcely intervene in shaping a social reality whose boundaries have been already defined by capitalist social relations at the level of society, does not help to identify the variety and complexity of people's/workers' responses to the impositions of the system. On the other hand, the focus on subjects' actions and the stress on individuals as the main determinants of social processes, does not provide satisfactory answers. This in part because certain situations, as is mobilisation, are collective in their own character and cannot be understood as the sum of individual decisions and in part because rational subjects tend to frame their actions within the limits imposed by the same system. Consequent with the criticism of both approaches, and drawing from the works of other authors who have studied mobilisation, a third interpretation is offered that while not denying the powerful influence of capitalistic logic on social reality also
reconsider the role of individuals in shaping it. There is a huge variety of reactions and adaptations to the impositions of the system that call for a renewed role of subjects. In particular concerning mobilisation, we should look at those turning points in which collective subjectivity may emerge and contest the system. Solidarity represents a fundamental element of these turning points. The concept may be understood as composed of two interrelated parts. The first refers to the existence of natural ties among people jointly involved in a production activity. Once we assume that this minimum is a constant component of solidarity, collective action always implying this, a second aspect of the concept as a dynamic process may be identified. Variations of power relations can produce obstacles or opportunities for solidarity to intervene in the social reality and that is why a perspective on the concept as something “in progress” should be used in the analysis of it.

The three sections of the chapter can be considered as well just as an attempt to reflect on "The" epistemological problem of the social sciences: objectivity versus subjectivity. Through the chapter both ways of interpreting social reality have been used, often implicitly. They are not mutually exclusive and evidence has been provided, depending on the situation, to justify one approach instead of the other. In this sense, in the first part the critics of injustice as volatile and subjective were not directed to the whole role of subjectivity. In the second part the consideration of conflict as inevitable did not mean a belief in an immanency of it, conflict and co-operation alternate but objective trends can also be identified. In
the third part both interpretations play a role and subjectivity in the form of solidarity frames the way in which subjects can contest a previously accepted reality.

The issue of "needs" is more extensively treated in the next section on the inevitability of conflict. Labour as a resource and not as a cost within an employment relation based on "mutual gains" is what the HRM school has sustained. The criticisms received during the last decade however put into question the compatibility of this approach with a market economy. More references to this at the end of the section.

Although the idea is not to make a general argument here, it is worth mentioning and of particular importance for the cases presented in this research, that cyclically grass roots movements and spontaneous workers' protests have appeared in many countries and at different times: shop stewards in the UK during the 1970's, consigli di fabbrica in Italy in 1968 and during the so-called biennio rosso 1919-1921, the resistencia peronista (1955/1957) and anti-bureaucratic struggles in the 1970's and 1990's in Argentina, comisiones obreras in Spain, among others known and statistically unknown cases. Not always the institutionalization of trade unions and their legalization as workers' representatives have guaranteed that institutionalization of conflict pluralists hoped. The fact that conflict escaped in these cases the rules and limits imposed on it, tells us that there should be an element, deep in the social relation of production, whose logic does not always fit within the system of rules prepared to receive it.

On the need to look at class, class structure, class consciousness, and I would add at solidarity, in an anti-essentialist way that stresses processes instead of structures, Munck (2003).
Chapter 3: The roots of mobilisation, workplace and social conflict in Argentina in historical perspective.

1. Introduction.

This chapter presents an historical background for the analysis of mobilisation. Consequently, attention is drawn to those aspects of Argentine social history and of trade unionism that could help to explain the cases of mobilisation in this research. The analysis, starting from the data collected during the field work, looks, in particular, at those historical or contextual factors that the same workers have indicated in the interviews as main obstacles in the process of mobilisation and/or in the radicalisation of it. Three thematic and recurrent issues have been identified:

- Military repression and workers mobilisation
- The relation between trade unions and workers' mobilisation
- The socio-political context at the time of mobilisation

Each theme has been considered as the base for the development of a debate and a discussion that could allow an evaluation of the reality emerging from the data collected in an historical and more critical perspective. I have tried to consider the interviews, in particular, as representing just part of a more complex and debatable reality and in doing this I may have given more validity to the overall findings and contributed to their strength.
The chapter is organised in three main sections. The first refers to the heritage of the last military dictatorship on workers' potential for mobilisation. The second investigates how the trade unions function and structure has been shaped by their relation with the state and how and why workers have criticised these developments of unionism. This historical analysis shed light on specific features of Argentinean unionism, bureaucracy and the anti-bureaucratic struggles in particular, that in the cases of mobilisation of this research have played a major role. The third section puts the case studies in the socio-political context dominating at the time of the conflict.

2. Military repression and workers' mobilisation.

"those who were militants and that had a voice among us are all gone, they have disappeared, they have been killed, they were simply not there anymore. Unfortunately all those, like me, who remained, now I can say, for cowardice, for necessity, for the family, for whatever reason, we never had the strength, the capability [...] we disagreed but we didn't act, we disagreed but at the end we did all it was ordered to do by bending the head [...] an entire generation has grown without those leaders able to unify people, leaders respected by the rest. When the new fellows came to work they could just see our examples and this meant for them to see people always nodding the head and saying yes" (Renault white collar worker)
"Argentina is like this..."don't get yourself into trouble", "let's go fight together but better you go first", this society has been severely punished during the epoch of the military so people fear to expose themselves. You have seen what happened last year in Buenos Aires for the protest against the corralito\textsuperscript{i}.

. there was repression and people dead. Because of this, people remain fearful that something can happen to them if they protest\textsuperscript{iii}

(Renault production worker)

"I have always tried to maintain myself capable of thinking and this is what, in these years, has been removed from people's minds....here we still have a clear image of what the dictatorship represented and this will be very difficult to change....here there is no participation\textsuperscript{iv}

(Fiat production worker)

These quotations represent just a sample of a recurrent issue concerning the heritage of the last military dictatorship on mobilisation and workers' solidarity. The interviews allow us to depict a picture in which military repression and the climate of terror so created appear as the direct or indirect causes of a number of factors that have hampered mobilisation and have broken solidarity and participation among workers. Putting together, these factors are:

a) fear. "no te metás" ("don't put yourself into trouble").
b) destruction of activism, no combative examples/leaders for the new generation of workers.

c) tendency to individualism (both within the plant and in relation to other workers' struggles).

d) no participation in society, no interest in politics, "yo cumplo con lo mio y es suficiente" (I do what I have to do, what I am ordered to do and this is enough).

The validity of these factors and their generalisation is highly debatable. But whether or not we consider them true or false and applicable to other cases, it still remains important that many workers have indicated such factors as direct or indirect consequences of the military dictatorship on their mobilisation and solidarity behaviour. As we have mentioned in the methodology, there is in oral history and interviews a dimension of knowledge that although not objectively true is still rich in information about the contexts where the same protagonists of events could have been, at their time, involuntary subjects of representations. This is what Portelli (1991) calls the "different credibility" of oral history, the possibility to extract from the representation of facts not in adherence with reality the meanings that actors have attached to it.

In order to better evaluate the meanings and the reality workers have described we will draw examples concerning their attitudes under the last military dictatorship as well as from other cases of both authoritarian and non-authoritarian governments. Anticipating some conclusions we could
say that it remains doubtful if the last period of military rule really was a watershed in hampering workers’ mobilisation and introducing a generalised passivity among Argentinean workers. This could be argued especially if we look at the high level of mobilisation that occurred in the decades after, and even during, the military government. But at the same time it seems undeniable that part of the reality coincides also with FIAT and Renault workers’ point of view.

If we look at mobilisation waves in Argentina during military and authoritarian governments previous to that of 1976/1983, we can conclude that repression and dictatorship have produced radicalisation and uprisings both at plant and societal level instead of fear, lack of solidarity and the search for individualistic solutions as seems to emerge from the interviews. In 1969 the city of Córdoba, as well as Rosario and other inland industrial agglomerates, was the major site of a popular revolutionary uprising against the government of Gen. Ongania and the economic and labour policies he was implementing. In the context of Córdoba, a newly industrialised city developed around the labour-intensive automotive industry and with a tradition of independent trade unionism, military repression acted as a catalyst for mobilisation. If we look at the dynamics of the so called Córdobazo, that mobilisation started as a traditional workers’ protest, with marches to the city centre, against the government’s decision to cancel the so called Sábado Inglés. But social support and solidarity at that time and the homogeneity of the working class helped to identify in the dictatorship the common enemy
and to transform a labour protest into revolutionary mobilisation (Gordillo 1999, Brennan 1994 and Delich 1970). In the same city two years later another protest, similar to the Córdobazo, the so called Viborazo, vii also occurred and both were determinant factors in the removal from power of Gen. Ongania and Gen. Levingston, who at the time of the events were Presidents of Argentina.

In June and July 1975 another wave of mobilisations and general strikes affected the country. At that time the armed forces were not directly involved in the government, but the repression and physical disappearance of militant workers and the takeover by the authorities viii of independent unions were common features. The state of fear and terror created by the activities of the AAA ix (Argentinean Anticommunist Alliance) and the obstacles to mobilisation imposed on workers by the central unions' bureaucracies, x did not prevent collective actions and workers' mobilisations were often part of a broader political confrontation between left and right sectors within Peronism and in the whole Argentinean society (Thompson 1982).

The military regime that took power in Argentina with the 1976 coup represented, with respect to previous authoritarian and repressive governments, a quantitative and qualitative change in the forms and ways in which repression was implemented. The military intervention was officially justified by the state of anarchy, insurrection and guerrilla actions, by the necessity to recover from an acute economic crisis and by a
general state of “sickness” that the virus of subversion and corruption had provoked in the body of the nation (to paraphrase the generals). On the basis of this “diagnosis”, the so called Process of National Reorganisation was in reality not just planned with the idea of enforcing order in the country but rather with the aim of proceeding to a complete re-foundation of the state and of the society under the headings of discipline, Catholicism and free market. Considering the scope of this operation, the elimination of resistance and rebellion had to be carried out in all spheres of society, at the workplace, in the universities, in the trade unions, in the community associations and not just with regard to militant guerrilla organisations (Godio 2000). The military junta was convinced that to stop waves of mobilisation, strikes and the political power of the trade unions decisive action had to be taken on the whole labour movement, both in its militant and independent forms and in the more centralised and bureaucratic unions’ confederations. On the one hand, repression had to be exercised against the more militant, independent expressions of unionism of that time. The experience of clasismo and of anti-bureaucratic unionism was still fresh. This type of grass-roots movement, fostering a democratic participation in union affairs and promoting an effective protection of workers' rights in the plants, was the first target for the military. In their words these unions were performing a subversive activity and had to be physically destroyed since they were considered as a form of guerrilla, workplace guerrilla (guerrilla fabril). On the other hand, the central confederation could represent a channel for future mobilisations and the centre of a political opposition to the dictatorship.
The CGT, and the 62 Peronist Organizations that were representing its backbone, were a threat for the military and the anti-labour project they wanted to implement and were at the same time symbol and reality of the power of the Labour Movement and of Peronism. In the very first days of the coup the CGT and the major national union federations were put under direct control of the government, many leaders were arrested and military administrators were appointed to substitute for them. At the same time shop-floor delegates and internal commissions literally disappeared, were forbidden or their action was made ineffective by both military takeover of local trade unions branches and companies anti-unions campaigns. In many cases the companies willingly participated in military repression, providing lists of activists and militants to the police forces, erasing entire shop-floor commissions, extending control on workers' private lives and increasing the rhythms of production. These actions transformed the plant into a jail in which the aim was to break all forms of resistance and opposition (Falcón 1982). Abós (1984) refers to the unlimited use of the police forces that were called by the companies to intimidate and "convince" the workers that a protest was counter productive and often too risky. In the absence of any form of protection workers had not much option then but to accept rules and regulations as imposed by the enterprise.

"When we consider the period 1976/1979 we have to take into consideration the terrible charge that was attached to each industrial conflict: the worker who challenged management authority, no matter if
to a lesser or greater extent, could risk his employment at first and, quite frequently, his freedom, security, his own life [...] ideological persecution was also another constant of that period. The worker with political or unionist background was immediately labelled as subversive and this was sufficient justification not to employ him/her" (my translation from Spanish, Abòs 1984, p.44).xii

From these examples we can say that, particularly during the first years of the military dictatorship, the scope and range of repression was very relevant. A combination of anti-labour legislation, takeovers by the authorities of national trade unions, elimination of activists and shop-floor commissions, companies tightening control of workers' private lives and intimidation were introduced and/or increased. At the same time, inflation was growing, real salaries were decreasing and the workforce was reduced in key industrial sectors of the economy (Gallittelli and Thompson 1982). As far as the workplace is concerned the combination of company and military repression, the blacklisting of fellow workers, the physical disappearance of leaders,xiii the intimidatory practices were a daily experience and this certainly contributed to create a climate of fear within all the spheres of a strictly controlled society.

Evangelista (1998) argues that the last military rule destroyed the utopia of a social change that during the 1960’s and 1970’s was a common denominator of social protests in both Latin America, on the waves of the
Cuban Revolution of 1959, and in Europe with the revolutions of 1968/1969. In the words of the same author the unleashed violence of the military dictatorship created:

"a reign of terror, a process of collective unmaking (that) destroyed the links between social subjects and their perceptions of a world with which they had already lost all proximity and familiarity. After an almost twenty years interval and in the ominous reality of the memory, the concentration camps established by the so-called Process of National Reorganisation thus constitute themselves [...] as the originating scene that always returns, like a ghost, to take hold of the present, and without which it is impossible to ponder Argentine culture in the years that followed the military dictatorship" (Evangelista 1998, p.XIX).

Is then the fear and terror produced by the military Government a ghost that has affected the mobilisation capacities of the Argentinean working class? Are then credible the assumptions made by workers interviewed on the disruptive effects that the last dictatorship had on their mobilisation and solidarity behaviour?

The labour conflicts that exploded at the workplaces during the first months of the dictatorship, for instance, seem to weaken these assumptions.xiv

Just to mention the automotive sector, the same day of the coup, Renault
workers went on strike and during September and October 1976 other conflicts emerged at Ford, FIAT Palomar, Mercedes Benz, Deutz. Most of these mobilisations were spontaneous and not led by the official trade unions, which were most of the time in the hands of the military, or by elected internal commissions, often physically cancelled by police and business repression (Falcón 1982). Despite all these obstacles and the probability of new restrictions, these grass root mobilisations took place and kept alive workers' opposition to the economic policies of the government, reconstituting or strengthening internal commissions and with this establishing the bases for further confrontations. At national level, the trade unions, after an initial period of disorganisation, recomposed their structures, became more and more confident in their challenges to the military and called for several national strikes that even if not always effective were the proof of labour movement vitality (Abós 1984).

If we look at the post-dictatorship period, thirteen general strikes were called against the government of Alfonsin. Again in the 1990’s other waves of mobilisation affected the country and this both from workers employed in the formal sector and from the unemployed movement and marginalised groups and in these latter cases with new methods of struggle.

It is of course unquestioned that these examples of mobilisation occurred within different economic contexts, political conditions and organisational
forms. The use of the strike during the Alfonsin UCR government, for instance, reveals how, particularly, Peronist unions struggled to maintain both their prerogatives at the workplace and their political influence in the Peronist Movement. Alfonsin, and before him in 1963 his party colleague and president Illia, looked at the democratisation of the shop-floor as a way to break the link between trade unions and the Peronist Movement and facilitate his economic, anti-inflationary reforms (Roudil 1993). Soon after the government reached power, it aimed to "dilate both the political and economic strength of the Peronist-dominated CGT" (Richards 1995, p.58) and democratisation in this context meant a process of "deperonisation" of the labour movement (Tedesco 1999). At the same time we cannot deny that within these political struggles the use of strikes was considered as an instrument of pressure by many Peronist unions in the CGT. They were mobilising workers against the government in charge to maintain their power and oppose democratisation but also to gain support for the Peronist candidate for the presidency. xv

Despite these differences of economic and political contexts, it is undeniable that all these struggles had a base of workers' support and showed their disagreement with the power in charge and the socio-political model implemented. But the fact that people mobilised independently of the nature of the party and the economic situation of the moment shows the degree of labour conflict in Argentine society as a whole, as is going to be further analysed in the following paragraphs.
Despite this high level of conflict both at macro and micro level, there is evidence that the climate of fear and terror produced by the last military rule is, or at least has been, a reality for many workers and their lives.

As reported by Corradi (1987), O'Donnell and Galli conducted in 1978/1979 in Argentina, a research based on interviews, life stories and testimonies, with the questions "What does it mean to live under fear?" and "What types of personal reconstructions can people produce?". The main conclusion of the authors was that there is a direct connection between the level of violence and repression at national level and the micro reality, such as the workplace. In these latter contexts cruelty, selfishness, de-politicisation, negation of evidence when related to forbidden topics (i.e. unionisation), lack of solidarity, individualism, are the immediate consequences of a climate of fear which is produced by an authoritarian regime in the public sphere and through media diffusion. The public example is then reinforced by micro despotism that can emerge in the various contexts of social life and this being justified by the same media under government control. All this creates, especially among the lower class, the condition for a state of political infancy and a search for political and charismatic leaders.

Noè Jitrik (1987) reaches similar conclusions in his analysis of Argentine culture. For this author the fact that repression has been mainly directed against political activists, workers and intellectuals.

"it has also damaged the critical capacity of society as a whole, which, to
the same degree, has been led to a form of cultural existence based on counter-values such as repression, self-censorship, vigilance, the acceptance of a subordinate and secondary scheme of values” (1987, p.162).

It is important to stress here that in the conclusions of both authors there are several points that overlap with what emerge from the interviews of this research. This coincidence, despite the time that has passed, should invite us not to underestimate what is stated in the interviews but rather to contextualise it.

In conclusion, from the discussion and the examples presented, emerge arguments and counter arguments to the hypothesis that the last military rule has acted as an obstacle to mobilisation. The examples provided certainly show that we cannot generalise the fact that all the workers have been affected by this culture of fear and by the consequences of this. But there is also evidence from the interviews and from the studies reported that effectively the last military rule, more than other authoritarian experiences in Argentine history from 1930 until the re-introduction of representative democracy, has produced in many people a progressive distancing from political and social participation. This sort of apathy for collective action and the feeling of impotence could have been reinforced by the worsening of the economic situation, the increase in unemployment and a more general crisis in the values of representative democracy.xvi

FIAT’s and Renault’s workers certainly were in the 1990’s, if compared
to the rest of Argentinean workers, a privileged category. They were employed in the sector of profit-making companies at the forefront of technological innovations. Because of their position in the labour market, these workers have always been used to a relatively stable job, good salaries and social protection in the context of increasing unemployment, labour flexibility and political corruption. Many of them, once forced to renounce any form of freedom in the climate of fear produced by the military dictatorship, could have found themselves not used to act collectively or not confident in their unions. We should add to this that they were probably disenchanted by the return of democracy and their loyalty to the Peronist ideal of social justice was a ghost during Menem's neo-liberalism. This seems confirmed by the fact that, in the case of FIAT for instance, UOM (Union Obrera Metalúrgica, the trade unions historically representing FIAT's workers) had at the time of the conflict 200 members out of 1900 workers. In addition to this they were also working for enterprises that, in a context of disruption of any form of representation and instability of the labour market, could have gained their favour. The protection of the job and the maintenance of the social status achieved became their primary concerns. At the same time, it is true that for the young workers the example of the old, the lack of charismatic leaders and the job stability and salary level in both companies were valid reasons for not engaging in collective action. If these conclusions are true, they nonetheless represent just part of the reality because otherwise we cannot explain why the same people mobilised in 1996, in the case of FIAT they occupied the plant after more then 20 years of collective
inactivity and reached an unexpected level of consciousness and radicalisation.

In conclusion it seems important to stress that the climate of fear produced by the last military rule, with its corollaries of apathy and asocial behaviour, has probably played an inhibitory role in the mobilisation capacity of FIAT’s and Renault’s workers. But at the same time the fact that they did mobilise despite this heritage of fear requires us to examine and reflect on other factors that could have influenced the process of mobilisation. The next paragraph will focus on the function and structure of Argentinean trade unionism and on the relation between grassroots and political/bureaucratic leadership.

3. The relation between workers and trade unions: political/bureaucratic leadership vs. grass roots movements.

The apathy over participation to which we referred before as a possible consequence of the last military dictatorship on workers' behaviour, in the cases analysed, was primarily directed toward trade unions. In this sense the low membership rate at the time of the conflict that we have previously mentioned, might be an indicator, although not always reliable, of workers' opinions. However it is also important to note that the decrease in unions' membership rates and workers' participation could be more a reaction to unchanging and corrupted leaderships than to the organisation itself. Bearing this distinction in mind helps us to understand
why, in the Fiat plant, a previously non unionised workforce voted massively in the election for new representation and, on the wave of mobilisation, subscribed in large numbers to the newly created organisation (SITRAMF). However, what the interviews confirm is that, at least at the time of the conflict, the image workers had of trade unions, an image constructed from many years working in the same plant, was not particularly positive. Workers' criticisms were not directed toward the role and function that a trade union should have as an institution created to defend their interests. The presence of someone representing them in front of the company was something natural not just because they were really convinced of this defensive and protective role, but it was also a sort of unchangeable and immutable element in their life at the workplace and, to a certain extent, in society. Trade unions in Argentina have historically played a political, pivotal role that dates back to Peron's first presidential mandates and that signed for them being co-opted into the state. This represents a watershed in the function and structure of trade unionism in Argentina and on the law and legal arrangements that regulate trade unions' action in relation to their affiliates, the employers and the state. The Argentinean labour legislation recognises the existence of one trade union per industrial sector and workers have no practical possibility to organise themselves around a different form of representation. Workers can freely associate and organise themselves independently but they cannot take legal actions, sign and negotiate collective bargaining, participate in arbitration, defend workers at the workplace, without a legal authorisation (personeria gremial) from the Ministry of Labour. Due to
the particular structure of trade unionism in Argentina, the legal recognition of a new union is always opposed by the historically legitimate union of the sector and is normally refused by the Ministry. This, among other factors, has in many cases produced an increase in unions’ bureaucratisation, a permanent leadership, extensive corruption and, often with the complicity of the company, the repression of any form of militant opposition.

It seems very useful to refer to what has emerged from the interviews as a starting point of further discussions. In sum this is what workers think of their trade unions:

- No democracy in internal union affairs, no participation
- Union membership as a means for obtaining economic advantages (social security, social services)
- Not efficient protection at the workplace, workers felt abandoned and tended to protect their own interests individually rather than collectively.
- When the union called for a mobilisation (national strikes, salaries increase) this was accepted more as an obligation to the union and its delegates (“what will they think if I don’t participate”) than as a conscious act in defence of workers' interests.

These views raise a number of questions. Can these findings be generalised? Are they applicable to other contexts or are conditions specific to FIAT and Renault? Most importantly for this research, had the
negative view workers had of their unions influenced their capacity for action? Is there any difference between the two cases?

These questions play an important role as they help us to focus on whether the historical developments of Argentinean unionism could have had a more direct relationship to our cases of mobilisation. In this section I will attempt to reach some conclusions on the basis of an historical analysis of certain particular characteristics of unionism in Argentina, but more precise answers will be developed in the empirical part of the research when more details will be available on each specific context. In the historical background that this section aims to provide, particular attention will be devoted to understanding:

- how structures and functions of unionism in Argentina have been shaped by its particular relations with the state.
- how workers have perceived and questioned these forms of unionism.

The two sub-sections that will follow have a point in common, that of union bureaucracy, that is the product of both the way the state has shaped the structure and function of unionism and the way in which workers have opposed this action. As a consequence of this overlap, historical events have to be looked at from this double and often contradictory perspective, and this could imply a non-linear exposition. A third sub-section will trace some conclusions and final considerations on the issues treated in the whole section.
a) Trade unions and their relation with the state

- From 1943 to 1955
In Argentina, for many years trade unionism and particularly of a certain style has been associated, although mistakenly, with Peronism. Not all the unions were Peronist, not even during the apogee of Peron when the activities of non-aligned organisations were strictly controlled by government's authority (Torre 1988). But it is true that the majority of workers were genuinely Peronist and maintained their loyalty to Peron and Peronism to a certain extent until his death in 1974.

Peron came to power in 1943 with responsibility for the National Labour Department in a cabinet formed by the military that took power that same year. The project that he gradually implemented was a sort of economic Keynesianism, of state intervention, within a populist formula adapted to the specific reality of Argentina and to its capitalist development. At that time the country was still substantially an exporter of agricultural products with the few industries related to and dependent on this business. The government, following a pattern of development common to other developing countries, fostered an economic model based on import-substitution, industrialisation and building infrastructures (Schvarzer 1996). This project went together with a re-composition of class relations in which harmony and co-operation were considered the essential conditions for national and common prosperity. Within this context, the
state had to play a role of social mediation, fixing rules and setting agreements for a redistribution of the national wealth.

The legal system introduced during Peron’s governments facilitated the creation of a highly centralised and bureaucratic union structure. This system functioned within the state-directed and planned economy and served the political machine established by Peronism. Trade unions and trade union leaders, as organisers of a strongly unionised mass of workers and administrators of social security benefits, had a fundamental role. Within this framework each union, depending on the number of its members, represented a nucleus of political and economic power often managed in pursuit of personal interests and in an authoritarian way. The legal system that supported unions and so much empowered leaders was a direct reflection of the hegemonic political design of Peron, which was symbolised in the “verticalismo”, a top down militaristic style of governance that was the same as Peron introduced in its relations with union leaders.

The powerful role trade unions acquired during the Peronist regime was both political and, as a consequence of this, effective in the workplace. In this period the internal commissions increased their power and came to influence the labour process and the prerogative of capitalists in the control of it. Until the economic crisis of 1951/1952, workers’ demands could be controlled, but after that time Peron’s efforts to reduce workers’ power at the workplace encountered resistance. This situation of conflict
produced stagnation in the economy and rendered evident the weaknesses of the social reformism promoted by Peronism. On one side capitalists aimed to regain full control of the labour force and increase their rate of profit by means of an increase in productivity and labour exploitation. On the other side, workers and trade unions were resisting such attempts through pressure on the government of which they were becoming the main supporter. The increase in productivity became the field of struggle in the following years between trade unions, local and foreign capitals\textsuperscript{xviii} and the dominant groups within and behind the state (Ghigliani and Flier 1998).

- From 1955 to 1976

For more than 20 years, from 1955, when Peron was overthrown by another military coup, until 1976, when the last dictatorship came into power, civil and military Governments alternated in power in Argentina. With the exception of the period 1973/1976 when Peron was re-elected to the Presidency,\textsuperscript{xix}

trade unions have been the target of the state’s reforms and interventions that tended to reduce their financial and political power. Beside the need for capitalists to recover control of the workplace and to increase productivity, trade unions were, with Peron in exile and Peronism proscribed, the soul and body of a renewal of the Peronist class compromise which they were constantly stressing through their loyalty to Peron.\textsuperscript{xx}
During these years the labour movement lost the struggle over productivity, was alternately defeated, repressed and rehabilitated but maintained a high level of mobilisation and political pressure. Trade unions' financial power remained consistent as well as their internal structure, their centralism, their bargaining power, despite various attempts to weaken their legal recognition (Godio 2000). This happened for instance during the Frondizi government (1958-1962) that gave the so-called *personería gremial* to plant unions, often sponsored by the enterprise, as was the case with FIAT's SITRAC and SITRAM. Paradoxically, the existence of these “yellow” unions and their independence from central organisations facilitated the emergence of a revolutionary leadership in 1970-1971. This reinforces the arguments, that I will deal with later on, that bureaucratisation is both an obstacle and a catalyst for mobilisation.

A fundamental process that took place during these years was the detachment of the workers from the politics of the leadership. The period, from 1955 to approximately 1958 corresponds to that of the so-called *Resistencia Peronista* (Peronist Resistance) when, with the central organisations under control of the military government, the focus of resistance was the workplace. In these latter contexts we can see the emergence of new leaderships forged in a struggle that, justified as a means for the return of Peronism, was, more importantly, a struggle over the increase in productivity and the control of the labour process. After the big defeats of 1959-1960 many of those who led the resistance, including
Vandor, secretary of the UOM, changed their position. They accepted the postponement of their claims for the return of Peron in exchange for formal state recognition and legalisation of their organisations and the recognition of their personal prestige so as to establish the basis for an autonomous power of negotiation with the state and the employers. The abandonment of issues related to the control of labour and its exchange for collective bargaining over wage increases were the corollaries of these agreements. In this new situation workers' discontent could be overcome just with an increase of bureaucracy in the leaderships that now, after government recognition, became further entrenched (James 1990).

Thus far the analysis has been of how the function and structure of trade unions changed in its relation to the state during the first two Peron governments and in the period 1955/1973. What we can extract from this is that in both historical periods the relations of trade unions and the labour movement with the power structures has produced an increase in bureaucratisation. In the first case this was justified by the fact that the leaders were the repositories of loyalty to Peron and workers were, in the majority, loyal to Peron and to the leaders he nominated. Leaders were also responsible for the administration of consistent financial resources and this gave them tangible power. This point is very important for understanding the role of both bureaucratisation and leadership within the Argentinean system. Trade unions collected welfare funds at source, the so called Obras Sociales, to deliver healthcare. Thus by providing this fundamental service they replaced the state, they constructed citizenship
around workers' rights (Martuccelli and Svampa 1997).

These political and financial reasons remain valid in the second case too. But when trade unions were antagonistic to power, bureaucratisation was fostered by the government. The same government that, conscious of the mobilisation capacity of the working class and in need of a legitimate interlocutor for negotiation, recognised the authority and power of the established trade unions. In a third case, that of the Peronist government of 1973/1976, trade union leaderships participated and supported the government, opposed the independent unions and strengthened their bureaucratic style. However, it is worth noting that bureaucracy was not always monolithic nor that bureaucracy necessarily means incapacity or unwillingness to mobilise. Even during Isabel Peron's government, when the compromise of the CGT with this authoritarian executive reached its peak, trade unions, pushed from the bottom (coordinadoras), mobilised massively in the national strikes of June 1975.

- From 1976 to 2000

The last military government certainly reduced the role of the trade unions as political actors and introduced several reforms that attacked their financial power. However, the destruction of what remained of anti-bureaucratic experiences and the takeover by authorities of many organisations, strengthened bureaucracy. Internal opposition was banned and former bureaucrats in collusion with the military authorities, often,
gained the control of those organisations still formally recognised by the
government.

With the return to democracy in 1983, unions' internal democracy came
again under discussion. The government of Alfonsin (Radical) presented a
law that, although maintaining one union per productive sector, aimed to
stimulate internal democracy and more transparent electoral processes but
the law was not approved because of CGT lobbying. Between 1984-1985,
elections were held in the majority of the unions that most of the time
were still managed by the same leaders elected before the military coup.
In these elections more participation was granted, in 70% of the cases
more then one list was presented, pluralist fronts gained in many unions
and this contributed to widen the political spectrum and internal
democracy (Palomino 1985). But 90% of the leaders elected were still part
of the traditional Peronist unionism represented in all its variants
(Fernandez 1998). In 1986, the first CGT Congress held since 1975, lasted
only two hours with only one list presented and no further debates. It is
significant how this culture of leadership, authority and top-down
decisions that historically characterised Peronist unions was also part of a
more general unionist culture independently of ideological orientations
(Godio 2000).

The perpetuity in the leadership and the lack of internal democracy are
characteristics that remained in Argentinean unionism also during
Menem's regime. Within the project of a reconstruction of the state under
the economic and ideological umbrella of neo-liberalism, he promoted an attack on unions’ financial and political power at the same time co-opting those unions more prone to enter the business of privatisation of former state enterprises and to support the investment of social security funds in the market. Those union leaders that accepted to participate in these lucrative businesses had then another reason not to give room to possible challengers. Jozami (2000) argues that within a context of unemployment, policies against labour and a more general political apathy and de-mobilisation, trade unions were forced to stress those bureaucratic and more undemocratic traits of their organisations as a means of institutional survival. But I will return to this issue in the next section when the socio-political situation during the 1990’s, which directly refers to the time of the conflict, will be analysed in more detail.

- General considerations

From this historical analysis, it is possible to say that bureaucratisation acquired different forms and methods depending on the way trade unions structured their relations with the state and the dominant power within it. At the same time, cultural patterns of a certain epoch (for instance diffused use of corruption or intimidation) and personal characteristic of the leaders can add differences in the ways and for which ends a bureaucratic position is used. However this emphasis on bureaucracy does not mean that trade unions and their leaders have remained attached to a rather static and monolithic idea of their functions and actions.
Contradictions often emerged between the base and the unions’ top levels and in the labour movement as a whole and we have to consider these variations while explaining the specificity of the Argentinean case. Looking at these issues from a broader perspective, we can say that a process of more or less developed bureaucratisation is certainly a general characteristic of modern trade unions as organisations inserted in capitalistic societies. The sociological school that refers to Weber has considered as inevitable a certain degree of conformity and bureaucratisation depending on the necessity for the union to become institutionalised. Marxists, although not against centralised organisations, have criticised the role of traditional unions as agencies of capitalist society and not performing a revolutionary hegemonic function but rather a sectional or corporative one (see e.g. Kelly 1988, Hyman 1971). These general interpretations applicable to western unions are certainly useful also in the study of Argentinean unionism. Nevertheless in this context, as discussed earlier, the same phenomenon has been shaped differently. According to Fernandez (1998), the attempts to debilitate and alter the Peronist loyalties of the central confederation through legal reforms and the repeated occupations by authority of national unions by both military and civil governments until 1982 produced the need to identify continuity of action and unity of the movement in well-known and charismatic leaders. The same author adds that especially in the past it was difficult to find workers educated and prepared to confront the challenges of the employers. This initial scarcity of competence was compensated by natural charisma and leadership. Later on, with growing financial
resources and political power, to be a unionist meant a career in the organisation from plant, to provincial and eventually national delegate. In addition to this, the particular geography of Argentina, a big country with one third of the population concentrated in the Great Buenos Aires, created centralisation of decisions and financial resources in the capital and a relation of dependence between the provincial and the national federations. Another element that certainly has contributed to maintain high levels of bureaucracy in the Argentinean unions, is their role as administrators and providers of social security services. During past decades unions have managed a huge amount of funds with which they have financed, primarily, health services but also all sorts of social activities and security plans for their members: from holidays hotels to pharmacies and from houses to pensions. Most importantly, substituting the state in the provision of all these basic services, trade unions have acquired a central role in the daily lives of Argentineans as workers and as citizens. This concentration of economic power, within a legal context that already favoured a top-down and anti-democratic practice in the internal decisions, added more strength to a perspective that saw the union and its leader as performing a political and “clientelistic”, if not corrupted, function.

The rate of unemployment and the scarcity of social services offered by the state are today producing a renewed interest of workers in the services provided by the unions, that even if weakened in terms of members, legal status and political influence still maintain a relevant organisational dimension.
On the basis of all these considerations it should not come as a surprise that the opinion many workers, at FIAT and Renault, have of the union is not positive. Instead of seeing the union as an organisation that defends their rights against the employer and the state, they have, often, experienced a different reality: that of a centre of power, managed anti-democratically by a bunch of former workers now enriched. In the best of cases they are if not suspicious certainly sceptical if and how a union, at least like the one they have known, can defend their interests.

While bureaucratisation certainly represents a salient element in the understanding of Argentine trade unions, opposition to such practice has also appeared cyclically. At least in Argentina, grass roots movements and spontaneous workers' protests (that often go unnoticed in statistical reports) have repeatedly contested both the leaders and the scope of their organisations. In certain circumstances these pressures from below became almost a constant of workplace relations and put in evidence those contradictions we referred to before that Argentinean unionism showed over time. The resistencia peronista (1955/1957), coordinadoras in 1975 and anti-bureaucratic struggles during the 1970's and 1990's remind us of those that occurred in other countries and in different times: shop stewards in the UK during the 1970's, consigli di fabbrica, in Italy in 1968 and going back to 1920, comisiones obreras in Spain during the last dictatorship. Trade unions are the institutions that historically have organised and represented those who work but are not necessarily
representative of all the different positions that can emerge from within the same class. In capitalism, the fact that unions tend to become institutions and insert themselves within a system of other institutions (as the idea of a "system of industrial relations" suggests) means that they, in practice, occupy an intermediate position, an institutional position, between capitalists, the state and workers' conflicting interests and this, in turn, can generate tensions and ideological struggles within the organisations itself. This is the basis of understanding how workers have perceived and contested the forms their organisations have acquired in different historical moments.

b) Workers and the opposition to bureaucracy

In the previous paragraph particular emphasis has been put on the bureaucratic and contradictory character of trade unionism in Argentina, its different meanings and on the reasons and historical contexts that could have explained it. But beside, and in opposition to this type of unionism, antagonistic strands have often emerged within the labour movement. In this sense, we should look at the cases of rank and file activism, born out of a critique of the anti-democratic practices used in the management of internal union affairs and to the strategy adopted in the confrontation with the employers, and to the very important role they played in the social and labour history of Argentina.

We have mentioned earlier that rank and file activism emerged right after
the military coup of 1955 during the so called Resistencia Peronista. At that time there was certainly a very deep sense of identification of unions and workers with Peronism. In the words of a worker

"for us the return of Peron represented the return of dignity for workers, it meant to get free from the owner's authority, it was the return of happiness, it was the end of sadness and bitterness for millions of people, it was the end of persecution"xxv


But, according to James, the nostalgia for the golden age of Peron and what those times represented in terms of social justice and workers' legitimacy in the society, was just one aspect of a more complex and ambiguous sentiment. The unfavourable and repressive political climate also supported a process of entrepreneurial renewed authority on the shop-floor. Workers that once could intervene directly on matters concerning the rhythms of production and the labour process had now to accept more exploitative conditions, less freedom and less respect. The harshness of such a situation and the daily fights on the production site and at a more political level, contributed to the creation among workers of a sense of class identification that, while not assuming the form of an explicit class opposition, was nonetheless producing, among the rank and file, a diffused state of tension. Workers genuinely supported the official Peronist ideology of social justice and class harmony and fought for Peron's return. But at the same time a more radicalised and alternative discourse started to emerge because of the incapacity of Peronist ideology
to provide workers with satisfactory solutions to their changed reality. This tension between formal ideology and elements of a class conflict produced radicalisation but remained nonetheless latent, at least during the first decade after Peron’s exile. It was made politically visible in the substantially classless dichotomy Peronism-Antiperonism. However it is worth mentioning that an ideological reformulation of Peronism within a more explicit Marxist framework started in the years following the “Peronist Resistance”. These years corresponded to a confrontation in the Peronist movement between “duros”, supporters of an intransigent and revolutionary opposition to each non-Peronist government, and “blandos”, more open to dialogue and integration. In this latter group were included the majority of unions that after proscription, in 1957, elected new Peronist commissions openly in favour of immediate economic gains and organisational stability and, as in Vandor's era, within a political project of a “Peronism without Peron”. Since the majority of unions were strategically oriented toward integration with the government in power, blandos soon became associated with bureaucrats and the anti-democratic, despotic, corrupted way of organising and managing the union. According to Raimundo (2000), Marxist inspired reformulation of Peronism have certainly contributed to question, if not the entire capitalist system, at least about the Peronist vision of a society essentially based on class harmony and labour/capital co-operation. This interpretation seems credible and supports James’ views about workers' tensions and contradictions between what is stated by formal ideology and daily work practices, and the influences of such tensions on workers' consciousness (James 1990,
Although the first signs of the emergence of a combative unionism could be traced back to the decade between 1955/1966, it is with the military government of Ongania and in the newly industrialised areas of the country, particularly Córdoba and Rosario, that a more radical and ideologically mature unionism found its confirmation. What later started to be called *clasismo* and *sindicalismo de liberación* was a class-conscious and revolutionary, at least in its intention, movement that through the reaffirmation of workers' rights in the workplace, the control of the labour process, and a system of democratic participation and transparency in the union's internal affairs, aimed at the establishment of a socialist state. In the words of Agustín Tosco, leader of the Luz y Fuerza union of Córdoba, "the trade unionist has to fight with all his determination, with all his strength to change the system. The trade union leader has to know that despite a "good economy", if there is no justice in the distribution of wealth, exploitation continues. From this it follows that he has to fight for social freedom. The leader has to know that there will never be a good collective agreement within an economy dependent on monopolies. It follows that he has to fight for national liberation" (in James 1990, p.307)\textsuperscript{xvii}

In this perspective of national and social liberation the immediate targets of a union leader were to establish a direct relation with the rank and file,
gain the loyalty of the base through honesty, coherence, democracy and respect for different political opinions.

This approach to unionism even if it didn’t conquer ideologically the majority of workers, who remained profoundly Peronist, as the enthusiasm for the return of Peron in 1973 showed, was nonetheless accepted and demanded by the rank and file because at that time it represented a real instrument for the defence of workers' rights and dignity in the workplace and for their political participation in the society. As recognised by several authors (Brennan 1998, Munck 1987, Gordillo 1999), clasismo has to be seen as the result of a combination of factors both related to the specific situation of Córdoba, as well as that of similar recently industrialised areas in the interior of the country, and to the general political situation. In the case of Córdoba, the establishment of FIAT and IKA/Renault in the second part of the 1950's produced a development of industrial activities based around the automotive sector attracting to the city migrants from the interior of the province that tended to live in new neighbourhoods near the plants and to share similar social environments. This new industrial workforce had no union experience in part because they were young and with rural origins and in part because of the paternalistic policies adopted by the companies. In the case of FIAT in particular, the existence of a plant union totally identified with the enterprise, if at the beginning it served to maintain the workforce passive, after the Córdobazo acted as an element of radicalisation. Events of social mobilisation and upheaval, such as the Córdobazo,
joined workers and studentsxxix together in the demand for better economic conditions, and in the hostility against the rhythms of exploitation at the workplace and in the rebellion against a repressive dictatorship. The combination of these claims and the revolutionary potential of such mobilisation, even today part of the popular imagery, acted as a spark in the clasista transformation of SITRAC and SITRAM, FIAT's plant unions. These unions represented the prototype of the anti-bureaucratic and anti-dictatorial employee representation that effectively defended its members in the workplace through a democratic decision-making process. As recognised by Duval (2001), clasismo did not produce in the majority of workers in the labour movement of Córdoba an anti-capitalist position. There was still a firm belief, incorporated in the Peronist ideology, that a better redistribution was possible. Nonetheless clasismo and similar experiences of militant and combative unionism of those years were fundamental in the re-establishment, through the methods of internal democracy and transparency, of workers' control of the production process and of the dignity of workers against despotic management practices. In the words of a FIAT/Materfer worker in these months of democratic unionism "...in the plant, life changed completely. Shop stewards defended us with the foreman against all the problems that could emerge during work, we could control the rhythms of production that before were terrible. In general we could eliminate the oppressive climate that was normal in the plant and we could demand our rights as human beings" (in James 1990, p.306)."
These anti-bureaucratic unions represented an important experience for the whole labour movement and a concrete threat for the establishment. This is best shown by the fact that, as we have mentioned before, the last military government detected explicitly in these forms of unionism a sort of guemilla activity and devoted to its eradication more attention then to the political guerrillas. Trade union activists promoted the first strikes during the dictatorship and paid a high cost in terms of repression and disappearances.

If, during Alfonsin’s government, traditional trade unions were very active in their mobilisation, pursuing with these both workers' defence and political support for the Peronist movement, during the 1990’s another grassroots movement detached trade unions from workers. This will be analysed in the next section.

c) Preliminary conclusions

In the previous section we have seen how trade unions' structure and function have been shaped by their relations with the state and how and why workers have reacted against the bureaucratic practices of their unions. Bureaucracy is certainly an element that emerges from the institutional process through which trade unions, as other organisations, always pass. But in the case of Argentina, together with this “natural” element, the process of bureaucratisation acquired very particular
characteristics specific to the context. Legal arrangements that date back to the first Peron government and to the role of trade unions in its political project provoked the lack of internal democracy, the centralisation of decisions, and the importance of leadership. This legal context, and in particular the lack of internal democracy, has been maintained through the years, probably increasing in a number of organisations during the 1990's, and has certainly affected the cases of mobilisation this research is considering. Anticipating some conclusions, in the case of FIAT the vacuum of union power provided the spark for mobilisation and the emergence of a radical rank and file movement, while at Renault, bureaucracy had been able to control and then co-opt internal rank and file opposition and with it eliminated any further possibility of mobilisation and radicalisation. The bureaucratic style, at least in the cases analysed, also influenced that sort of apathy, of scarce workers' participation that we identified as a possible consequence of the last military government. With the return of democracy workers could expect more freedom and democracy within the union but this did not happen.

Bureaucracy and the culture of fear that the last military dictatorship produced, have certainly hampered workers' collective action. This background could have favoured apathy for participation and a search for individual solutions. Despite all these factors, a mobilisation happened and has to be explained. Other elements have certainly contributed to produce this event: solidarity at the workplace, leadership, how workers have perceived employers' action. But other questions could be raised:
does bureaucratisation have to be seen just as an obstacle to mobilisation or could it have produced (with this latter) more radical oppositions? Or, to put it in another way, is there a limit to workers' acceptance of a bureaucratised, non-democratic leadership? Without the action of bureaucracy are they more free to mobilise? The answer to these questions is directly connected with the way workers have historically understood their relations with bureaucracy and with unionism and once more it is very difficult to find an answer easily applicable to all cases. During the 1964 CGT Plan de Lucha (Plan of Struggle), a totally bureaucratised leadership could mobilise workers in the occupation of 11000 plants, something that for its importance is comparable, for instance, with the Italian factory councils of 1919-1920. The same bureaucracy during the Peronist Government of 1973-1976, if at the it beginning tried to freeze workers' protests also occupying by authority “rebel” local unions, in the strike of June-July 1975 led mobilisation and showed to the military its potential as an organiser of massive workers' demonstrations. This also explains the repression that followed the coup, with the CGT and so many unions taken over by the military and their leaders arrested. But by contrast to this militancy, from approximately 1989 to 1996 the bureaucracy first contained, but then was bypassed, by a general wave of mobilisation that was emerging in the country. These examples provide evidence of the double role bureaucracy has played, being, often at the same time, both an obstacle and a trigger for collective action. This requires searching for other factors to explain mobilisation, to look beyond and contextualise the issue of bureaucracy, and to consider the
general trends of the phenomenon as an adaptation to the particular case.

In this sense an important element to be considered and that occurred frequently, as the history of unionism in Argentina has shown, is the emergence of grassroots mobilisation against the leaderships. The workplace has been at different moments the centre of opposition to employers’ policies, to government repression, and to bureaucratic leaderships. In the 1990's, as we will see in the next section, a new split between the rank and file and the leadership occurred within a context of more generalised resistance of the working class (employed, unemployed and underemployed) against neo-liberalism. In this context a bureaucratic style of unionism could have both produced and hampered mobilisation.

4. The political economy and social conditions at the time of the conflict: neo-liberalism, labour flexibility, trade union disempowerment, new labour struggles.

The election of Menem in 1989 represents a watershed in many aspects. First it signalled the definitive supremacy of multi-lateral financial agencies (IMF, World Bank, Washington Consensus) over the state on the determination of the country’s economic and social policies. Menem implemented a “modernisation” process that was finalised by the retreat of the state from welfare provision, the privatisation of public enterprises, and the flexible use of labour. This was inserted within the neo-liberal policy of structural adjustment imposed by multilateral financial agencies.
to Third World Countries as a way to obtain new credits. Second, the implementation of this programme required a redefinition of Argentine trade unionism in relation with the state and with Peronism. The ideology and politics of Peronism were part of a societal project that through the inclusion of labour and the co-option of trade unions into the state aimed to achieve better social justice, and the redistribution of wealth and development in an harmonious class relationship (this was concretely put forward in the period 1945-1952 and unsuccessfully in 1952-1955 and 1973-1976). Menemism corresponded in the real world of the workers, even if it was not in the political discourse, to a radical departure from the idealised social justice in class harmony promoted by Peronism. In particular it broke the idea of development and redistribution with the state as mediator and protector of workers. The Peronist ideology of the majority of Argentine trade unions was put into crisis by a system that while reducing their political and financial power was pushing unions to adopt a business-oriented perspective. Third, the combination of neoliberal policies, and their negative consequences in terms of employment, the redefinition and internal conflicts of trade unions over their nature and their relations with the political power structure, produced new labour struggles. These latter evidenced a new detachment of workers from traditional trade unions, the emergence of anti-bureaucratic organisations at local level and the development of alternative trade union confederations.

In the expanding informal sector, the unemployed and underemployed led
protests and resistance which led to a reformulation of labour/capital relations through new forms (piqueteros, coordinadoras) and new identities. Social exclusion, exploitation and individualisation in the workplace is what the working class (defined here in the broader sense of employed, unemployed and underemployed) has experienced in the last decade in Argentina within a financial and industrial system, now open to the global economy, highly dominated and influenced by transnational capital.

In this sense, we can say that the election of president Menem in 1989 marked a turning point in the Argentinean political, social and economic scenario. In the last decade, following the neo-liberal doctrine promoted by the International Monetary Fund, as a condition of obtaining new credits, the country undertook a process of profound structural change. This was put into practice mainly through privatisation of public companies, fiscal bonuses to attract multinational investments, anti-inflationary monetary policies, reduction of public employees, cutting public expenditures, privatisation of social security services, and labour flexibility. The Convertibility Plan introduced by minister Cavallo in 1991, fixing the parity peso/dollar, stopped hyperinflation, created stability and market confidence creating the conditions for a period of constant economic growth (during 1991/1997 GDP increased at an annual average rate of 6.1%) and political consensus. Privatisation of state companies, due to government concessions and to the parity with the dollar, turned out to be a highly profitable business for local and foreign
capital, producing at the same time extensive corruption, "clientelism" and unfair practices. xxxi

But the euphoria of the economic stability of the first years of the Menem presidency did not correspond to better conditions for employed and the unemployed. The official unemployment rate rose from 6% in 1991 to 17.3% in 1996, while underemployment in the same years rose from 7.9% to 13.6% (Lozano-Basualdo 2001). In 1996 the fact that neo-liberal policies were explicitly showing their weaknesses not just in terms of social marginalisation but also in terms of economic growth was already clear to Argentine business representatives, too. In an interview reported by the national newspaper Clarin in September 1996, a representative of the UIA (Union Industrial Argentina, Argentine Industrial Association) admitted that labour flexibility alone could not produce more employment and that it was a mistake to sell politically, as the Government and the World Bank were doing, these reforms as the panacea for unemployment. At the same time he made clear that a broader social and political consensus was fundamental to implement such reforms and to avoid social conflicts (Clarin 20 Sept. 1996). Meanwhile FIAT’s workers were occupying the plant and resisting, among the first in big industrial enterprises, the so called labour flexibility. Once asked by a local newspaper about his opinion on the issue of flexibility, FIAT’s mobilisation leader answered that he was still trying to understand if this “means that those who work are giving a small piece of employment to other unemployed or that what we are giving will never be recuperated and nothing will change?” (La voz del Interior, 12 Oct. 1996) xxxii
This process of reform was partly supported by the CGT which at the beginning remained, despite internal divisions, politically loyal to Menem, a Peronist president. But soon the unions became the target of Menem’s strategy because they could easily mobilise workers especially against his economic policies which were producing social discontent. On the one hand, he tried to undermine unions' financial and organisational power and political centrality through an attack on their Obras Sociales (unions' social services) and a decentralisation of collective bargaining. On the other hand, he invited unions to participate in the privatisation of public companies and in the business of investing in the market of the funds collected for pensions and social services.

For the first time in Argentinean history a Peronist president explicitly attacked the organisation and structure of trade unionism, one of the pillars of the Peronist movement, and workers' rights. This combined action provoked within the movement a crisis of identity and between central bureaucracy and shop floor delegates an increasing split (Fernandez 1997). On the one hand, trade unions were facing a direct attack on their autonomy and political power from a Peronist government that they contributed to support and put into power. On the other hand, labour reforms, consistently reducing workers' rights and benefits, were creating amongst ordinary workers a deep sense of dissatisfaction and anger against union bureaucrats and central confederations.
At the institutional level, the conflicting and contradictory relations between Menemism and traditional unionism generated a split in the CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo) between those unions (or union leaders) supporting Menem’s reforms and aiming to participate in the business produced by the privatisation of social security and those promoting opposition both at political and workplace level. In 1992, the CTA (Congreso de los Trabajadores Argentinos) was created mainly with the contribution of public workers' unions and former state-owned companies. This new confederation was thought of as a new experiment for unionism radically different from the traditional Argentinean one. In particular, the CTA aimed to collect both workers and unemployed struggles emerging in different parts of the country, promoted individual and not compulsory membership, independence from the state and the Movimiento Justicialista (Peronism), decentralisation and de-bureaucratisation. In 1994 from another split in the CGT the MTA (Movimiento de los Trabajadores Argentinos) was created with the aim of opposing labour reforms. After the creation of the CTA and the MTA, unions loyal to Menem and his reforms remained in the CGT. This group in July 1994 subscribed with the government and the entrepreneurs to a general agreement (Acuerdo Macro) that, while recognising CGT financial autonomy and maintaining collective bargaining at central level, allowed the flexibility of labour (reduction of labour rights) at workplace level. The last years of Menem’s government showed a re-composition of unions’ opposition. The CGT with support from CTA and MTA called four general strikes in an attempt to confront government intentions to
decentralise collective bargaining. The success of these demonstrations, while it saved the unions prerogatives, did not change flexibility at workplace level, already recognised by the Acuerdo Macro and translated by the government into law.

This fragmentation of unionism shouldn’t be a surprise since it confirms once more the multi-faceted nature of unionism as an institutional and organisational form of workers' representation whose historical development always occurred within capitalist economies. The analysis of unionism as an expression of sectional and corporate interests, even if unions were representing the working class, was expressed by Gramsci at a time when socio-political conditions could have favoured the idea of an imminent revolution led by the trade union movement. In his words:

"Objectively the trade union is nothing other than a commercial company, of a purely capitalistic type, which aims to secure, in the interest of the proletariat, the maximum price for the commodity labour, and to establish a monopoly over this commodity in the national and international field" (Gramsci 1969, p. 502). It is true that in Argentina, as well as in the traditional form of the so-called business unions, particularly under Menem, the natural character of the unions has produced a perversion. Perversion in the sense of "financial stabilisation of the unions......achieved by means of the legalisation of the instability of workers’ lives" (Dinerstein 2001, p.122). This situation has been perceived at the workplace as a betrayal. A betrayal often symbolised by the contrast between the ascendancy and the
material benefits achieved by certain union delegates, previously colleagues at work, and the unemployment or the worsened labour conditions the majority of workers were suffering. This perception of unions, the anti-democratic internal style and the bad reputation that certain organisations had in the popular image have contributed to a further distancing of workers from their representative organisations. In particular, for workers who were still maintaining their jobs the constant state of insecurity generated by labour flexibility led to individualism and to the impossibility of maintaining solidarity at the workplace and for collective action (in this sense see Dinerstein 2001, p.121 and for the car industry Battistini and Montes Cato 2000). These opinions seem to be confirmed by the data collected for this research. The combination of individualisation, insecurity and scepticism first created apathy among those not directly affected, at least at the beginning, by the loss of a job or by some form of labour flexibility and lack of awareness for the fate of other workers in the same plant or in similar sectors. This apathy and indifference, symbolically summarised in the expression “no te metás”, transformed itself, once changes in labour conditions or unemployment became a reality, for those who had not yet experienced it, into consciousness/militancy/mobilisation or consciousness/impotence/frustration. I will return to this issue and to the different outcome of workers' reactions in the empirical chapter of the research.

In Argentina, the decade of the 1990's demonstrated, despite the internal
contradictions of the trade union movement, its fragmentation and the distance from the workforce, high levels of conflict and resistance. In the privatised state companies, the processes of rationalisation and the closure of productive sites created reductions in employment and strong opposition from workforce (Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones ENTel, Aerolíneas Argentinas, Gas del Estado). When company restructuring affected industrial areas of the country historically dependent and specialised in one productive sector (metallurgy, oil extraction, sugar cane plantations) resistance acquired a social character and the defence of the jobs mobilised together different parts of civil society: local unions, municipal governments, and religious organisations (this is for instance the case of ACINDAR's Villa Constitución workers).

Although resistance encountered strong company and government repression, it was nonetheless a characteristic of the entire decade even with the increasing scarcity of job opportunities and social marginalisation.

These first experiences of mobilisation mainly affected formal employment, and even if they extended throughout the country, they remained basically isolated from each other, not finding the momentum or the political stance to express themselves as a unit. Although these mobilisations achieved very limited results in the short term, we could argue that they have represented a background for those forms of resistance (roadblocks, factory occupations, popular assemblies, solidarity alternatives) that the working class is currently trying to consolidate in the
social laboratory that is Argentina today.

5. Conclusions.

The chapter has explored several issues that could have affected the cases of mobilisation this research is considering. First, the effects of the last military dictatorship on workers' potential for collective actions have been analysed. A two-sided perspective has been proposed. On the one hand, a "culture of fear" has been created and a process of atomisation and depoliticisation at the workplace could have emerged. On the other hand, these assumptions are contradicted by the waves of mobilisation that occurred before, during and after the last dictatorship and with both military and civil governments. These arguments and counter arguments are both true and do not allow for generalising: not all the workers have been affected by a "culture of fear" and its consequences. In the cases of FIAT and Renault the climate of fear produced by the last military rule, with its corollaries of apathy and asocial behaviours, has probably played an inhibitory role in workers' mobilisation capacity. But at the same time the fact that they did mobilise despite this heritage of fear invite us to look for and reflect on other potential factors of mobilisation.

In this attempt bureaucratic unionism and internal union struggles have been identified. These characteristics emerge from an historical analysis of how trade union structure and function have been shaped by their relations with the state and how and why workers have reacted against the practices of their unions. Bureaucracy is certainly a natural phenomenon
that affects all forms of organisation. But in the case of the Argentine trade unions it has been shown how the legal system fostered bureaucratic tendencies to serve political purposes. Once trade unions became political actors and in such a legal context, a distancing of ordinary workers from central organisations often occurred. Moreover it has also been stressed that bureaucratisation could be seen as both an obstacle and/or an element that favoured mobilisation or a radicalisation of this latter. Since the political goals of the Peronist trade unions went hand in hand with the need to satisfy workers' demand in the plants, bureaucratic leaders have often assumed contradictory positions. The years 1973-1976 give a good example of how bureaucracy first tried to stop, then led the protest giving strength to the grassroots and finally was bypassed, but not defeated, by the big strike of June-July 1975. Considering all these contradictory elements, it has been argued that, in the cases analysed in this research, the combined action of bureaucracy and the culture of fear that the last military dictatorship produced, have certainly hampered workers collective action. This background could have favoured apathy for participation and a search for individual solutions. But, despite all these negative factors, a mobilisation happened and has to be explained.

With this aim in mind the third section of the chapter has analysed the decade of the 1990's. Three elements have contributed to raise the level of social conflict and to a certain extent could have influenced the mobilisations that occurred in 1996 at FIAT and Renault. First, the pressure of multilateral financial agencies on the government became
influential as never before on political decisions. Second, the economic reforms implemented under IMF auspices produced unemployment, underemployment, increase of poverty and, with this, social unrest. Third, trade unions' contradictory position relating to the government and its economic policies distanced once more ordinary workers from bureaucratic leaderships and opened the space for a new anti-bureaucratic stance. This economic context and the opposition to bureaucracy have certainly represented a fertile soil for mobilisation because they offered to workers involved in industrial conflicts the base around which their demands could be formulated and solutions, eventually, provided. At the same time, examples of other mobilisations and the development of a sense of solidarity with the struggles of other groups could have offered both an example and a support. At least in the cases presented in this research, as will be more evident from the empirical analysis, these external conditions have not directly produced mobilisation but have constituted the moral background around which demands and conflict could be framed and the basis for workers' radicalisation and consciousness during mobilisation. This latter argument justifies the search for explanations based on a micro level analysis.

The chapter has explored some issues considered as relevant for the cases of mobilisation this research is considering. At the same time, and for the historical perspective that the chapter offers, it could be considered as an attempt to highlight the overall mobilisation capacity of the Argentine labour movement.
This character seems to embrace a wide range of historical experiences and ideological positions. We have seen how workers in different times have mobilised in favour of Peron and of his return, against repressive military governments and anti-democratic unions, against privatisation, labour flexibility and marginalisation. These struggles have tended to support changes in the balance of power at different levels of society. Solidarity emerged at the workplace, at local, provincial and national political levels. Ideologies have ranged from Peronism and its class harmony society, to clasismo with its anti-imperialistic and socialistic orientation, to the recent cases of social mobilisation with their, ideologically heterogeneous, anti-system potential. At the same time these struggles have acquired different organisational dimensions, alliances and leadership.

The study of a specific case of mobilisation has to be put within more general waves of mobilisation considering the international, especially for dependent economies, political economy and its effects on the country at the time of the conflict. This context represents the framework within which labour/capital relations at micro level can be understood and help to explain the different forms in which the labour/capital opposition asserts itself in the workplace. By looking historically, as Kelly (1998) does using the Kondratieff model, at the interdependence of market cycles with events of mobilisation, some trends can be certainly fixed and some generalisations made. Within this historical perspective could be explained for instance why companies that formerly successfully
implemented schemes for “job satisfaction” or “identification with the company”, experience mobilisation of their former human resources.

In the case of Argentina, workplace mobilisation can be certainly explained in terms of labour/capital opposition. This can be argued, from one angle, looking at the structured antagonism (Edwards 1986) of the employment relationship as inserted in a broader socio-political context dominated by capitalist relations, from another angle, considering the conflicting interests between workers’ social needs and capitalists’ drive for profit (Lebowitz 2003). In particular, the analysis of mobilisation as a social process inserted into the logic of a capitalist society allows us to better understand how the same system produces rules, institutions, laws and principles that at different levels and with different outcomes influence mobilisation. But the sphere of subjective perceptions is fundamental as well. I am here referring to the way discourses, ideologies, cultures, social prejudices, customary opinions, external pressures are filtered by those who mobilise. In this sense, as far as Argentina is concerned, concepts of unionism and its role, of nationalism, of worker dignity, of the social function of workers in the family, of the tradition of workers’ struggles, of individualism, are all concepts with their background in the labour movement history of the country and have to be taken into consideration as the subjective level in the study of mobilisation. In other words, attention has to be put also on the cultural dimension and collective imagery that, for instance in the case of Córdoba, have had big influence, during the 1960’s and 1970’s, in shaping
what has been called a “culture of resistance” (Gordillo 1999). Mobilisation has characterised Argentina so deeply that it is possible to argue it is part of the subjective experience of each worker, no matter what their opinions. The need to look at subjective perceptions while explaining mobilisation once more confirms the attention that has to be put on the analysis of social processes at the workplace.

A second important consideration concerns the level of social conflict’s radicalisation in Argentina. For an external, European, observer the study of Argentinean social history is undoubtedly an exciting, although dramatic, experience. Class counter-opposition, economic crisis, popular rebellions, military upheavals, charismatic leaders, have appeared in the last sixty years in Argentinean history in a much more dramatic and spectacular way, especially compared to Western Europe. Both police repression and popular rebellions easily reach high levels of radicalisation as has been demonstrated, for instance, in December 2001. Repression is repression and rebellion is rebellion because no other alternatives are offered, because the system does not provide spaces for compromise or political agreement and far less for a better redistribution of wealth. In the societies of the rich world, social conflict is less evident, but has not certainly disappeared, because inequalities are controlled and frozen, to a certain extent by the intervention of the state. xxxvi

In Argentina this is not the case and when not even the basic services are provided and people are abandoned to the vagaries of the market and starve, radicalisation comes more spontaneously. The music is the same
but in the case of Argentina it is heard at a much higher volume.

The radicalisation of social conflict in Argentina is an historical trait that has certainly influenced subjective interpretations of collective actions. Workers have been empowered by Peronism and acquired a consciousness of their strength (it does not matter here if as “a class” or not) through mass mobilisation, street marches, and factory occupation. During military rule they had to get used to obedience and rebellion, and even with Peron, it was forbidden. Subjective interpretations of the meaning of certain events, actions, behaviours could be extremely varied and, especially for an external observer, the knowledge of historical events that have affected workers lives can help to understand their internal motivations. This is particularly important in cases of mobilisation.

i The extracts from the interviews that are used in this and the following chapter have been left unchanged in their grammatical structure. Similarly, the translations provided have to be considered as a personal attempt to maintain unaltered the original discourse of the interviewees. "la gente realmente opositora y que tenia peso o se fue, desapareció, lo mataron, no estuvieron mas. Lamentablemente los que quedamos a posteriori por cobardia, por necesidad, por la familia, por lo que quiera, nunca pudimos tener la fuerza, la capacidad, si el desconformismo pero no la acción....estábavamos disconformes pero terminábamos haciendo los servicios y agachando la cabeza............ha pasado toda una generación intermedia que no ha tenido esos líderes con poder de hacer convocatorias de gente, con la opinión sólida que de ellos tenían los otros, entonces los nuevos que llegaron después de nosotros nos vieron continuando allí, pero como continuando? Haciendo siempre si con la cabeza.......... " (Renault white collar worker)

ii When the Government decided to limit the withdrawal of cash from bank accounts.

iii "La misma Argentina esta’ ya así el “no te metás”, “vamos a luchar pero andá vos al frente”, acá esta sociedad fue muy castigada en la época de los militares entonces es como que hay un miedo a exponerse. Viste lo que pasó en Bs. As. el año pasado a esta altura, que es cuando se armó la organización para el tema del corralito, reprimieron y mataron gente. Esa es la idea vieja que por el miedo quedó allí." (Renault production worker)

iv “Siempre me mantuve con la capacidad de razonar que es lo que se le han quitado a la mayoría de la gente en estos años........acá tenemos todavía recuerdo de lo que fue la dictadura militar y eso va a ser muy difícil cambiarlo........acá no hay participación” (Fiat production worker)

v Traditionally workers benefited from a shortening of the working day on Saturdays.

vi The role of the CGTA (Confederación General de los Trabajadores Argentinos) was in this sense crucial. The central was antagonistic to the traditional CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo) and offered, within its class and anti-bureaucratic discourse, a reference point for the establishment of workers alliances in the city.
vii This name from a speech of Uriburu, Governor of Córdoba, who a few weeks before the uprising had promised to cut off the head of the poisonous snake (vibora), as he considered the Córdoba labour movement at that time.

viii In Argentina, due to the political role trade unions have historically achieved, especially during authoritarian regimes, executives in power have commonly reduced unions' political and mobilisation potential by both removing former leaders and substituting them with government's functionaries and/or inhibiting by authority unions' normal functions of representation. This practice is known in Argentina as *intervención*, and the English translations with the words intervention or unions' intervention do not explain properly what *intervención* means. This explicative note should clarify what frequently in the rest of the paper I mean by using the expression “occupation, takeover by authority”.

ix This was a para-military organisation created by José' Lopez Rega, former secretary of Peron and Ministry of Social Welfare in the government of Isabel Peron who took the Presidency of Argentina after the death of Juan Domingo Peron in July 1974. Lopez Rega represented the extreme right wing of the Peronist Movement and through the AAA he started a period of terror directed at the physical elimination of left wing and independent unions' leaders and political militants. The AAA hit severely Córdoba where a Marxist oriented leadership of the labour movement, the so called *corriente clasista*, emerged at the end of the 1960's.

x At that time Peronist unions were an important part of the government. Although the CGT was controlling the Ministry of Labour and with it a developed apparatus of control on grassroots organisations and local branches, they could not impede workers mobilisations and the new forms of organisations that started to emerge, coordinadoras.

xi The Army commander of Córdoba, cynically, recognised the necessity to proceed to the killing of 50,000 people divided in order of priority among guerrilla and political activists, collaborators and a certain unavoidable number of “mistakes”. Twenty-six years later these opinions were still valid. While interviewing people in the FIAT plant I had an informal chat with one of the foremen. I provoked him by saying that I was desperately looking for an activist, a militant but that no one was left in the plant after the conflict, they really had done a good job. "Yes", he said, "we did like the military did, first the activists, then the less activist, then their friends, then the people who knew them and sometimes we also did some “mistakes”.

xii "Al considerar el periodo 1976/1979 debe tenerse presente esta terrible hipoteca que pesaba sobre cualquiera conflicto laboral: el trabajador que desafiaba la soberania patronal en un aspecto minimo o en uno decisivo, arriesgaba, cuando menos, su empleo y, con frecuencia, su libertad, su seguridad y su propia vida........la persecución ideológica fue otra de las constantes de este periodo. El trabajador que tuviera antecedentes politicos o sindicales era catalogado inmediatamente de subversivo y ello lo descalificaba para ingresar "

xiii From a first report commissioned by the US Government, the Vance commission (1976/1978), reported that 20% of physical disappearances were of workers or trade unionists. Gallittelli and Thompson (1982) argue that this percentage of workers probably increased after 1978 because at that time guerrilla organisations were already destroyed while the total number of people disappeared amounted to 30000 at the end of the dictatorship.


xv The CGT, from the period between 1989 and 1996 which corresponds to the first and beginning of the second Menem’s mandate, never called for a general strike, despite workers' worsened situation. All this explains why, in 1992, the CTA was formed, aggregating unions that were opposing labour flexibility and Menem’s neoliberalism, and being one of its main aims to extend its control of an increasing number of unemployed and marginalised workers.

xvi Despite the fact that voting in Argentina is compulsory, electoral tests previous to the last presidential elections showed low rates of participation, protests and spoiled ballots.

xvii However, it is useful to reflect to what extent unions' political force was based on their capacities to mobilise or rather was based on their ability to control waves of protest and use this to gain political benefits.

xviii During the last years of Peron, foreign investments were promoted in new industrial areas of the country. Particular relevance was put on the attraction of those productions, like motor vehicles, which were more technologically innovative.

xix As mentioned before, trade unions were a constituent part in this government until the big strikes of June/July 1975. The process of bureaucratisation to which we refer in the following lines during this period was particularly strengthened. As we will see in the following sub-section, trade union bureaucrats promoted, from the Government, intervention in local “rebel” branches.

xx This does not want to deny those important trends that appeared within the same Peronist movement.
to build an alternative “Peronism without Peron”. In this sense the case of Vandor was very important.

xxi This is the case of SMATA Córdoba, for instance, were the same secretary has been in power since 1976.

xxii In the majority of cases, union membership fees are paid directly from the employer to the national or central federation of Buenos Aires.

xxiii As the case of Renault and that of FIAT will show, in periods of enterprise crisis and massive layoffs secret negotiations are often held between management representatives and union leaders in order to “satisfactorily” arrange the situation. In these cases it is not uncommon that the union could accept the company plans in exchange for benefits and cash for individuals at the top of the organisation.

xxiv This is for instance the case of Mc Donald’s workers that, despite the anti-union practices globally adopted by the enterprise, affiliate to the union and to its Obras Sociales for the social security package provided (Ghigliani 2002).

xxv “Para nosotros, la vuelta de Perón era la vuelta de la decencia y la dignidad para los que trabajamos, sacarnos la pata del patrón de encima, era la vuelta de la felicidad, era el final de tanta tristeza y tanta amargura que había en los millones de hombres del pueblo, era el fin de la persecución....”(James 1990, p.128).

xxvi “El sindicalista debe luchar con todas sus convicciones, todas sus fuerzas para cambiar el sistema. El dirigente sindical debe saber que pese a una “buena economía” si no hay una justa distribución de la riqueza la explotación prosigue. Y por lo tanto debe luchar por la liberación social. El dirigente debe saber que jamás habrá buenos convenios de trabajo con una economía del país supeditada a los monopolios. Y por lo tanto debe luchar por la liberación nacional”(in James 1990, p.307)

xxvii Fiat workers did not even participate in the Córdobazo.

xxviii It is interesting to note the similarities between Córdoba and the Córdobazo and that of Turin, approximately in the same period, during the so called “Hot Autumn”. In both cases we have young migrant workers, living in new neighbourhoods near the plants and that were at their first experience of work in a car factory. These common backgrounds, among other factors, certainly produced a class conscious identity and the potential for rebellion and radicalisation. In the case of FIAT/Turin, in particular, the change of production system and working rhythms that occurred at that time contributed to unify the demands of the "old" skilled workers with those of the "new" unskilled migrants. See Castronovo (1999) and for a militant perspective Balestrini (1977).

xxix It was not uncommon to work in a factory and study part-time.

xxx “...cambio totalmente la vida en la fabrica. Los delegados nos defendian de los jefes frente a todos los problemas que surgian en el trabajo, controlamos los ritmos de produccion que antes eran terribles. En fin, eliminamos el clima opresivo que se vivia en la fabrica y pudimos reivindicar nuestros derechos como seres humanos” (in James 1990, p.306)

xxxi See for instance the case of Aerolineas Argentinas in Thwaites Rey 1999.

xxxii “...significa que los que tenemos trabajo estamos cediendo un pedacito de empleo para que otro lo tenga o que lo cedemos para no recuperarlo nunca más y que nada ocurra?” (La voz del Interior, 12 Oct.1996)

xxxiii SMATA, the biggest union in the automotive sector and supporter of the Acuerdo Macro, put flexibility into practice signing several collective agreements with the big multinationals of the sector and among these with FIAT.

xxxiv In its original version: “il sindacato è obiettivamente nient’altro che una società commerciale, di tipo prettamente capitalistico, la quale tende a realizzare, nell’interesse del proletariato, un prezzo massimo per la merce-lavoro e a realizzare il monopolio di questa merce nel campo nazionale e internazionale” (“Le masse e i capi”, Ordine Nuovo 30 Ottobre 1921) in Gramsci 1969, p. 501-504.

xxxv A detailed analysis of this mobilisation in Cangiano (1998).

xxxvi At the same time the lowest levels in many of these societies have been occupied by an increasing number of immigrants that because of their illegal status or of their conditions of legality dependent on a formal "job" do not easily mobilise.
Chapter 4: Dynamics of mobilisation, injustice and solidarity

1. Introduction.

The cases presented in this research analyse two mobilisations that occurred in the city of Córdoba, in Argentina during the period from September 1996 to May 1997. Three different factory occupations have represented workplace conflict, two in the FIAT Ferreyra plant and one in the Renault Santa Isabel industrial complex. These cases could probably be seen as examples of workers' resistance to the policies of labour flexibility introduced by the neo-liberal government at that time in power in the country. During the last decade Argentina has shown a consistent, popular opposition to the effects, in terms of job losses, unemployment, underemployment and social marginalisation, produced by the waves of privatisation of former public companies and by capital restructuring in a globalised dependent economy. Within this context we have to place our analysis of these cases.

At the same time, mobilisations cannot be explained just as the result of external influences on the workplaces. The change in the objective reality surrounding workers, corresponded to a change in workers' subjectivity and the ways in which they processed the new situations of precariousness and benefit reduction, included in the flexible contracts. This can explain differences in the process of mobilisation. As shown in the theoretical
chapter, there are certain circumstances in which macro changes in the external reality activate subjects, allowing them to contest the fluidity and inevitability of social relations formerly taken for granted and reproduced. The research aims to shed more light into these complex relations.

In the case of FIAT, we have a group of workers not used to conflict, with a high level of income, especially compared with the rest of workers in the country, with expectations of growth in their careers within the company and in society as well. The objective reality they were facing before the conflict was that of security and stability. But the unfavourable conditions included in the new collective agreement they were forced to accept faced them with a harsh and unexpected reality in which even the reference points, the company and the union, of their previous industrial relations environment were momentarily absent. Within this context of change and attack on their rights, workers found a powerful ally in solidarity. The same people that for years had maintained themselves in the comforts of the island of welfare their employment could offer, changed with the new conditions they had to face. The situation and the action that followed it, forged the process through which *compañerismo* (a fair relation with their fellows workers in the same line) became active solidarity. Company repression, government opposition and a bureaucratic union boycott pushed a conflict for better wages and defence of workers' dignity into a choice of passive acceptance or resistance. Conflict evolved in these circumstances and its intensity followed the level of radicalisation and socio-political consciousness workers developed in the context of local
and national labour struggles. One year after the conflict started, 1200 out of 1700 workers lost their jobs.

In the case of Renault as well workers had to face the implementation of a set of “flexible” measures that negatively affected their previous working and salary conditions. But while in the case of FIAT these changes were introduced abruptly and unleashed strong mobilisation out of union and company control, in the case of Renault, workers experienced a prolonged deterioration of their conditions. The workforce was reduced selectively and with the use of incentive schemes, entire sections were outsourced to external companies with new employment conditions for those workers that could maintain their posts. In few years Renault, in complicity with the business union SMATA, effectively introduced all the organisational changes necessary to make the company more profitable. This strategy helped to keep conflict under control. Workers did mobilise to occupy the plant, and genuinely supported an oppositional and more militant stance within the union, but the divisions among them provoked by company strategy and the unsuccessful attempt to win control of the union, broke solidarity and any possibility of conflict radicalisation.

The two cases are certainly asymmetrical, at least with regards to the outcome of conflict, with the case of Renault occupying the negative (as the place where mobilisation not always happened in an open form and radicalisation did not occur) side in the analysis that will follow. Problems in comparing the two cases may be expected because to explain what did
not happen is much more difficult than to establish differences among similar sets of events. However this thesis aims to provide empirical evidence for a critical evaluation of conceptual categories included in the mobilisation theory (injustice, solidarity, leadership) rather than to set differences in the types and models of possible mobilisations. Due to this, Renault has been considered and has to be seen as control rather than a classical comparative case.

In the same line of argument and because of the asymmetry mentioned above, we may have been tempted to look at the case of FIAT as a sort of pure or authentic mobilisation and consequently to treat the other case as a deviation from an assumed rule. This interpretation has to be avoided. But undoubtedly the case of FIAT has the advantage of offering a perspective on an entire process of mobilisation and counter mobilisation and this broader view puts clearly the evidence for each period of conflict, the causes that generated it, the role played in it by solidarity and leadership, and the relations between repression and workers' radicalisation. Thus the point that should be made is not on the differences between pure and less pure cases of mobilisation but rather on those factors that hamper a process of mobilisation and whose presence or absence determine different outcomes of the same process. This interpretation does not necessarily represent a "workerist" preference but is just the evidence that certain factors have had a profound influence on the possibility of workers mobilising in similar ways, in the two cases.
Following these considerations we can identify company and bureaucratic unionism as those factors whose material presence or absence has hampered or facilitated mobilisation. In this sense Renault is "presence" and FIAT "absence". In the first case, company strategy deliberately aimed to dilute the conflict introducing outsourcing, flexible working conditions and reduction of personnel during the years previous to the occupation of the plant. The bureaucratic union SMATA supported this strategy covertly and rode the wave of protests that workers at Renault were demonstrating since the beginning of the process of company restructuring. But as in other historical cases, official unionism co-opted internal opposition and maintained a strong control of grass roots movements. In the case of FIAT, the company and the bureaucratic union momentarily disappeared and left room for the process of workers' solidarity formation and for an anti-bureaucratic leadership to emerge. The company, changing the contract so abruptly and so unfavourably, lost the value it had in the view of many workers. Union delegates in the plant were considered traitors. The former pillars of paternalistic industrial relations at FIAT, those factors that maintained workers' protests under control in the years before the conflict, collapsed simultaneously. The vacuum of power created, produced in turn a space for the process of solidarity formation to continue and, with it, an apparently inevitable system of beliefs and rules to be contested. This moment represented a watershed in workers' consciousness, they acknowledged that their struggle was part of a bigger movement resisting neo-liberalism, they regained a space for discussion, for decisions, and for politics.
In the case of Renault, the system to control workers' grievances and prevent any forms of open conflict with the company was always firmly in place. As explained earlier, opposition to labour flexibility started two years before the mobilisation here analysed occurred. Workers genuinely supported a renewal in the union leadership, at Renault and in Volkswagen the opposition slate won the elections, but their hopes for a more militant union changed to frustration and impotence when the bureaucracy co-opted the former opposition leader into the union apparatus.

The emphasis on this "genetic" difference is also fundamental to understanding how mobilisations have occurred and the way we understand the role played by solidarity and leadership. These examples will show that mobilisation has emerged out of a process in which solidarity was a crucial element. While agreeing with a commonly accepted view that, almost by its very nature, collective action cannot be understood without a minimum level of solidarity, the emphasis on this latter helps us to understand how in the two cases the same factors have differently affected mobilisation, increasing or reducing the room for the process of solidarity formation.

The chapter is organised as follow. The first part, introduced by the chronology of the conflict, describes the companies and the unions involved in the cases and looks for possible preconditions of mobilisation.
The second part, subdivided in four subsections, focuses on the processes of mobilisation trying to show from the analysis of their dynamics, how differently workers perceive injustice thus calling for a re-evaluation of the role of solidarity within mobilisations. Due also to the above mentioned asymmetry between the cases and at the way solidarity has been conceptualised, in the chapter the comparison is constructed around thematic areas rather than on fixed rules and strict parallels between the cases, this maintains a constant dialectic with the theory. A final comparative section concludes the chapter, that has been written fusing narrative descriptive accounts of what happened with in-depth analyses. This approach probably adapts better to the study of a social process, maintains stronger relations between facts and theories and also follows on to the way data has been collected.

2. The context:

a) The chronology of conflict

*Table one: the chronology of conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th Sept. 1996:</td>
<td>CORMEC's workers sign the new contract with FIAT AUTO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 Nov. 1996</td>
<td>Renault’s factory occupation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Jan. 1997</td>
<td>Creation of FIAT’s independent union SITRAMF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 May 1997</td>
<td>FIAT’s mobilisation leader is fired.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research embraces a period of industrial conflict of approximately one year, from September 1996 to 1997, during which three open mobilisations in the form of factory occupations occurred, two at FIAT and one at Renault.

The FIAT Ferreyra industrial complex, historically the most important hub of company activities in Argentina, until 1994 hosted an engine factory employing almost 2000 workers. Following the decision of the company to increase its investments in Argentina, a new assembly plant was built in the same industrial area. This plant, a copy of the one existing in Melfi, Southern Italy, had to be at the forefront of technology and work organisation, including a full set of “flexible” employment practices. Due to the new production methods the company wanted to introduce (broadly speaking a lean production model that included kaizen, just in time and team working), an harmonisation, in terms of working time and salaries, between the old engine factory and the new assembly factory had to be achieved. With this objective in mind, on the 18th of September 1996 workers employed in the engine plant were forced to sign an agreement in which they accepted dismissal by CORMEC (the legal name of the engine plant owned by the FIAT group) and currently employed by FIAT AUTO, within the conditions of the new collective agreement subscribed one year
earlier by FIAT with SMATA, the biggest national union in the automotive sector. When workers the day after discovered that they were losing almost 50% of their previous salaries, they reacted spontaneously occupying the plant and at the same time derecognising the union internal commission.

After six days of occupation and with the risk that the case could become nation wide known example of labour flexibility (on the 26th of September FIAT’s workers were among the protagonists of the local demonstrations organised for the national strike against Menem's labour reforms), the company, with the mediation of local Government, finally reached an agreement with its workers, who formally accepted a reduction of their salary by approximately 10%.

In the following months conflict remained simmered beneath the surface with the company trying to oppose the formation of a new workers' representation with any means possible. In January, a moment of low production in Argentina, a new factory occupation occurred, this time provoked by the decision of the company to fire a workers' delegate on the basis of its low productivity rate. The success of this mobilisation was partial, the local authority settled the dispute in favour of the company, and it signalled the decline of grassroots mobilisation. Conflicts did not disappear: there were acts of sabotage, disruption of production, and partial strikes. But the company was in the meanwhile undermining the material bases for collective action and this forced the majority of workers
to accept voluntary retirement and isolated the most militant of them.

In November 1996, probably on the wave of FIAT's events, Renault's factory was occupied. The company implemented over two years a programme to reduce its labour force. Workers were first suspended (but remained employed with a reduced salary) due to scarcity of production and later on reincorporated. In this process hundreds lost their jobs with union complicity. Groups of suspended workers mobilised against the company and contested the union's leadership, oppositional leaders emerged. This situation represented the background for the mobilisation that occurred in November when the union, forced by its internal opposition, decided to occupy the plant as a protest against the decision of the company to outsource the entire section of maintenance to an external provider. After five days an agreement was reached, but soon started covert negotiations that left things unchanged. In the meanwhile the local union internal opposition, although successful in the big factories, lost the election for the renewal of charges within the organisation and settled an agreement with the former leadership. Opposition ended in the Renault factory and with it any possibility of alliances among the automobile workers of the city.

b) The unions

As previously mentioned, the Argentine labour law regulated the issue of trade unions' representation through the recognition of one trade union for
each industrial sector or economic activity. The ministry of labour is the only authority that can give the legal status of trade union to a free association of workers. People can freely associate but this is not a condition sufficient to defend their rights. In practice the legal system implies that despite the high degree of representation a certain organisation could have reached among a group of workers, the power to act as legitimate defendant (in court, arbitration, collective bargaining and at the workplace) of the same group against the employer is dependent on a political decision. In fact the ministry of labour, through the recognition of the so called personería gremial, does not perform a purely administrative task since its decision is normally opposed to the national trade union that historically represented a certain category of workers. This regulation, which in practice denied the freedom of association, is part of the labour law system created by Peron. The aim was to support the institutionalisation of trade unions, both tightening their activities and demands to the political objectives of Peronism and subordinating unions' leadership to a personal loyalty to Peron.

The Law that regulates trade unions' representation (*Ley de Associaciones Professionales*), has been one of the most important pieces of legislation on the basis of which trade unions' political power has been alternately strengthened and weakened. Behind the decision of the ministry of labour to recognise or deny the personería gremial there have often been national political struggles. This is the case with Frondizi's government's decision in 1958 to allow the creation of plant unions, for instance with FIAT's
SITRAC and SITRAM and later Perkins's SITRAP, as a way of weakening the financial power and numerical strength of SMATA and UOM in the key automotive sector. Another UCR (Union Civica Radical) government, that of Illia, in 1964 gave the *personeria gremial* to FIAT's plant unions. But in other cases government's decision has been targeted to balance the power between two existing unions competing for the same category of workers. Particularly in new and potentially expanding industrial activities, trade unions' competition over the issue of representation in the sector was fierce. Automotive production could not be easily and neatly classified since it included within the same factory many different activities and skills: from assembly to maintenance, from the work in the foundry and soldering to the construction of seats and internal instruments. When the first companies in the sector started to operate in the middle of the 1950's, two unions could potentially claim the representation, SMATA and UOM. SMATA at that time was a very small union whose members were mainly employed in garages and mechanical repair shops. UOM was one of the most important and powerful unions within the CGT and represented workers in the metallurgical sector which had increased in number as a consequence of the process of industrialisation promoted, in particular, during Peron's decade. After the military putsch overthrew Peron in 1955, one of the first decisions of the new minister of labour was to recognise SMATA as the union representative for the automotive sector and this as both a way to financially undermine UOM and to curd its influence and capacity to mobilise among automotive workers (at that time this latter union was one
of the leaders in the so called *resistencia peronista*). In 1971, under the presidency of Gen. Lanusse, the government decided, with pressure from the company, to de-recognise the *personería gremial* of FIAT’s SITRAC and SITRAM since their *clasista* and anti-bureaucratic leadership was an element of social instability in the city of Córdoba and a national, and potentially dangerous example of workers' self-determination (Duval 2001). In 1974, with the union bureaucracy in the government, local *clasista* unions such was SMATA in Córdoba and UOM in Villa Constitución, despite their high level of representation among the workers, were de-legitimised and their executive committees substituted for more “in line” delegates (Brennan 1994). After the last military dictatorship, the Alfonsin government tried to introduce more democracy within the unions, as we have mentioned before, but it did not challenge the monopoly each union had in its own “historical” sector. Menem, despite his partial success in the reform of the labour law system, did not substantially touch the *Ley de Asociaciones Profesionales*. He needed the traditional unions' political power as a support for his anti-labour social economic reforms, and the introduction of more democracy in the workplace would have meant reducing the influence of union bureaucrats on the labour force and with this increasing the chances of grassroots movements in opposition to the government's policies.

These historical examples are important to understand workers' representation at FIAT and Renault in 1996 during the mobilisation that occurred in both plants. In the case of FIAT in particular, the historical
antagonism between UOM and SMATA created a vacuum of power in representation giving space to an anti-bureaucratic reaction. In the events following the first occupation of the plant, a new leadership was elected and was recognised by the workers as the only legitimate representative of their interests. After several attempts to obtain from SMATA legal recognition of the new representation as an independent part of the same union, workers massively voted for the constitution of an independent union, SITRAMFi, which was never legitimised by the government through the personeria gremial. Based on this “non legitimacy” the union and its leaders were never accepted by the company who, although forced to deal with workers' delegates to maintain discipline in the plant, never officially recognised the new entity.

After the experience with plant unions that transformed themselves in a few years from “yellow” to clasista and with SMATA under a clasista leadership, FIAT in 1974 supported UOM claims to workers' representation and until 1996 this latter union was the only legitimate one in FIAT’s plants in Argentina. When the company planned to increase its investment in the country through the establishment of a new high technology plant, negotiation with the UOM started for a new collective agreement that had to implement flexible working conditions in the labour process and consistent reductions in salaries and benefits. An agreement was reached but the union general assembly decided not to ratify it. FIAT offered the same agreement to SMATA, who accepted becoming the legitimate partner of FIAT in one of the first flexible collective
agreements in the industrial sector in Argentina. Similar agreements were signed in the same year by the same union with other automotive producers. It is important to recall that in 1995 when the agreement was signed, UOM was starting to oppose Menem’s labour policies. Nonetheless, the union supported his presidential campaign during the same year, but soon after the re-election the same union started to lead a critical opposition to the government from within the CGT. In the country as a whole a situation of social unrest was already emerging as a consequence of privatisation of state enterprises, the increase in unemployment and the precariousness of jobs, the flexible agreement with FIAT was in contradiction with the opposition of the union. At the same time SMATA was openly in favour of the government, and with the arrival of new investments in the automotive sector, its position in the CGT would increase with the potential of new jobs that the new plants would have generated.

Before 1996, when the new plant was inaugurated, FIAT’s presence in Argentina consisted of an engine factory employing almost 2000 workers with a contract, signed with UOM in 1975 and updated in the following years, which in terms of benefits and salaries was considered among the best in the whole industrial sector. The new agreement signed by the company with SMATA was considerably worse than the previous one. The first obvious difference was in the salaries, reduced to half together with a general reduction or suppression of other benefits and allowances: holidays, extra time, study leave, and job categories. But most
importantly, and less obviously, the new agreement changed the working week reducing, by a decision of the company, the normal working day and imposing extra time on Saturdays and Sundays to make up for lost time. Although this agreement was signed with the aim of implementing it in the new plant with a new labour force, the company, because of the fabbrica integrata (integrated factory) production model, was clearly obliged to homogenise its workforce both in terms of salary conditions and production practices. This process was not so easy since workers in CORMEC, the engine plant FIAT owned in Córdoba, had to be convinced to accept the unfavourable conditions included in the new collective agreement. As far as the new union was concerned, workers really did not matter because it was imposed on them by the law, they had no possibility of changing it and FIAT’s workers had no interest in the union as the low membership rate at UOM (10% of the workforce) showed.

The change from CORMEC to FIAT AUTO with the new collective agreement is fundamental to understanding why workers mobilised and a new anti-bureaucratic leadership emerged. In the case of Renault, a change of contract, company name and union were not at stake and SMATA has always been in charge of workers in the Renault plants. Also, in this case a mobilisation and an anti-bureaucratic reaction occurred but with different motivations, without the emergence of an independent form of unionism and these factors did not give space to further radicalize the conflict.
UOM and SMATA have often competed for the representation of workers in the automotive sector and for their influence in the CGT but interviews reveal that FIAT's and Renault's workers were not really interested in the way their unions were managing labour relations. This is particularly true for the case of FIAT, in which workers' exclusive claim was for better wages. Opposition to the internal commission was dangerous since those who were critics or wanted to raise the need for different union strategies could easily be fired with the company's complicity. The foremen were used to teaching new workers how to behave in case of trade union mobilisation:

"Look, here people move in this way: if there is an assembly stay in the middle, don't be the first and don't be the last... you are new... and don't stay in the plant". The same foremen told you to go and not to stay to maintain good relations with the union" (FIAT production worker 32).

Workers did not participate easily in solidarity strikes, people working at FIAT were considered as individualist and even within the plant there was a general apathy for all that was somehow related with "hacer o meterse en el lio".

This apathy for direct participation in union affairs could be related to many factors. As previously stated the last military dictatorship could have played an important role in this sense. But it is also true that the way the union was managed, its complicity with the company and the
impossibility of changing the leadership, not even at plant level, have
discouraged workers from participation. In addition to this, a consistent
group of them over the years became increasingly more interested in their
own salary and stability of their employment than in collective issues.
Many workers who participated in the creation of the anti-bureaucratic
SITRAC went, after that democratic experience was repressed, through
many years of bureaucratic unionism, military repression and market
crisis that consistently affected their non-participation. In summary we
could consider all this as apparent evidence that before mobilisation there
was no solidarity but, as specified in the theoretical chapter, if we think of
solidarity as a process there is no contradiction in considering it as the
basis of collective action.

At the time of the conflict, in September 1996, there was a generally
discredited view of the union in the plant and at national level. UOM
represented the paradigmatic example of the orthodox Peronist union and
of its two contradictory positions, being both a national political actor as
well as a counterpart to management in the workplace. Its permanent
leader, Lorenzo Miguel, had been in charge of the union since 1970, and
over all these years, he changed his political position many times
depending on which government was in charge and his influence in the
labour movement. The opinion Renault workers had of SMATA was no
different as we can see from the following quotations:

"The union has been bought, it laid off more than the company", "they
seem lambs but are wolves” (Renault maintenance worker, n.12), “I could also tell you about the union but I don’t know in what way this can be useful for you [...] we don’t trust too much in the union, they are all bought off”, “the union on one side was defending us and on the other side was smashing our head” (Renault production worker, n.10), “the union is a conniver and permanently in power”, “is like the mafia, not more and not less”, “the same people that were in the union with the military continue in the leadership of the union, it is the mafia” (Renault production worker n.8).vi

SMATA national leader, Jose’ Rodriguez, has been in charge of the union since 1972 and has stands accused by a German tribunal of the disappearance of workers in the Mercedes Benz plant during the last dictatorship.

In conclusion, it can be said that the combination of the legal system and the bureaucratic style of unionism contributed to creating among workers in both plants a discredited image of the unions. Together with these factors, the inheritance from the last military dictatorship and the fear of losing a comparatively well-paid job, could have increased workers apathy for participation in collective issues. Other factors have certainly contributed to mobilise workers, too. If it is true that there was, at that time, a generalised apathy for participation, the fact that a strong mobilisation occurred, especially in the case of FIAT, invites us to look for other determining factors as part of the same process of collective
action. It is possible to argue that a combination of relevant factors has both contributed to won workers' apathy for participation but also has mobilised them. Therefore, the next section is dedicated to an introduction to the companies object of the case studies, to look at the way management has historically established its relations with the workforce.

c) The companies

FIAT is the top Italian industrial group with its core business in car production. The same family has always owned the company and it represents a still successful model of early Italian industrial capitalism. Probably for these reasons FIAT directed its strategies to the global market later than other competitors, it has maintained a highly centralised and vertical chain of command and a rigorous managerial style. In the last decades FIAT’s previous centralised structure, both in terms of production factories and decision processes, has shifted toward a more geographically decentralised and internally flexible organisation. During the 1980’s the company opened new highly technologically advanced factories in the South of Italy that could be considered as sorts of laboratories, experiments in adapting Japanese practices (and the related work organisation) to the specific Italian reality (Camuffo and Volpato 1995). This process of innovation culminated in the 1990's with the Melfi plant, a new plant in the South of Italy, where technological innovation, flexibility, lean production, Japanese practices and a, consistently, new collective agreement, have been jointly implemented under the label of
In this context of change, labour relations at FIAT seem to have moved, at least in the management rhetoric, from a conflictual to a more participative approach, at both national and local levels. The company has for decades followed anti- or non-union policies and this has certainly contributed to increasing the conflict at plant level within a general political instability at national level. Over the years, the company has been, to some extent, more oriented toward participation and co-operation with unions. But the economic and financial crisis that the company is currently suffering, and the need to reduce labour costs, has shifted labour relations once again toward forms of management unilateralism. Nonetheless two trade union federations (UILM and FIM) signed in 2003 an agreement with the company and the government to soften job losses, while massive mobilisations opposed the company’s plans in all the Italian factories. FIAT's readiness to recognise a more active role for unions and workers in the management of everyday life in the plant is debatable and this not just because economic crisis and job losses often increase the distance of rhetoric from reality. Huge differences between green-field and brown field sites, and between Italian and foreign operations still exist (Bonazzi 1994, Rieser 1997, Meardi 2000).

FIAT is a company that has strong legacies from its past, its own “genetic code” and its peculiar characteristics. This is particularly evident in the case of labour relations. In the history of the company, management work
force relations have followed four main patterns: paternalist in the 1950’s, adversarial during the 1970’s and part of the 1960’s, management unilateralism in the 1980’s, oriented to participation. The strength of these historical models goes probably beyond their simple embeddedness in the company’s culture or in some sort of “country of origin effect” if it is true, as recognised by FIAT’s top industrial relations manager, that they represent core competences of the company (Camuffo e Massone 2001). This logic allows FIAT and its labour relations specialists to flexibly use historical and Italian patterns of relations with organised labour, or a combination of them, within the particular local context of legislation and the unions’ strength. FIAT is a company that has adapted quickly to organisational, technological and geographical changes but which constantly exploits labour relations codes of practice, prejudices, experiences, mentalities, profoundly related to the history of the company and, to a certain extent, to Italian industrial labour history.

These specific characteristics of the company and its labour relations style seem confirmed in the Argentine case. FIAT established its presence in the country in 1954 by buying a state-owned tractor plant in Ferreyra, a suburb of Córdoba. The company gradually expanded its activities to the construction of industrial vehicles, cars, and railway equipment until, in 1982, when, as a consequence of an economic crisis, it consistently reduced its investments in Argentina. In 1988, FIAT bought its former engine plant in Ferreyra from Sevel, an Argentine business group which was producing FIAT cars under a license agreement. In 1994 the company
started to build, with consistent financial support of local and national governments, a new highly automated plant to be integrated with the engine plant and in order to develop in Ferreyra and in South America its second production hub after Brazil. During all these years the company passed through different economic situations and market crises but it constantly maintained unchanged the paternalistic model of labour relations introduced since 1954.

In 1996, was the pride of being part of the *familia* (FIAT family) the company’s leit-motive. This was echoed in the social events organised for the workers during Christmas and other important holidays, or in the public speeches, or in the football competitions between different production lines of the plant. The Industrial Relations director was the president of a foundation that provided workers’ children with scholarships and awards for advancement in their studies, the company had permeated workers’ lives until the point that the majority of people were wearing the FIAT *camiseta* (shirt). There was a diffused sense of satisfaction among workers of being employed by FIAT and the expectation of further growth, as the construction of new plant demonstrated, also contributed to this feeling. People in the CORMEC plant were empowered, new courses were provided and career opportunities were offered for those who wanted to be leaders in the new production processes the new plant had to introduce. Workers were profoundly involved by the discourse of the company, they were feeling themselves to be part of a powerful company within which they could
develop professionally and socially. This “ideological” work was put forward through the foremen and in the local television channels, but was also part of more explicit activities that professional psychologists carried out among workers. In the years that preceded the introduction of the new FIAT/SMATA contract, workers were paid to attend group and individual psychological sessions set up to convince them that whatever the salaries they were going to receive, they should be satisfied with the possibility of maintaining employment in such a prestigious multinational company. Despite workers’ suspicions about the psychologists, FIAT’s ideological action was successful in building confidence in the future and the expectation of growth. On the one hand, workers had no other view of the reality than that offered by the company especially within a generalised apathy against participation. On the other hand, people at FIAT were living in an island of peace and prosperity both in terms of employment conditions and of future expectations.

"At FIAT we were enjoying the summer but it wasn’t like this for the workers in the casting sector and people were not aware of this, like a person who stays in his island [...] he doesn’t want people to move"(FIAT worker formerly employed in the casting sector). ix

Renault workers, compared with those of FIAT, in the years before the conflict were living under rather unsatisfactory conditions. The company changed its name to CIADEA and the ownership was acquired by national investors at the beginning of the 1990’s who started a process of
workforce reduction and outsourcing. In particular, the company adopted a strategy of outsourcing of production sections or of complementary services. The change of ownership produced a redefinition of the employment contract to worse terms with a consistent number of redundancies in each operation of outsourcing. When Renault became again in 1998 the owner of the plant, people employed were now reduced by half and production was limited just to the assembly of vehicles whose parts were imported from Brazil. It is possible that Renault became CIADEA just to implement employees’ reductions. The development of events gives credibility to workers' opinions of this as recorded in the interviews. Renault has a long-established presence in Córdoba that dates back to 1954. First as IKA (Industrias Kaiser Argentina) and then as Renault in 1967, the company represented the biggest industrial complex of the city both in terms of the number of workers employed and the importance of automobile production. In the plants the union has always been SMATA and workers suspected a union/management pact for outsourcing activities and were not confident in the leadership. Despite the common opinion FIAT and Renault workers showed of the bureaucracy of their unions, in this latter case was an anti-bureaucratic reaction and an oppositional stance internal to the union emerged before the conflict. The two companies were experiencing two different periods in the development of their industrial activities. FIAT was able to create expectations and promote enthusiasm among its workers for the perspective new plant and Renault was clearly going in a direction of labour flexibility.
In conclusion, the two cases of mobilisation have to be seen as the result of two different situations in terms of the companies' labour flexibility policies. In the case of FIAT, management promoted a sense of workers' identification with the company by the ideological action of raising expectations of personal growth and career development as a consequence of the new investment. These ideas were put forward through the use of psychological interventions within a managerial plan structured well in advance to convince workers to accept the unfavourable conditions of the new FIAT/SMATA agreement. The success of this plan could be also attributed to workers' apathy for participation in union affairs the basis of which could be found in the inheritance from of the military dictatorship, in the bureaucratic style of unionism and in the impossibility, strengthened by the company during the years, of real and democratic unionism within the plant. In the case of Renault, the company's plans were evident well before the mobilisation and there was no expectation of growth. These circumstances were evident to workers who reacted defensively, supporting an anti-bureaucratic opposition internal to SMATA. But what they thought of as a new authentically representative leadership to defend their rights against the company and to defeat the weak and compromised leadership turned out to be part of the same bureaucratic business system.

Paradoxically, as can be seen from the table below, preconditions seemed to be much more favourable to mobilisation in the case of Renault, where
the signs of company restructuring were already evident and a militant opposition had already emerged, rather than in the case of FIAT, a paternalistic company whose workforce was dominated by apathy for collective action and individualism. Thus despite certain preconditions which may fertilise the soil for mobilisation, it seems clear that these are not sufficient to create the critical mass necessary for action.

*Table two: preconditions for mobilisation*

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3. The process:

a) Dynamics of mobilisation and perceptions of injustice

In this subsection is offered a detailed reconstruction of the mobilisations (factory occupations) occurring in the two cases analysed. The focus is on the way people collectively mobilised, the chronological sequence of the events, the reasons that may have justified each action, the role played in it by each actor and the differences between the cases, will offer empirical evidence to:

- Demonstrate the weaknesses of the concept of injustice in the theory of mobilisation.
- Show which factors have fostered and/or hampered mobilisation.
- Reconsider mobilisation as a collective response not always organised and lead by a trade union organisation.

For the clarity of the exposition, the cases are treated separately but the preference is for a style mixing narrative descriptions with analytic accounts which has often implied cross references between the cases. A section at the end of the chapter more systematically compares the cases along the lines identified as objects of the study.
"FIAT signs the new collective agreement with SMATA. We had a plant that had to pass to a new company with salary conditions inferior to the ones workers had before [...] it was very difficult" (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).\textsuperscript{xi}

It was really very difficult to convince 2000 workers to accept a reduction of their salaries by 50\% and to be "flexibilised". This especially if we consider that the company had nurtured workers' involvement and had produced expectations among them. What to do if none of them signed the new agreement? FIAT could not lay off all these people without a bad image in the community and the risk of political pressure. The company was presenting itself in the media as the employer of 5000 new workers, FIAT signalled at that time, technology, innovation, welfare. The internal commission of (UOM) never informed workers of the company plans with details on the salaries they were going to receive with the new contract and always stressed that a reduction was coming but that it was only a cut of approximately 10\% of their previous salaries. The day before the change to the new contract, union delegates invited workers to sign a paper in which they received the authorisation of their colleagues to negotiate with the company a reduction not more than 10\%. The company used this paper as the proof of workers' desire to be employed by the new company, FIAT Auto. In a note for the press of 18/9/1996, the day of the change to the new contract, the emphasis put was on its voluntary
character and on the fact that the company valued and positively accepted workers' requests and that from that moment on an innovative project in the Argentine automotive industry would commence. But in reality the change to the new contract was compulsory, workers ignored the new conditions included in it, everything came as a surprise even to the day on which workers had to sign.

"The day of the change to the new contract was a secret, we surprised the whole factory, everyone" (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO). xii

At the end of each shift workers were called one by one into an office with two doors, one for entering and the other for exiting, and inside there were a lawyer, a representative from the personnel office (REPO) and two guards waiting. Two options were available: resign from CORMEC and accept the new flexible contract with FIAT or be laid off, in both cases with payment of legal compensation xiii. No time for reflection was allowed, the discussion with mates and colleagues at work was impossible, the workers who passed through the office were accompanied to the gate of the plant by the guards. Most people signed, convinced that something could be done in the days after, maybe talking with the union delegates, and that signing with FIAT could give them time to become aware what the labour market was offering. In the words of a worker, the day of the change to the new contract is described as follows:
"One day you came in, they grabbed you, and the boss was telling you not to put the machine on and instead you had to go to talk with the REPO and he had your resignation and your new contract and you had to sign and a guard was standing beside him. If you wanted time to think about it, they did not allow it, you had either to stay or to leave. Many in that situation signed thinking that after they could change something and others did not accept from the beginning and gave up the job. If you go to your job that has always been the same and from one day to the next they tell you that you have to resign and that they will reduce your salary by 50% and that if you do not like it you are laid off [...] you freeze, you do not have other perspectives, you do not even have the time to think about a different job or to invest money in something different" (FIAT worker 32).

The day of the change to the new contract and the way it was implemented was the spark for the mobilisation that started next day. There were a number of factors associated with that compulsory signature whose combination produced the basis of mobilisation. Firstly there was a surprise: workers were convinced that the new contract did not imply to them any substantial reduction in the salary or a change in the working practices. Secondly they were feeling impotent and scared at the same time in relation to a decision that was against their interests and of which they did not know in advance. Thirdly, these feelings transformed themselves into a search for those responsible for their condition: the company and the union.
“We hated both the company and the union bureaucrats. The occupation was against the company but we also went to the delegate’s houses, we wanted to beat them up and destroy their houses. All of them disappeared that night from Córdoba……..usually it’s the bureaucracy that scares us, that beats us, but in that case it was the opposite” (FIAT activist 1).

The majority of workers were fans of the company, they were wearing the FIAT camiseta (shirt), there were people with many years working in the plant who were grateful to the company for what they had received in the previous years, the money representing just one aspect of the upward social mobility they acquired while employed by FIAT.

“Yes, all of us were wearing it (the shirt). When I was ordered: “do this or do that”, I have always executed the order, I have always complied with the obligations of my work. We were very happy with the situation we were living in, we were interested in the productivity of the plant.” (FIAT worker 31)xvi.

The confidence in the union was somehow compromised because of the opinion workers held on union representation. For the same reason, they were expecting from the company improvements and job security that FIAT had continuously stressed among them: they felt they were an essential part of a modernisation process, of an industrial adventure where they were among the protagonists.
“the company did not stress just aspects of production but also involved workers’ families in the whole productive process in the big FIAT family. We celebrated birthdays for all the children, there were gifts for Christmas and New year, books, paper and stationery for the school, ......it was total involvement not just in production, it was ideological, for me it was terrible because I could see what in reality all this meant and I was feeling isolated” (FIAT activist 1) xvii.

After the change to the new contract and in the nightly discussions with their families, workers were trying to define their feelings and to give an explanation to the situation in which they were living:

“(the change of contract) broke an entire life project, it destroyed myself and my family, I could not accept that idea” (member of the independent union commission), “you were feeling as though someone had robbed you, it is like when you buy a toy for a kid and when you are going to give him, and the kid with all the expectations of playing with it, you tell him “it was not for you it was for someone else” (independent union delegate).

“In that plant people always worked a lot, production rhythms were very high. People worked a lot but they were proud to be employed by that company. They did not want to accept this and people felt betrayed, assaulted (injured)” (FIAT mobilisation leader) xviii.

The reduction in salary was the most obvious change workers had to
accept but it was not the only reason and justification for their reactions. What they had earned was considered as an acknowledgement of their capacity to work and a sort of company respect for their human qualities. They could not tolerate thinking about a different life style, they could not accept the company's behaviour, they could not admit a limitation on what they saw as their legitimate rights: the wage-effort relationship was now unbalanced.

"We did not like the idea (of the change of contract), because we already had a living standard that we did not want to change, moreover, as it is for all people, we were aiming to have much more and not to go backwards" (FIAT independent union delegate).

But to focus just on economic relations and consider the violation of rules (as in the case of a change of the contract) as a perception of injustice and thus the basis of mobilisation is part of a more complex reality. As we will see in the case of Renault, workers mobilised against the move of maintenance workers to another company with the same salary and working conditions. Their definition and perception of injustice was in this sense much "milder" than that of FIAT workers? If this is the case we should then consider that there are different levels of injustice? These questions certainly seem to confirm what was argued in the theoretical chapter about the subjective nature of injustice and the impossibility of considering it as a central element in a theory of mobilisation. Injustice does not exist on its own, it does not have any objective dimension, but it
is rather the result of individual perceptions framed within specific social and cultural models.

Problems in the analysis of data considering injustice as the basis of mobilisation, appear again while interviewing people who were still working in the FIAT plant and who experienced those moments of mobilisation. I approached those kinds of people who maintained the strongest affection for the company. In their view, there was no injustice in the decision of the company to cut their salaries. Nobody was of course happy about the changed situation but individually they came to accept and justify the new labour conditions.

"You have to be realist and always stay with the company. You have to be fully aware that a company pays a salary for the work that a person does and you have to agree with those working conditions. I have always been on that side, if I do not like it I will not stay. But if at that moment I was behind a machine, doing the same thing and earning less than before, I could not tell you what I could have done" (FIAT REPO, former production worker).\textsuperscript{xix}

Others stressed the view that their sacrifice was justified by the fact that young workers were now entering the plant and that was an important social development for the entire community. The majority of them accepted because of the responsibility they had for their families, they dared not even think if it was unjust to cut their salaries with a group of
people was depending on them.

"I have a family, I cannot say "well, I give up the job" if there is no other option. The point is that I am not alone, depending on me there is a group of people. Unfortunately that's the way it is" (FIAT worker 1).xx.

Generally it appeared that working in the plant was somehow "addictive" for those people who had already spent a number of years in the factory, this applied both to FIAT and Renault workers. The rhythms of the factory, a certain stability and social recognition during the years, the repetitiveness of a life structured around the plant, the development of inflexible skills adapted specifically to the production of parts of cars, created in many people, including those who initially mobilised, a dependency on the factory.

"The point is that those people that have passed, in practice, a life inside the factory maybe do not see things as one who has thought to leave the factory. A person that lived inside there, when he goes from the plant to the street looking for a job, does not even know how to sell something. He structured his life working there and if you send him to the corner to sell a "Mantecol", (popular biscuit frequently sold in street kiosks) he does not know how to do it" (member of the independent union commission).xvi

In this sense we could say that working in the factory is in itself a mechanism that inhibits the possibility for mobilisation and that could
explain why people accept reductions of their rights/salaries. Despite the fact that individual workers may perceive a specific situation as unjust, their sense of injustice and their possible reactions tend to remain blocked by structural constraints (they simply need to maintain the job because no alternative options are offered, for the responsibilities of the family, for the inadaptability to a working life outside the factory) and the impossibility to identify a collective agent.

The day of the factory occupation, which also corresponded to the beginning of mobilisation, workers did not know what to do. They were of course feeling uncomfortable with the new situation but action and collective solidarity were needed to make explicit their feelings. The union delegates disappeared, for the company a normal day of work was starting, there were no recognised leaders, no organisation, nobody knew what to do. People started to work but only for a few hours.

"The day after we entered the plant and we found a very strange situation. I entered a little bit later, the quality department entered later than others, and we had to pass through the plant, there was a very strange atmosphere there. People meeting together in all corners, everybody was meeting, it was as though the day could not start. We reached the changing room but we did not even change, "a mate is saying that we have to gather". And it was something spontaneous. We went forward to the small square in front of the plant, none of the union delegates was there. "this is not what they had told us... somebody should explain...
let's go to ask for explanations, let's go and demand some explanations”. And people went out of the plant in an orderly manner, I think everybody was there and they went walking forward, “What is happening?” (FIAT worker, Quality Control Department)

The factory occupation was spontaneous, unplanned, and not organised. FIAT workers were not used to mobilisation and in the previous years they just participated in a few national strikes because were forced to by the union. People were used to solve working problems directly with the foreman and individually each of them had already accepted the conditions of the new contract. Even if the majority did not like it, nonetheless they had to accept it. It is just when they met again at work that mobilisation started and with it their perceptions of injustice became explicit. Workers started to talk, became conscious of what was happening, and solidarity emerged within the workplace, and natural leaders unified individual feelings. From individual rebellion and discussions among groups of workers the wave grew and people occupied the plant not knowing what they were doing apart from the fact that they needed to understand what was happening. Somebody closed the fence of the factory gate violently and mobilisation became occupation, at that moment,

“we were lost, we had no direction, they had hit us very hard, so hard that we got crazy, we reached a moment in which we were not thinking, people did not want to believe, but it was very resolute” (member of the
Workers felt violently attacked for many reasons. The reduction of their salaries was very large, the change to the new contract was compulsory, the company was responsible because it had created expectations among them and “old” workers were particularly critical of FIAT because after so many years in the plant they should have received more respect.

“The “old” were maybe more militant because we perceived what was happening as unjust. After so many years of work we felt marginalised, and that we had no value anymore” (FIAT “old” worker 1).xxiv

The internal union commission had worked against them, the delegates were considered as traitors, and there was no organisation through which to express their protests. They were feeling abandoned, their dignity as human beings damaged and alone and somehow they had to react, to hit back.

"we went directly to fight and it wasn’t. They forced you because a different solution was not available, they forced you to fight. They make it (the change of contract) so compulsory and the salary reduction so drastic that it resulted in a very strong blow and you had to repay it with another strong blow, no alternative was left" (FIAT worker 32).xxv

These conclusions became clear just when they met together and could
talk of what they were feeling with the other colleagues. Injustice appeared in action, there became explicit.

**Renault**

The dynamics of mobilisation at FIAT were very different from that at Renault and this was somehow connected with the violence of the blow perceived by FIAT workers. In the words of one of them:

“it was a terrible blow and in a very short time. Maybe if we were in the situation of Renault which was more gradual.......but in our case it wasn’t. They broke us in the middle, they didn’t dissolve us, they hit us directly and strongly and they broke us in the middle” (delegate of the independent union). \(^{xxvi}\)

In the case of Renault, the mobilisation and the factory occupation that occurred a few months after that of FIAT, has to be seen as part of a process of company restructuring and workers' protests that had started in June 1995. In that month, CIADEA (at that time the Renault plants were nominally in the hands of an Argentine investor) decided to suspend 2500 workers as a measure to reduce costs at a time of market crisis. Within one year the company gradually recalled the suspended workers but at the end of the process a large number of them was not reintegrated\(^{xxvii}\). It is in this period, that among the suspended workers emerged a militant group who opposed the leadership of SMATA, who had been accused of supporting
the interests of the company. This militant slate won the union elections in the Renault and Volkswagen plants but it was not successful in other workplaces. It nonetheless remained an active group with strong support, opposed to the SMATA Córdoba permanent leadership. Under pressure of internal opposition and after the events at FIAT, where an anti-bureaucratic stance emerged against UOM and SMATA as well, the SMATA secretary was forced to mobilise workers through a factory occupation. This as a way to oppose the company’s decision to outsource the maintenance sector and to support workers' claims to remain employed by CIADEA. But after the occupation ended and the provincial ministry of labour interposed between the union and the company, an agreement was reached that in practice opened the doors for the outsourcing of the section.

In the case of FIAT mobilisation was massively supported, it was not organised, anti-bureaucratic and it was opposed by the company, while in the case of Renault people reported the mobilisation as a joda (a joke), something not to be taken seriously. Many workers were initially sincerely convinced about the reasons for their mobilisation\textsuperscript{xxviii}, but the way the factory occupation was managed by the union and the absence of real opposition by the company, produced a diffused scepticism. In the opinion of a Renault worker the factory occupation turned to be “a political/unionist agreement both of the union and the company that was in some ways arranged, in this sense we, the workers, always have to pay” (Renault worker 8).\textsuperscript{xxix}
The opinion Renault workers had of their union has been discussed before, and the occupation of the plant represented another indication of the bureaucratic style of SMATA Córdoba at the time of the conflict. Another worker, on the basis of his experience in the plant, identified the existence of a “union thought or philosophy” (pensamiento sindical), a sort of message circulating in the plant and referring to the way people had to relate with collective issues, in the following way:

“the union philosophy (the idea about the collective matters), was not to concern yourself with the problems of the others, “you take care of your business and nothing more than this and forget about the others” (Renault worker 9)."

Here again we can find that apathy and individualism many Renault workers alluded to as a consequence of the last military dictatorship in their vision of the union. But this point of view was based on the SMATA union style which even before the 1996 occupation acted as if it was Renault's business partner. Another worker:

“Many people say that in reality the union and the company arrange things among themselves but then say to people different things. It seems that it is like this because we didn’t gain a thing. We were feeling impotent and we couldn’t even look for another different solution, with different people representing us because the union didn’t allow us to do
In the case of Renault, the union bureaucracy was pushed to mobilise by the pressures of the internal opposition, by the emergence of an anti-bureaucratic unionism at FIAT (whose workforce was legally represented by SMATA) and by a situation of generalised social unrest in the city and in the country. SMATA had to show a certain degree of militancy if it wanted to avoid the risk of being bypassed by the rank and file and this could explain why mobilisation was provoked. We have seen how union bureaucracy in Argentina has often acted in such a way, trying to ride the wave of mobilisation and taking advantage of workers' protests to win support for its action.

In the case of Renault, injustice did not emerge because action did not take place within the frame of a renewed workers' self-determination. Workers were aggrieved by the company’s policies but first scepticism and then reality showed that a mobilisation led by a bureaucratic union was not possible. The sense of injustice did not become explicit. Injustice meant the acceptance of an unchangeable situation and transformed itself into impotence, frustration:

“we were all aware, all.....unfortunately how many “broncas” (anger, regrets, sorrow) we had to accept? Thousands and thousands of “broncas”. You have to resist and accept it for the family, you have to tolerate many things” (Renault worker 12).
b) Mobilisation and solidarity: a necessary introduction.

This subsection, moving on from the evidence provided by the dynamics of mobilisation, is concerned with solidarity. First a point should be made for a reconsideration of this in the theory of mobilisation. Secondly, following what was argued in the theoretical chapter, it reinforces by the view of solidarity as a dynamic process. This, in particular, implies avoiding a fixed perspective on the concept and consequently the need to look for necessary preconditions of it. Solidarity has its basis in human cooperation, and its influence on collective action may be best perceived by searching for those factors/elements that have altered the process of its formation. This search is thus detailed in subsection C.

The issue of solidarity represents the central point in the understanding of a process of mobilisation but, notwithstanding, its importance it does not appear explicitly in the theory of mobilisation. Solidarity, contributes to strengthening collective identity, is the basis of any collective action and is the crucial point in the analysis of the social processes around which a mobilisation is constituted and for three main reasons.

First, solidarity is one of the appearances in the workplace of the basic antagonism that confronts capital and labour and often contributes to the
identification of two opposed groups, “them” and “us”. While making explicit this latter opposition, solidarity is at the same time the first evidence of workers' collective interests and the first step in the acquisition of a class consciousness, independently of whether it is revolutionary or not. Secondly, solidarity, as a manifestation of the “them” and “us” opposition, is the conditio sine qua non collective action cannot be produced and/or maintained. The importance of leaders and representative organisations in framing workers' protests and in mobilising them cannot be understood without a reference to the way solidarity is built in the same micro contexts where collective action can be generated. Thirdly, the importance of solidarity in the study of collective action lies in the analysis of how government and company repression and counter-mobilisation breaks, stressing competition and individualism, those solidarity links that spontaneously emerge in the workplace among workers.

In the case of Argentina, workers' recognition of the opposition between “them” and “us” has been very evident. The important place in society that workers, before that as citizens, achieved through Peronism and the mobilisation capacities acquired as a result of their role in the Peronist political project, certainly contributed to strength the basic, although classless in the Peronist ideology, opposition between “them” and “us”. The historical development of capitalism in Argentina has produced a workers' culture, based on a constant identification with previous successful mobilisations (as with the Córdobazo) or with previous
unsuccessful but milestone struggles (as with the UOM Villa Constitución and the 1975 strikes). This has contributed to build a certain pride in being a worker, to constitute that particular class and a firm belief to be counterposed to the employer in the workplace (Camarero-Pozzi-Schneider 2000). But in addition to the workerist heritage of the Peronist era, there is also proof, as we have seen (Raimundo 2000), that a culturally clear recognition of workers with solidarity and class consciousness, the “us” of the opposition, did not have just a direct relation with Peronist culture but were also the results of the objective contradiction between this latter, with its classless ideology, and the production process.

Although these historical trends have to be taken into consideration, as well as the level of social conflict and radicalisation in Argentina, and have certainly influenced the way workers understand themselves within the society, they do not say much about the way solidarity is generated in the workplace and then transformed into collective action.

As a general frame for analysis we could look at solidarity from a two-stage perspective. On the one hand, we have all those situations that are directly related to the production process and to the way companies exercise their control of the workforce: for instance, the mutual help of workers or groups of them in the achieving the daily production output or the sharing of common problems related to authority in the plant. In all these cases solidarity seems to emerge spontaneously because people need to socialise and to find support for individual problems among those
working in the same workplace and under the same conditions. On the other hand, solidarity needs to be reinforced and confirmed when and if, a stronger action of protest needs to be implemented or strengthened. This stage is often the breaking point for workers’ solidarity and what emerged as a spontaneous consequence of the production process becomes insufficient and impossible to maintain against the action of the company and of the labour market. The same concept put in the words of an old SITRAC activist:

“solidarity always exists, it is spontaneous. What happens is that repression, today the flexibility of labour and yesterday the army, and insufficient organisation breaks it up.”

This provocative declaration, with its limitations, can be considered as a good starting point for the analysis for the following reasons. First, it offers a controversial vision based on two opposed extremes: the spontaneity of solidarity and an almost natural intervention of repressive factors. Second, the alternation of these two extremes and the various situations that can emerge in between, introduce a dynamic view of solidarity. Third, it also focuses our attention on repressive conditions external to the workplace (labour flexibility and the army). Fourth, it gives importance to aspects related to organisation and, we could add, leadership. The cases of FIAT and Renault help to define more clearly the limits to this perspective on solidarity. From the analysis of the interviews, questions could be raised both whether solidarity always
emerges as a spontaneous product of the social relations within the plant and on the factors that help to hamper and/or trigger it. But these differences emerge if we look at solidarity in a static way without an investigation of the cause/effect nexus. In this sense, we could show that in those cases where solidarity did not explicitly appear, the combined action of the company, of the labour market, of a bureaucratic union and of the economic and political situation has been fundamental. There is in other words a set of factors that could be the cause of the ineffectiveness/limitation of the action of solidarity which gives the impression that, in certain workplaces, there is no solidarity at all. At the same time and for the same reasons, there could be situations in which the existence of (active) solidarity among a group of workers is overestimated and this despite evidence of its pre-existence. Mobilisations do not always achieve what unions expected and conversely workers can show unexpected levels of cohesion and be able to organise a protest. On the basis of the above considerations, looking at solidarity as something whose pre-existence has to be somehow proven does not help us to understand its role in a case of collective action. The point we should stress is that of the dynamic nature of solidarity and the consequence of what was stated in the theoretical chapter, we have to analyse it as a process whose formation can be differently influenced by internal and external factors. Following this, the next section will focus on the various moments that have constituted the process of solidarity formation and look at the situation before the conflict, at the role played by leadership, at the external situation and at people's feelings/justification for collective
c) The process of solidarity formation

The differences are particularly evident between the cases in the analysis of solidarity. By considering the concept as a “process”, we have to accept that despite there being conditions more favourable in one to the emergence of solidarity (for instance previous organisation, class consciousness), this may not determine whether people will mobilise. Thus in the following analysis attention is put on the process of solidarity formation rather than on the search for preconditions. The issue of solidarity most explicitly appeared in the interviews with FIAT workers. If in this case workers have experienced a sort of “progressive”, “increasing” sense of the strength of their solidarity, Renault workers have, in contrast, experienced a “regression”. This negative perception has profoundly influenced their accounts which as a result appear less intense and full of scepticism, but not less interesting, than those of FIAT workers.

In the case of FIAT we have an heterogeneous group of workers who in the last 20 years before the conflict never had a confrontation with the company, and were proud of the quality of their job, they were totally identified with the company, and were part of the workers' aristocracy
who already had a place in society and future plans for a social and professional advancement:

"People were not so much concerned with solidarity......nobody wanted to lose anything because we had, compared with workers nationally, a good salary and a comfortable position. Those people that were involved in this history, put themselves........, didn’t see that they were losing some common interests” (FIAT worker quality department). xxxvi

For a worker who entered the plant in 1992:

"At CORMEC there were no reasons for conflict and not even union politics, the assemblies that we did were foolish, we sat there to smoke a joint” (FIAT worker n.31). xxxvii

In the plant it was even difficult to organise a small protest for better food in the cafeteria and solidarity did not emerge because workers had no significant complaints about the company. They were well paid, production in 93/94 was high, and the company had no interest in raising conflict.

"there was a high production level, we had to work extra time, the company needed workers because it was a moment of high demand in the automobile production in Argentina. There was a continuous and strong growth and exports to Brazil. This meant that workers were working on
three shifts to satisfy that demand. There was no pressure from the company, they rather always tried to respect the rules of the collective agreement that we had at that time” (FIAT activist 1)\textsuperscript{xxviii}.

In addition, the new factory was creating even more expectations. Solidarity was at that time compañeroismo, nothing more and nothing less than a fair relation with the majority of colleagues at work, friendship with some of them, and sharing of common social activities outside the factory. But this form of solidarity never gave space for collective action.

“at that time everything was quiet, we were earning very well and the rest was not important. Among us there was compañeroismo, there were always parties, there were always people for this but not for the struggle” (FIAT activist 4)\textsuperscript{xxix}.

The composition of the workforce was also a matter of division among workers. A consistent number of them had passed through periods of rebellion with the SITRAC, repression from the military government and economic instability. This group in particular was a bit sceptical and tired of many years of confrontation and was much more oriented to the satisfaction of personal and individual goals than to collective achievements. These people, in particular, after the 1970’s were

“a bit tired and at the end we didn’t see the objectives that we had as workers. Everything was done or could be obtained. In 1983 people were
entering a time of democracy and freedom, we were at that time in a time of transition. There were not too many things to fight for” (FIAT worker, Quality Control Department).

In the case of Renault solidarity was compañeroismo too and the composition of the labour force was similar. The union was more approved of than at FIAT and this was true at least at the beginning for some of the plant delegates, initial opposition to the SMATA Córdoba leadership was from a Renault delegate. Nevertheless, the general opinion was that of the no te metás, haces lo tuyo (do not get yourself into trouble, mind your own business). As previously seen, this was the “old” attitude over collective matters and new workers had no other options than to follow that way:

“Those who recently entered the factory didn’t have any examples because the only thing that they found was a lot of people nodding their heads and saying si senor, si senor” (Renault worker 12).

But a difference with FIAT was that the company managed to generate a sense of competition and division among the workers and it often found the union available to negotiate on these issues:

“The politics of the company has always been to divide us if they suspected that we would gather and build solidarity amongst us. They
tried to create conflict and divisions among us........I tell you once again, the one who loses is always the worker, I do not know if because of our lack of activity or because of their plans” (Renault worker 8). xlii

“the company contributes to the break in solidarity, I think. This was or it is what the company normally does, to break unity among colleagues, we lived all this down there, I’m sure” (Renault worker 4). xliii

From this a first conclusion could be reached, that is that solidarity was present at FIAT and Renault just in the form of compañerismo, people helping each other in the daily production activities, but workers tended to look first at their own business and collective protests were the last issues in their discussions. If we conceptualise solidarity in a static way we have to accept that before the conflict there was no pre-existence of it and that individualism was, to a certain extent, the dominant attitude in the plants. Thus we may think that mobilisations occurred as the result of leadership persuasive action (giving credibility to the fact that an individual may gain over diffused individualism). At least is what a detailed internal report, prepared by FIAT’s representatives a few weeks after the conflict and based on the opinions of a group of journalists, seems to argue. In the document there is no reference to the reasons why people mobilised, some possible causes are outlined (bad communication, unions' internal struggles), but an extended part is dedicated to the leader, his political affiliation, his life style, his acquaintances. Even in informal conversations the time of the conflict is identified with the name of the leader: el tema de...
Gallo, la cuestion de Gallo (the issue, the theme of Gallo). It is not in doubt that leadership is important to mobilisation and that leaders are fundamental in strengthening it. But in our case collective action, as previously seen, started spontaneously as people gathered in solidarity to discuss and try to solve common problems. Leadership emerged after mobilisation not before.

Thus a question remains: how a group of workers that for years have lived within an individualistic environment could have generated, from one day to the other, a solidarity movement? Is it credible that just in one night they could have passed from corderos (lambs) to lobos (wolves)? But the opposite is the case with Renault, despite the negative culture about collective issues (el pensamiento sindical) an opposition and a leadership emerged, internal conditions may have favoured mobilisation but conflict did not reach the level of FIAT and soon after the factory occupation, workers' activism dissolved.

In search for an answer we could first look at those external conditions that could have favoured solidarity. In September 1996, when CORMEC was occupied there was in Argentina a situation of social mobilisation, although not-articulated and fragmented, and opposition to the neo-liberal policies of the government coming both from the organised side of the labour movement (traditional unions in the CGT and alternative central confederations CTA and MTA) and from the early actions of the unemployed movement. Unemployment was around 20% nationally and
in certain de-industrialised areas social conflict was becoming unsustainable. But if we think that, this situation could have transformed workers' individualistic attitudes and strengthened solidarity links we are probably wrong. In the case of FIAT we have seen how mobilisation was spontaneous and not externally directed or motivated, workers did not know precisely about the day of the change to the new contract and the amount of the salary reduction, they were “like on an island enjoying summer”, to use the expression of one of the interviewed. The fact that FIAT had decided to increase its investment with the construction of the new plant was another sign of confidence in the future and this independently of what was happening in the country. Of course not all the people were unaware of the world outside the factory and not all of them had a low level of education and absolute apathy for politics, but discussions at the workplace were limited to a few arguments related to production and working conditions. The fact that the union, generally a channel for information exchange with the external world, was discredited among the workers increased their isolation and many people in a certain way wanted to maintain it. In addition, the high level of unemployment, an important external condition at that time, should have invited a fierce and individualistic defence of the job and not a mobilisation. As previously observed, due to the existing preconditions, we may have expected mobilisation at Renault and not at FIAT. But despite workers’ identification of a collective agent, a mix of structural determinants had hampered the possibility for workers solidarity being expressed by collective action.
On the contrary, in the case of the FIAT mobilisation, taking advantage of the free space that the change of contract produced, a solidarity movement explicitly emerged, born out of a situation specific to the plant. In the 25 years before the occupation,

"there was compañeroismo and nothing else. That is why on the day of the factory occupation people were crying.......I was crying, every half an hour I was crying. It was a situation for crying because solidarity, everything was unexpected, it was like something was set free, was released and this was positive for the people. It was positive not just in the economic sense but also as a way to feel realised as a person. They were feeling worthy persons and today everybody remembers that struggle and that they did well, well because they were feeling well" (FIAT mobilisation leader).

What happened with the change to the new contract affected the majority of workers in their dignity. The reduction of the salary was one factor but a combination of many others contributed to create that particular emotional situation which represented the spark for the mobilisation.

"it wasn‘t just a salary reduction, it was compulsory, it was an agreement among all: governments, trade unions, company, all together.........at that time, I tell you what it was for me. I felt and even today I feel ashamed to have to say to my family that I cannot have the possibility of supporting
them. I was passing from a certain salary to earn half of it and with many conditions of slavery and without having moved a finger........I believe that each of us can react very, very violently when you are touched in something that you love more than yourself and if no other possibility is left” (FIAT maintenance worker). xlvi

Many people at FIAT felt completely abandoned not just by the fact that the union did not act as it promised to do but also by the action of the company to which they had dedicated an entire working life.

“I felt deceived and in that moment the relation that I had with the company broke down” (FIAT quality worker 3), xlvii “People felt betrayed by the union and abandoned and cheated by the company” (CPI FIAT)xlviii

The combination of all these factors was a shock for the workers. When they had the opportunity to get together, they gave expression to their feelings, knowing that the others could understand and support. Solidarity was emerging spontaneously even among a group of people not used to conflict because there was no basis any more for individualism. The paternalistic style used for decades by the company to control the labour force, the “golden splendour” of their isolation from the rest of the working class, bureaucratic unionism, disappeared from one day to the next. In this new situation, without those elements that had maintained workers outside conflict for decades, solidarity became the basis of their
strength. An that moment people started to achieve a deeper consciousness of their position within the more general social unrest of the country and this contributed to the radicalisation of their fights. As bitterly a worker summed it up:

"you were living like a chicken for the slaughter house: you went to work, you ate from your little plate, you got fat and then you finished on the barbecue. It was like this. Later on, they showed you that they were going to make your cage smaller, that they were going to give you less water and food but in any case you had to go to the slaughter house" (FIAT activist 5).xliv.

In the case of FIAT, those factors that for years had maintained the plant without conflict and had made solidarity unnecessary, changed from one day to the next and were all summed up by the new contract. The identification with the company became disaffection, union delegates were traitors, people felt damaged in their dignity and reacted emotionally and spontaneously. Solidarity emerged as the only resource available to workers' mobilisation.

The case of Renault is similar to FIAT with respect to workers' individualistic attitudes and the discredited image they had of the union. From the interviews a sense of strong identification with the company does not appear, because it was clearly moving towards a reduction of costs and the number of its employees, well before the mobilisation. As
we have seen, the outsourcing of the maintenance sector had been
preceded by massive suspensions and selective reintegration of some of
those suspended. Renault never, and especially after FIAT workers
mobilised in September, implemented changes in the labour conditions or
cut costs of its labour force so drastically and without a negotiated
agreement with the union bureaucracy.

"Here the company doesn’t lay off, they suspend you, they drown you,
they drown you until you say “well here they are choking me”. But they
never laid off anybody, they suspend you. They don’t have to hurry, the
one who has to hurry up is you because you have bills to pay and you
cannot" (Renault worker 12).¹

A hidden negotiation between the company and the bureaucracy resolved
the conflict “positively”. Officially the factory occupation was justified by
the fact that the company wanted to transfer all its maintenance workers to
an external company, Polymont, with the guarantee of salaries and labour
conditions. Workers supported in solidarity the mobilisation promoted by
the union because they saw the decision of the company as a first step in
the outsourcing of the entire plant. But a few weeks after the end of the
occupation, the union agreed with the company a plan that, dividing
workers and breaking their solidarity, opened the doors for the flexibility
of working conditions and for a reduction in employees, which even today
is not yet finished. The dilution of conflict is one of the factors that have
to be taken into consideration in the understanding of solidarity and
mobilisation at Renault. Workers did not face a drastic and generalised reduction of their salaries, flexibility was implemented gradually, competition among workers was fierce because of the real possibility of being suspended and never again being re-employed.

Solidarity did not reach the level of collective action because of a clear strategy by the company to dilute the conflict, and the union bureaucracy also played a fundamental role. This happened not just through secret negotiations with the management but also through the co-option of the former internal opposition at the top of the organisation. With the company subtly reducing labour costs and with no alternative of a more efficient and honest union representation, solidarity could not emerge.

“You were surrounded with no possibility to move, you had to stay in the middle. Everybody felt fear, fear to lose the job, fear of the government, fear of the company, fear of the union. Fear, fear, fear, and the “elderly” that were there could arrange with the company and ciao” (Renault worker 1).

d) Conclusion: a comparison between the two cases.

In the previous sections we have analysed the dynamics of mobilisation, the role played by injustice and the concept and function of solidarity within the process. The cases may be considered asymmetrical with
Renault being the “negative” (as the place where things did not happen) side of the comparison. But it is exactly because of this “genetic” difference and its consequences that it is possible to address important issues regarding the theoretical approach to mobilisation. The two cases show how the alternate presence or absence of bureaucratic unions and specific companies’ corporate strategies influenced the way in which mobilisation processes occurred, how and when injustice was perceived, the centrality of solidarity and the process of its formation.

In the case of Fiat, the managerial strategy adopted proved to be a failure in containing conflict. On the one hand, workers were first empowered and their expectations rose, letting them understand that the opening of the new plant would mean new possibilities for all of them. On the other hand, psychologists and the internal commission tried to convince workers to accept the future changes as unavoidable and at the same time not so negative. The contradictions of the strategy appeared when the company, to maintain its international competitiveness, changed from one day to the next conditions of employment by drastically reducing salaries. This unexpectedly hit workers who were mostly identified with the company and were confident in a future of further growth. The new contract was compulsory, consistently worse, and ignored for the big majority of workers. The combination of these elements produced first a shock, then incredulity and the day after the change of contract a solidarity movement emerged in the workplace. In the absence of a union bureaucracy, a vacuum of power in workers’ representation was created giving space to
the emergence of an anti-bureaucratic and independent form of unionism. This type of organisation could collect workers’ grievances and lead in the following months, but solidarity produced mobilisation before a leadership and an organisation could emerge to strengthen it.

In the case of Renault, the action of a bureaucratic union, and the company’s successful strategy in diluting conflict, has been effective in breaking solidarity and eliminating natural leaders. Workers had been betrayed by their union who first called for a factory occupation as a solidarity response to company’s plans and then reached an agreement that in practice divided workers. Furthermore the union also eliminated any possibility of internal opposition through the co-option of the former opposition leader into the bureaucratic structure. Workers' expectation of change to the situation through the factory occupation became disillusionment and then impotence. With the union not assisting and defending, and with no possibility of a different and more effective representation of their interests and with the company diluting the conflict by use of massive suspensions and selective offers of work, workers had to look for individual solutions. Solidarity broke, individualism returned and fear started to work in a context of increasing unemployment.

The analysis of the dynamics of mobilisation also demonstrates the inadequacy of injustice as a central tenet in the theory of mobilisation. Certainly injustice is not the basis around which a mobilisation can be produced, it is rather a subjective perception that varies when considering
the specific case and the moral/ethical values of certain epochs. The comparison provides various examples of how injustice can be differently perceived even within the same plant, as for instance in the case of those FIAT’s workers that remained loyal to the company. Renault’s workers after the failure of the mobilisation and the impossibility to change their situation were certainly uncomfortable and feeling their situation as unjust. But mobilisation did not occur.

The evidence from the cases seems to suggest that solidarity is a spontaneous phenomenon that can be best perceived and its function in a mobilisation understood if considered as a process (hence it is a concept best understood by considering the cause/effect nexus). This does not mean that we have to think of solidarity as something that always emerges, as an abstract, theoretical proposition that always has to be present in the employment relationship. The combination of specific circumstances in some cases may and in others may not allow solidarity to emerge. We have seen that in the case of FIAT, with the change of contract, there was a mixture of surprise, betrayal and shock that broke the “golden splendour” in which workers had been living and brought them back to a harsh reality. In this context, with either support to the company or to the union, solidarity emerged spontaneously as the only resource available to workers to defend their interests. In the case of Renault, solidarity developed along similar lines but with conditions specific to the case. At first, workers tried to avoid the traditional and ineffective union,
voting for the opposition slate. They participated as an act of solidarity with other colleagues and as a form of protection of their threatened rights, in the mobilisation called by the union. But later on, those solidarity links and expectations for a new leader and a new union direction were frustrated by the co-option of the former opposition and the dilution of conflict negotiated by the company and the union bureaucracy. Given the context of unemployment, this produced fear and divisions and broke the solidarity.

The two cases analysed also seem to agree in that mobilisation has to be seen as the result of the combination of specific internal conditions. This is true with reference to the causes of the conflict that we have just mentioned. In both cases mobilisation appeared as something specific to the factory and to its working situation and labour relations. But the stress on the internal conditions does not mean that the external situation did not play any role. It is what produced the foundation on which internal conditions could be created. The FIAT/SMATA agreement received the support of the national political power as it represented the first step to introducing labour flexibility in the industrial sector. FIAT received consistent support also from the local political power that expected 20000 jobs (including direct and indirect) from the establishment of the company in the industrial area of Córdoba. Moreover, the mobilisation led by the bureaucratic union at Renault was a reaction imposed by a generalised social protest present in the country at that moment and by the anti-bureaucratic FIAT mobilisation. As will be more evident in the next
chapter, external conditions will play a fundamental role first in the establishment, consolidation and radicalisation of FIAT’s mobilisation and later on company counter-mobilisation and workers' divisions.

Generalising these findings, the impression is of complex interactions between structural determinants and the space they leave for strategy and agency. We certainly have a set of unchangeable external features influencing these cases: international market pressure, labour flexibility and political will to fully implement it, and unions’ bureaucracy. In this situation, the two companies adopted different strategies: management-imposed changes in the case of FIAT, dilution of conflict with bureaucracy complacency in the case of Renault. Against this background and despite the dominating apathy against collective action, workers in both cases mobilised. The forms were different due to the obstacles encountered in their actions, and the intensity and length of conflict was variable depending on the effective interaction of the company strategies, the union’s control and the natural exhaustion of mobilisation. Yet people mobilised and this is probably the most important lesson we can draw from these cases.

Do people always mobilise? Certainly yes, although in different forms and times as we have seen. We believe that conflict is inevitable but there is also a material basis for people’s mobilisation and that is solidarity. These cases have shown how the interaction of structural and agency factors have acted to reduce or increase the space for its formation.
Acknowledgment of this turns up-side down taken-for-granted assumptions about the role of solidarity in collective action, and invites us to reconsider this latter not merely as the sum of individual choices. Thus, overall the above findings help a reconsideration of the theory of mobilisation as a whole.

The next chapter takes into account the emergence of the leadership, the evolution and the radicalisation of conflict in the FIAT plant.

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1 Act of Professional Association.

ii SITRAMF is the acronym for Sindicato de Trabajadores Mecánicos de Ferreyra. The name voluntarily recalled the anti-bureaucratic experience and the militancy of the historic clásista union SITRAC.

iii Fabbrica integrata can be approximatively understood as a model of lean production and just in time.

iv "Mirá acá se mueve la gente de esta forma: si hay una asamblea metete en el medio, ni salgas primero ni salgas último que vos sos nuevo y no te quedes. O sea, ellos mismos te decían que te fueras de irté y de no quedarte para hacer buena letra con el sindicato" (FIAT production worker 32)

v Make or create troubles.

vi "El gremio está vendido, nos echó más que la fábrica", "están disfrazados de corderos pero son lobos", (Renault maintenance worker, n.12) "después te podría hablar del gremio pero no se' en que te sirve..... no confiámos mucho en el gremio, son todos unos vendidos", "el gremio por un lado nos defendía y por el otro nos pisaba la cabeza", (Renault production worker, n.10) "el sindicato es connivente y perpetuo en el poder", "es como una mafia, ni más ni menos". "La misma gente que estaba en el gremio con los militares sigue en la dirigencia del sindicato, es la mafia" (Renault production worker, n.8).

vii In 1998 the company also participated in a European sponsored project on trade union/company committees for participation and joint training.

viii It should also be noted that FIAT represents a pattern-setting outstanding case rather than a model representative of Italian Industrial Relations.

ix "Nosotros dentro de FIAT gozábamos de un verano, no así los trabajadores de la siderurgia, y de esto la gente no se daba cuenta, como uno que queda en su isla..... no quiere que se la muevan....." (FIAT worker formerly employed in the casting sector)

ix Due to the method used to reduce its personnel and the extension in terms of time this took, it is not easy to provide exact figures of Renault's restructuring. In addition to this it was company practice not to use layoffs but rather suspensions. In these cases each employee received a salary whose value was inversely proportional to the time he/she was suspended. The mechanism was a bit perverted because on the one hand it nurtured hopes and illusions of a future full re-employment, freezing conflict, on the other hand the constant reduction of salaries and incentives from the company forced many workers to renounce their job “voluntarily”.

x "FIAT cierra el nuevo convenio con SMATA. Teníamos una planta que tenía que pasar a una nueva empresa con condiciones salariales inferiores a las que tenían......era muy difícil" (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO)"
El día del pase era un día secreto, se sorprendió a la Planta, a todo el mundo (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO)

Under the Argentine law, workers, when a company ceases to exist, have to receive a sum of money which is calculated on the basis of one month salary per years of employment.

"Vous entrabas un día, te agarraban y el jefe te decía de no prender la máquina de andar a hablar con el REPO y el tipo estaba con tu renuncia y tu nuevo contrato y vos tenías que firmar con un guardia parado al costado. Si vos decías que lo querías pensar no te daban tiempo, o estabas o te ibas. Muchos en esa situación firmaron pensando que después las cosas se podían cambiar y otros no aceptaron desde el principio y se fueron. Si vos vas a tu trabajo que todos los días has sido igual y de un día para otro te dicen que tenés que renunciar y que te bajan el salario de un 50 % y que si no te despiden......te agarrar frío, no tenés otras perspectivas, no tenés tiempo ni de pensar en otro trabajo o de invertir la plata en otra cosa" (FIAT worker 32).

"El odiojue a los dos. Una jue la toma en contra de la fabrica, la otra jue la de ir a las casas de los delegados para reventarlos, romperle la casa, no quedó' uno, desaparecieron esa noche de Córdoba ........ normalmente la burocracia nos pone miedo a nosotros, nos pega a nosotros, esta vez fue al revés" (FIAT activist 1).

"Si'', todos la teníamos (la camisa). Si a mi me decían, "hace esto ", yo lo hacía, cumplía con las cosas de mi trabajo, estábamos muy a gusto con esto, teníamos interés en que se produjera" (FIAT worker 31).

"Me rompió todo un proyecto de vida, me destruyó a mi y a mi familia, yo no podía aceptar esa idea" (member of the independent union commission). "Te sentías estafado, es como cuando a un chico le compras un juguete y cuando se lo estás por dar, el chico con toda la ilusión de jugar, le decís "no era para vos era para el otro" (independent union delegate). En esa fábrica siempre se trabajó mucho, los ritmos de producción eran elevados. La gente trabajaba mucho y estaba orgullosa de trabajar por esa empresa. Ellos no quisieron reconocer eso y la gente se sintió traicionada y bueno si entonces no tengo ningún valor yo me siento agredido" (FIAT mobilisation leader).

"uno es realista, siempre esta del lado de la empresa. En todo aspecto uno tiene que ser conciente que una empresa paga el sueldo por el trabajo que uno hace y vos tenés que estar de acuerdo con ese trabajo. Yo siempre estuve de ese lado, sí no me gusta me voy. Si yo en ese momento estaba detrás de la máquina haciendo lo mismo y ganando menos no te podría decir lo que hubiera hecho" (FIAT REPO, former production worker).

"Yo tengo una familia, no es cuestión de decir: "bueno me voy", si después no tengo nada. No es que estoy yo solo, atrás mío hay un grupo de gente. Lamentablemente es así" (FIAT worker 1).

"Lo que pasa es que esa gente que tiene prácticamente una vida allí adentro de esa fábrica a lo mejor no ve las cosas como uno pensando que se iba de la fábrica. Un tipo que vivió allí adentro, sale de una fábrica a la calle a buscar trabajo y no sabe que hacer, no sabe vender nada porque el orden de su vida trabajando allí y si vos lo mandás en la esquina a vender un mantecol no sabe como hacerlo (Member of the independent union commission).

Al otro día entramos y fue una cosa raraísima. Yo entraba más tarde, el área de calidad entraba más tarde, y teníamos que pasar por toda la planta, un ambiente raro... la gente reunida en todos los rincones, todo el mundo reunido, era como que el día no arrancaba... llegamos al vestuario pero ni nos cambiábamos, «che, ahí dice un muchacho que hay que juntarnos» y todo el mundo, fue una cosa instantánea. Vamos para adelante, a la placa que está frente a la planta, los delegados ninguno, nadie estaba, esto no es lo que se nos dijo... alguien que explique... que es lo que habían dicho a todo el mundo no solo a mí... vamos a pedir explicaciones, vamos a pedir explicaciones. Y la gente ordenada saltó, yo creo que no faltó nadie y fueron caminando para adelante «che, que pasa?»" (FIAT worker. Quality Control Department).

"Estábamos perdidos, no teníamos rumbo, nos habían pegado fuerte, tan fuerte que nos enloqueció, llegó un momento que no pensábamos, la gente no quería creer pero estaba dispuesta a cualquier cosa" (member of the independent union commission).

"Los viejos teníamos tal vez más espíritu de lucha porque veíamos la injusticia después de tantos años de trabajar. Sentíamos que nos habían marginados, que ya no valíamos nada" (FIAT "old" worker 1).

"Fuimos al choque de entrada y no era pero te obligaban porque tampoco había otra salida, te
obligaban a dar ese choque. Al hacerlo tan compulsivo y tan drástica la rebaja de sueldo fue un golpe duro y tenías que responderlo con otro golpe duro no había otra." (FIAT worker 32).

"fue un golpe muy fuerte y en muy poco tiempo. Por allí si nos hubiéramos encontrado en la situación de la Renault que se vino más gradualmente......pero en el caso de nosotros no. Nos quebraron en el medio, no nos fueron disolviendo, directamente nos pegaron un golpe y nos partieron en la mitad" (delegate of the independent union).

See note 10 for the problems of indicating precisely the number, forms and time of redundancies at Renault.

Of the same opinion were all the unions/ grassroots leaders that joined Renault’s workers during the days of the occupation. SMATA never allowed them to have an influence in what was happening at Renault and considered the case as an exclusive internal affair.

"Una charla político gremial tanto del gremio como de la empresa que de alguna forma arreglaron, en este sentido siempre salimos perjudicados los operarios" (Renault worker 8)

"El pensamiento sindical era de no mezclarte con los problemas de los otros, “vos metete en lo tuyo y nada más y quien se jodió, se jodió” (Renault worker 9).

"Muchos comentan que, en realidad, el gremio y la empresa arreglan y a la gente le dicen otras cosas. Pero aparentemente es así porque no se consiguió nada. Nos sentíamos impotentes y tampoco podíamos buscar otra salida con otros representantes, el gremio te lo impedía (Renault Worker 7).

"Todos somos concientes, todos....lamentablemente por dentro cuantas broncas hemos tenido? Pero miles y broncas, broncas. Te lo tenes que aguantar por la familia, tenés que aguantar muchas cosas" (Renault worker 12).

It is worth mentioning that by saying that solidarity is the manifestation of the ‘them” and “us” opposition I am not arguing that it is always the base of conflict and that this latter is the rule. For instance, Social Christian movements have always stressed solidarity but have often tried to maintain hidden and have denied open conflict and in this way recognised implicitly the importance of it in labour/capital relations. However, solidarity even in these cases, working as a catalyst of workers' identities and framing the “us” of the employment relation, is also implicitly indicating the “them” of the same relation. Social partnership unionism is not incompatible with a class identification (Hyman 2001).

"La solidaridad siempre existe, es espontánea. Lo que pasa es que la represión, hoy son las leyes de trabajo flexible ayer era más el ejercito, y la falta de organización la rompen."

At the time of conflict the workforce could be divided into three main groups. The first one included those people that entered the company between 1970 and 1976. In the second were those in the middle of their careers already having 15 years of experience. The last group was represented by workers with just few years of employment.

"la gente no era tan solidaria...... (por) el hecho de tener un buen sueldo o una situación cómoda adentro del ambiente obrero nacional, nadie quería perder nada. La gente que estaba metida en esta historia, viste, entonces se ponía...... perdía de vista unos intereses comunes" (Fiat worker Quality Control Department)

"En Cormec no había razones para el conflicto y tampoco había políticas sindicales, las asambleas que se hacían eran por boludeses te sentabas allí para fumarte un faso......" (Fiat worker n.31)

"había alta producción en primer lugar, había horas extras, necesitaban a los trabajadores porque era época record en la producción automotriz de la Argentina, en crecimiento continuo y fuerte y de exportación hacia Brasil. Eso significaba que los trabajadores trabajaban un tercer turno para satisfacer esa fuerte demanda. Por lo tanto no había presión por parte de la empresa, mas bien tentaba cumplir siempre con las reglas del convenio que teníamos “ (FIAT activist 1).

"en ese entonces todo estaba tranquilo, se ganaba bien y el resto no importaba. Siempre se hacían fiestas, siempre habría gente por eso pero no para la lucha" (FIAT activist 4).

"el poco cansados y al final perdímos de vista los objetivos que teníamos nosotros como trabajadores. Todo estaba dado o iba dándose. Recién se iba incorporando en el 83 la gente a la democracia a la libertad, estábamos todavía en un momento de transición. No había muchas cosas para pelear...... “ (Fiat worker, Quality Control Department).

"los nuevos no tuvieron ejemplos porque lo único que encontraron fue un montón de gente agachando la cabeza y diciendo si señor, si señor". (Renault worker, 12).

"Siempre la política de la empresa ha sido la de dividirnos y de separarnos si tenía sospecha de que nos podíamos agrupar y ser solidarios entre nosotros. Trataban de crear discordia......te vuelvo a repetir que el perjudicado siempre es el operario, no sé si por falta de actividad nuestra o por cálculo de ellos“ (Renault worker, n 8).
“la empresa contribuyó en romper la solidaridad, yo creo. Ese fue o es donde mas apunta la fábrica, a romper la unión entre los compañeros, lo hemos vivido allí adentro, estoy seguro” (Renault worker 4).

“Lo que había era compañerismo y nada más. Por eso la gente el día de la toma lloraba......yo lloraba, cada media hora estaba llorando. Era para llorar porque la solidaridad, todo esto nació de golpe, fue como algo que se liberó y ese le hacía bien a la gente. Ya no bien en el sentido económico, bien en el sentido de realizarse como persona. Se sentían dignos y hoy cualquier persona se acuerda de esa lucha y que hizo bien, porque se sintió bien” (FIAT mobilisation leader).

Here dignity is understood as the level of workers' tolerance beyond which a reaction is considered necessary to maintain respectability. For references on the concept, in particular Hodson 2001.

“No sólo nos redujeron el sueldo, fue compulsivo, fue un arreglo entre todos: Gobiernos, sindicatos, patronal, todos juntos........en ese momento, te digo lo que fue para mí, me daba y todavía me da vergüenza venir a decirle a mi familia que yo no la iba a poder mantener. Yo de un sueldo pasaba a ganar la mitad con muchas condiciones esclavizantes y sin haber levantado un dedo......pienso que todos nosotros podemos reaccionar muy, muy violentamente cuando te tocan algo que queréis mucho más que a vos y que no tenías otra posibilidad” (FIAT maintenance worker).

“Me sentí engañado y en ese momento se me rompió la relación con la fábrica” (FIAT Quality Control Department, worker 3).

“La gente se sintió traicionada por el gremio y defraudada y abandonada por la empresa” (CPI FIAT).

Vivías como un pollo para el matadero: ibas a trabajar, comías de tu platito, te engordabas y al asador. Era así. Después te mostraron que te iban a engordar meno, te achicamos la jaula, te sacamos mucha agua de la comida pero de toda forma vas al matadero” (FIAT activist 5).

“Aquí la fábrica no te echa, te suspende, te va ahogando, ahogando hasta que vos decís "bueno acá me están ahorcando". Pero nunca echó a nadie, te suspenden. Ellos no tienen apuro, el que tiene apuro sos vos que tenés cuentas para pagar y no podés” (Renault worker 12).

“Estabas rodeado sin poder arrancar, te tenías que quedar en el medio. Eso es lo que pasó. Todos tenían miedo a perder el trabajo, miedo al Gobierno, a la fábrica, al sindicato. Miedo, miedo, miedo y los viejos que estaban de antes arreglaban con la fábrica y chau”. (Renault worker 1).
Chapter 5: Conflict evolution and radicalisation at FIAT

1. Introduction.

This chapter follows the evolution and radicalisation of conflict at FIAT looking at the effects produced by the mobilisation, previously analysed, with particular focus on the emergence of leaders and the establishment of representative organisations, workers' change of consciousness and company repression. The particular way in which mobilisation emerged, the momentary absence of hampering factors, profoundly influenced workplace relations in the year following the first plant occupation. The abrupt change of contract turned up-side down workers' vision of the social reality surrounding them and opened their minds to the world outside the factory, creating a new field for consciousness formation. Those workers, the majority who were wearing the company's shirt and were not used to conflict, started to question a formerly taken-for-granted reality and became rebellious. The company was forced to re-establish managerial order. Mobilisation developed following the radicalisation of conflict.

2. Leadership, activism and collective action.

As previously seen, in the two cases analysed, the dynamics of mobilisation and the issue of solidarity have been differently shaped,
among other factors, by the presence or the absence of a bureaucratic union. In the case of FIAT and because of the Argentine law on trade union representation, the change to the FIAT/SMATA collective agreement implied, with the new unfavourable conditions, a change in the legitimate organisation representing workers, from UOM to SMATA. Once the conflict exploded, workers went first to the union office in the plant, to question delegates and derecognise the negotiation they had with the company about the conditions of the new contract. The office was empty, the delegates had physically disappeared from the plant and from their personal addresses for weeks, fearing the ferocious reaction of their former colleagues. At the same time, SMATA had not yet entered the plant, it had no organisation within the workplace to frame workers' protests. In fact, by an agreement with the company, the new SMATA internal commission had to be formed from the same people who had represented workers in the UOM. This situation of change and mobilisation created a vacuum of power, filled by workers' anti-bureaucratic reaction, in the institutional representation of the workforce and thus the impossibility of channelling and controlling their grievances through the union bureaucratic apparatus. It is in this context that a new leadership and a new democratic and anti-bureaucratic organisation could emerge.

These fundamental events profoundly shaped the evolution of struggle at FIAT in the year after the factory occupation, and at the same time have set differences compared to the case of Renault. In this latter company an
anti-bureaucratic stance emerged, workers spontaneously sustained it but it was later co-opted by the SMATA Córdoba leadership and since then further radicalisation in the Renault plants and interplant anti-bureaucratic alliances in the city of Córdoba could not be developed. In the two cases analysed, we could see, using analogies, the union bureaucracy as “the dyke” and workers' mobilisation as “the water” contained by the dyke. In one case (FIAT) the dyke could not resist the pressure, a new leadership and a democratic organisation emerged and conflict could radicalise. In the other case the dyke resisted and mobilisation could be contained. It is very important to stress, once more, this “genetic” difference in the two mobilisation processes because it had a big influence on the ways other issues of the collective action were shaped.

In the previous chapter it has been argued that leaders at FIAT emerged as a result of the mobilisation status created by the fact that specific conditions of the moment (a new unfavourable and unexpected contract, company’s and union’s absence) had allowed solidarity to be expressed and workers to question the inevitability of the objective reality. If in this sense solidarity could be considered as the basis for mobilisation, leaders, then on this basis, acted as a catalyst for workers' grievances, proposed solutions and provided a first boost for organisation. All this by trying to frame a discourse which the majority of people could recognise. But how did these leaders emerge?

The following is a reconstruction of the events from a management
“a debate started, in the whole plant there were discussions. After this a movement started to grow, they started to mobilise. They had no idea of where to go and what to do but nonetheless they started to gather, they were many, and then an internal mobilisation of the plant, without leaders, started to emerge. In this situation from the same mobilisation natural leaders started to appear, these latter were the people with more character, the biggest, the most wicked, the ones who could raise their voices and say let’s go. This type of people were those who led the mobilisation. Natural and spontaneous leaders started to emerge.” (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).

Natural leaders started to emerge from the same mobilisation, from the debate in the plant, and this seems to confirm that leadership appeared after solidarity. People did not go to work with the idea of occupying the plant or to protest, there was a general collective feeling that both the company and the union were responsible for their situation but there was no organisation, no leadership able to transform individual grievances into a collective action. Not even those who later led the process of mobilisation had clearly in mind what to do. A couple of them did not even sign the new contract and went to the plant the day of the occupation to receive the allowance for the end of contract, while others wanted to resign. Nothing was planned but the same situation of uncertainty, impotence and desperation was affecting the majority of workers.
"The day after (after the change to the new contract) the guys went to the plant... that night nobody slept. They went home, they calculated what they were going to receive, they discovered that they were going to earn half of their previous salary for doing the same job, they got depressed, they cried, they didn’t sleep. The day after they reached the plant feeling bad, a collective bad feeling and without anybody suggesting anything to them, they got together. What should we do? (FIAT mobilisation leader).iv

Solidarity emerged in this context and on the basis of the mobilisation status it produced, leaders could find space.

Those people who led the mobilisation certainly had some personal characteristics or experiences useful at the time of collective action. Recognition among a group of a few colleagues on the production line, some political activity or experience in social organisations, but almost none of them had a relation of friendship with other leaders and before the conflict they never had any union activity. But three weeks before the factory occupation, some of those who later were recognised by their colleagues as leaders, abandoned their workplaces, convinced a consistent number of workers to do the same and went to the union office in the plant. Despite union opposition, an assembly decided to abandon work for the day. The protest was spontaneous and was justified by the government's decision to cut the financial assistance each worker was receiving which was in proportion to the number of his/her children. This
action could have alerted management to the possibility that spontaneous protest could emerge again and that the internal commission, in the control of workers, was largely ineffective. But the company was probably confident of the fact that no organisation was available to channel these protests, that workers at CORMEC were not used to conflict and that many of those wearing the FIAT camiseta (shirt) would have promoted their interests better through institutional channels, without open conflict.

The company read the situation correctly at least as far as the issue of organisation was concerned. Just three weeks passed after this spontaneous demonstration and before the factory was occupied. Workers could not organise any solid alliance, and the day of the change to the new contract came as a surprise and a shock for all and it did not leave any chance of organising collective action. Even those who later would lead the mobilisation, reacted to the change of contract differently, some of them refusing the new contract, the majority accepting it temporarily, but nobody went to the plant the day after with the idea of mobilising people and, far from this, the possibility to occupy the plant.

"I was planning to renounce to my job and for this, I think, workers could trust me, I was going to leave" (FIAT mobilisation leader).

But despite the absence of any form of organisation and mutual agreement, natural leaders emerged spontaneously from the micro context
of their department or production line where discussions among workers had already started. In the morning shift, when the factory was occupied, four leaders emerged and two of them had participated in the mobilisation that had occurred three weeks earlier. Each of them moved his own line or a part of it, often with fierce company opposition, and walked with the group of those who followed to other lines where workers were still undecided whether to abandon or not. The reconstruction of those moments and the function of the leader are best described by one of those who led the mobilisation:

"That day we were all discussing this and suddenly there was just silence [...] because the feeling was generalised and I became very nervous. In that moment I was [...] I started to punch a keyboard of the machine, I wasn’t feeling pain it was just to release my anger. In that moment the foreman passed and sought me, but people were copying me and everyone started hitting and then in all the production lines. In the sector where the engines were tested, people started to remove the silencers. The more I was hitting the keyboards the more the rest were following me". The foreman invited all the workers of the line to his office and there he threatened them with the consequences this act could have had on their jobs, they were now workers of Fiat Auto, they had accepted all the conditions of the new contract and had to obey him. "I stood up and I turned the table on him and said to him "here we are going to do what the mass decides and if the mass decides not to work we are not going to work, is that clear?" "You are nothing" " Yes we are many, we are
"You don't talk to me in such a way, I am your boss", "Now you are nothing and I am going to stand up, I am going out and those who want to follow come with me". I stood up and everybody followed me.\textsuperscript{vii}

In this brief reconstruction of the events we can see how the leader says that he transformed solidarity into mobilisation. He first gave voice to workers' collective sentiments, making them real through the use of physical violence on the machine, and people followed suit. He then defended his position, and that of the people who were supporting him, against the action of the foreman. In doing this he further framed the workers' grievances, identifying the "enemy" and the strength and identity of the group (\textit{somos muchos, somos trabajadores}, we are many, we are workers) and then he completed the process of transformation to solidarity by calling for mobilisation, and people followed. The construction and the role of leaders in framing workers' grievances and transforming solidarity into collective action echoes that of Fantasia's wildcat strike (Fantasia 1988). As in this latter case, individual leaders from different departments met in the courtyard of the plant. At this time a situation of confusion, fear, and indecision was uppermost dominating among people. "\textit{Qué hacemos?}" (what can we do?). Once again it was the leadership who offered a solution in a rather fortuitous way, very similar to what happened at the plant described by Fantasia. One of those four who were at that moment leading the mobilisation, violently closed the main gate as a way of sharing his anger, it was like a detonation: glasses broke in hundred of pieces, all the people reached the gate and simultaneously the
The word went out. The plant was occupied.

Here started a new and more challenging situation for the original leaders. All the workers were now concentrated within a few hundred meters and were waiting for some sort of information, some direction to action, and they needed to understand the situation more clearly. The internal commission was not there, it had disappeared, the company, being issued the new contract, was not to be believed any more. People started to talk, each one expressing his own point of view, each one identifying those responsible for that situation, then more workers from the other shifts entered the plant. In this context the leadership grew and nine people were elected. Since a permanent assembly came to be the dominant part of the process of mobilisation, a qualitative step in leadership had to be made. Now the problem was to offer, together with a clear understanding of the situation (the frame), a solution to confront the firm effectively. In this context of democratic decisions and opposition to bureaucracy, leaders had to convince people not just to mobilise, this was already a fact, but also to maintain and organise collective action that was originally spontaneous. At the same time the anti-bureaucratic stance promoted by the grassroots bulk of the assembly was so strong that leaders never acted autonomously (although the company pressed for this: with the plant occupied, one of the conditions for the start of negotiations was for the commission to take decisions independently and later submit them to the assembly for ratification), they were delegates and had the power to negotiate certain issues with the company just on the basis of a clear
mandate from the assembly. This process of democratic decisions making remained a dominant organisational character in the later radicalisation of the mobilisation and at the same time was what strengthened it, this will become more evident in the following section. But it is important to stress at this stage that the democratic process established by the status, at least initially, of permanent assembly, from the beginning gave a peculiar character to the function of leadership. Leaders coordinated, organised and proposed solutions through constant contact with the grassroots.

"they thought I was a powerful leader because I could transform that mass of lambs, wearing the shirt, into exemplary fighters. But they did this!!! They did it. The only thing I did was to clarify the situation, nothing more than that" (Fiat mobilisation leader). viii

While democracy remained as the pattern of the relationship, people massively followed en masse.

The last quotation and the reference to the fact that management looked at the leaders as the "heart" of mobilisation it seems confirmed by the internal document, which we mentioned analysing the causes of the conflict and in which contained abundant information on the political background and the private life of the leader were abundant. The same point, in the words of a former foreman:

"I know that, at that moment, they were upset, people in the personnel
office were disappointed by the fact that that person, who could have been on the side of the company, was in reality against it” ix.

The fact that the company during the phase of counter mobilisation focused on weakening and repressing the leadership and in considering it, as the core of mobilisation, is an element that invites further reflections on the function of leadership. We have argued that, at least in this case, solidarity emerged out of workers' interactions in the particular situation created by the change of contract. In this context, leadership should be seen as the element that, born out of a solidarity movement, transformed the same into a solid mobilisation making explicit workers' grievances. But once collective action solidifies into organisational forms, we could argue that leadership becomes a constituent element of solidarity rather than just a product of it. In this transformation the function of leadership changes and assumes the role of a cohesive element unifying individual perceptions into collective thinking/actions. In a way, we could say that leaders can represent an ideological continuation of the same mobilisation that had produced them. In this process, as the next section will show, a certain separation from the rank and file is in part inevitable and in part provoked by counter mobilisation.

"In the second factory occupation, activism took a leading role and this broke democratic relations with the rank and file, it was a mistake. Many times the role of activism is to give voice to the anger that each one has in itself" (Independent union member). x

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"After the factory occupation I met a different type of people, together we become politicized [...] before we were an "island"" (Fiat worker 4, Quality Control Department).\textsuperscript{xii}

The shock produced by the change to a new flexible contract and the company’s and union’s betrayals brought FIAT workers back, following the imagery of an "island", to the "mainland" of labour relations. At that time, Argentina, the country that had represented the ideal model of the implementation of neo-liberal policies, started to decline in terms of industrial production and GDP, while social cohesion was becoming unsustainable in a context of rising unemployment and underemployment. In this process of decline, the automobile industry represented, as it often did, the centre around which industrial development could be fostered, employment increased and the Government’s power strengthened. The FIAT/SMATA agreement was very important because it was the contract whose implementation would have opened the way to the labour flexibility of the entire industrial sector. In 1995/1996, SMATA signed similar agreements with other big companies of the automobile industry and a cascade effect was to be expected in related sectors.

FIAT workers mobilised through the occupation of the plant when the
external social climate was certainly favourable to labour conflict. In another section reference has already been made to this as far as the national level was concerned. In the city of Córdoba, in particular, street demonstrations against the reforms of the education system of the province had, before FIAT’s mobilisation, gathered together thousands of people. This situation was fundamental in shaping the outcome of the first conflict and labour management relations in the plant in the next nine months.

For the local newspaper, the conciliation dictated by the provincial ministry of labour, which suspended the plant occupation and restored the situation previous to the change to the new contract, was clearly a recognition of the repercussions the conflict could have had on the entire labour movement in the city.

"There was a risk that the conflict could extend to other plants and that the central act of the protest could have been carried out in front of CORMEC" (La Voz del Interior, 24/9).

The factory was still occupied and a general strike against labour flexibility has called for the 26th of September, there was the risk that the conflict at FIAT could have been transformed into the epicentre and symbol of labour protests in the city of Córdoba. Television and radio channels also gave space in their news programmes to what was happening at FIAT. FIAT workers were recuperating a major role in the
local labour movement after decades of passivity, the majority of the population was supportive of their struggles.

Despite this acquired role among the public and to a certain extent within the Cordobean working class, we do not have to think that FIAT’s workers developed, once in contact with the reality around them, a revolutionary character, as reports of the conflict from radical sectors of the Argentine left seem to show or to hope (as in the case of La Verdad Obrera/Partido Obrero). Nevertheless, at the same time, they did not use the power acquired from the mobilisation in that particular social situation exclusively for economic demands. They constantly mixed “bread and butter” issues with more radical objectives, both in terms of representation in the workplace and of their position in society. In the months following the first plant occupation, conflict was mainly generated by the company's refusal to formally recognise the new workers' organisation. This created a constant push and pull of management with workers. The new leaders promoted a campaign of solidarity with others plants and neighbourhoods looking for a way to export the conflict out of the gate of the plant. This strategy necessarily involved discussions of the reasons for such actions and this implied questioning the socio-political system as a whole.

The evolution of struggle in the FIAT factory is the evolution of workers' socio-political consciousness. Struggle against the company, symbolised by its foreign ownership and the new working practises and salary conditions introduced, went together with a development of a socio-
political consciousness, unexpected in a group of workers who were not very familiar with conflict. In this process, mobilisation removed obstacles that for years had hampered the possibility of conflict. As in the case of solidarity and leadership, that emerged spontaneously once the obstacles to their full development disappeared, workers' consciousness too could be seen as a spontaneous outcome of the situation created with the mobilisation. The pressure of market competition outdated and bypassed the paternalistic policies of the company and overcame the bureaucratic union's possibilities of controlling the labour force. The factors that had inhibited conflict for decades weakened. These elements were not useful to contain workers' protest any more, solidarity and leadership emerged as the most natural bases around which workers' strength could be built.

The opposition to union bureaucracy and company labour flexibility was led from the beginning by an independent and democratic organisation which was a direct consequence of workers' renewed freedom and autonomy. In this context, radicalisation has to be seen as a natural element in the evolution of workers' struggles, just as solidarity was spontaneous the day of the factory occupation.

"I will never forget when Gallo said: "we recovered our power to make decision, the possibility to take decisions". We recovered the power of struggle, of debate, before nothing was discussed. And the group was so strong........was great" (FIAT worker production line, La Morenita).
It is important to stress that once we refer to radicalisation as a natural outcome of a process of mobilisation, we are not saying that in all cases conflict radicalises workers. There are particular situations, like the one at FIAT, in which a combination of factors has been so explosive as to overcome and momentarily break those elements of inhibition of workers' protests that in the past had worked very well to control of collective action. In this context of weakened control and increased exploitation, a vacuum was created that allowed workers' solidarity to be strengthened and alternative forms of organisation to be implemented. In the case of Renault, changes were introduced smoothly, workers were divided, the bureaucratic union maintained control and no space for radicalisation was left, this despite external conditions that could have favoured it.

In the months after FIAT’s occupation, the mobilisation’s leaders tried to foster, despite company opposition, the structure of their organisation and in January 1997, after several unsuccessful attempts to be recognised as an independent local branch of SMATA, they formed an independent union (SITRAMF). This signalled the highest level of their anti-bureaucratic opposition and at the same time the point of no return in their conflict with the company. Independently of the support that the majority of workers gave to the new organisation, and continuous attempts to establish solidarity links outside the factory, company counter mobilisation weakened the possibility of maintaining workers actively mobilised. As admitted by the Industrial Relations Director:
“people started to be really identified with the team work and we could recover the plant. Leaders lost support and left the plant......we fired them” (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).xiv

Divisions emerged regarding the strategies to be used in the conflict, the fear of losing a job and company pressure pushed many to retire from active conflict, but divisions apart, a change in workers' consciousness had already produced a constant incompatibility and non-conformity with the work in the factory. One year after the first factory occupation, 1200 out of 1700 workers that signed the new agreement with FIAT were laid off or forced to abandon the plant. At that time, after a year of struggle and the elimination of leaders and activists, it was

“impossible to regain control of the people. Many of them had to leave, there was no more possibility of their identification with the compromise. They were laid off or they voluntarily left” (FIAT Industrial Relations, former REPO).xv

There are several factors, both internal and external, that could explain the resilience of workers' resistance and opposition. The socio-political conditions at the time of the conflict offered a set of examples of other mobilisations and the forms through which a more effective response could be offered. FIAT workers received solidarity from organisations already involved in a process of opposition to labour flexibility and
privatisation. Political parties and public opinion as well, offered support to their struggle because this contributed to discredit the overall political project promoted by Menem. In general, the situation at the time of the conflict represented the context in which workers at FIAT could place their struggle and provided a fertile soil to extend it out of the factory. Solidarity developed with anti-bureaucratic movements in other plants, as was the case of Renault before the internal opposition was co-opted, actions in defence of poor neighbourhoods and establishment of relations with union organisations in other FIAT factories worldwide. But although this scenario could have influenced a radicalisation of conflict positively, the majority of those interviewed agreed with the view that they were basically struggling alone. Many workers and their organisations openly supported the struggle at FIAT, but government and the union bureaucracy boycotted it and the fear of losing your job hampered extensive solidarity from other factories. In the country as a whole there were many acts of resistance but they were scattered, with no central representation, and without a political party willing or able to act in defence of the same struggles.

"I believe that with more experience and if we would have been in the social situation the country is living in today (FIAT worker 4, quality department), xvi

We were feeling, and it was in reality like this, that we were alone, we were the first" (independent union delegate), xvii
“We told other workers: “they are going to cut your salary” they replied “no I don’t think so”. In the Chevrolet plant, workers had to go out from the back door but nobody appeared, or came in solidarity” (FIAT worker 32, quality department). xviii

The sense of abandonment that emerges from the interviews and the fact that FIAT’s workers were basically alone in their conflict, indicates that we should not underestimate the internal conditions which have generated mobilisation as a possible basis and explanation of radicalisation. Nonetheless external conditions presented a social scenario in which labour conflict was certainly favoured, these conditions found a fertile soil and the way and under which circumstances mobilisation was generated.

The same elements that helped the emergence of solidarity and then leadership also created the conditions in which a more radical opposition could be developed. In this sense the shock provoked by the change of contract and the anger against the company and the unions were both the bases of the first mobilisation and of the radicalisation and establishment of it. Workers were now free to express their opinions and to channel their demands through an organisation that was really defending them, they could stand up with dignity and refuse the foremen’s impositions, they were feeling proud to have defended themselves after years of passivity.

“*The company couldn’t control us any more. Everything was a batucada, hitting the machine, we did batucada for every type of reason. The will of*
the people wasn’t the same. The “elderly” that were used to set the
machine didn’t want to do it any more for that amount of money. People
gradually became rebels’’ (FIAT worker 32).xix

“The plant was really out of control, it was as I am telling you, workers
could do what they wanted, they worked as they liked and these people (the
leaders) really had the pulse of people, because people were really angry.
They didn’t want these nine leaders but rather they were disappointed and
angry and were showing it through this action” (FIAT Industrial
Relations Director, former REPO)xx

Internal and external conditions, with reference to their effects on
radicalisation, are probably not mutually exclusive and for what it has
been argued until now could be seen as complementary. In an attempt to
put together the pieces, that make up a process of mobilisation, it may be
useful to think of solidarity and consciousness as two succeeding points in
a continuous line of evolution/radicalisation in which leadership and
organisation have filtered, framed and established a connection between
the internal and the external world. If the process of mobilisation is
positioned in this temporarily widened perspective, the role and
importance of leadership and organisation in the same process appears
much clearer than through a narrow focus on a single mobilisation event.
At the same time, as the case of Renault shows, less successful cases of
mobilisation/radicalisation can be explained as well. In this company, in
the particular situation previously described, leadership and organisation
did not play any important role in framing workers' consciousness, rather they contained it. In other words radicalisation, as far as the case of FIAT is concerned, seems to constitute that level of the process of mobilisation in which solidarity has been already transformed, through action, into consciousness. The following quotations put in evidence how this process of transformation occurred contemporarily with the evolution of the struggle:

"When we occupied the plant for the first time we really didn't have a clear consciousness of what we were doing" (FIAT worker, production line La Morenita).

"People were now different, the same person was not the same as before, he could see the world in a different way, he had "jumped" and this happened to all of us, to all of us. The same struggle changed us, all of us, it changed us, it shaped us, it changed me and all of us. Emotion, I could say, in our case, was an essential element in our struggle" (FIAT mobilisation leader).

"We were part of it, we were in the middle of it. In that moment we started to realise what labour flexibility was and what was going to happen in the country" (FIAT worker 4 Quality Control Department).

"During this process that lasted one, one and half years, a very big change in consciousness occurred, and this despite the different position each one took at the moment of struggle" (FIAT worker 1, production
The above quotations seem to confirm that radicalisation and a change of consciousness were part of an evolution in the process of mobilisation. At the same time, this evolution was not perceived by the actors as a clear and unequivocal perspective. People radicalised in and through the struggle, became activists because, day by day, they had to defend themselves and what they had achieved. The rhythm and the time of the conflict set the quality and the level of workers' consciousness. Company repression, forced part of the workers to retire from activism, and contributed to increase a sense of group identification in both those who continued the open confrontation and those who did not. The conditions in which mobilisation emerged favoured radicalisation as an evolution in workers' collective consciousness detached from clear cost and benefit calculations.

The case of FIAT and its outcomes is far from any Olsonian rational choice theory or approach, as this was discussed in the theoretical chapter. Is there anything rational in the decision to occupy the plant and provoke so openly the company when less costly actions could have been implemented instead (for instance a strike or a union negotiation)? Is there any self-interested individual decision that could be detected from the dynamic of workers' mobilisation? Have they individually reflected on the costs and benefits of their action before this was put into practice? People that in the last two decades were used to think for themselves, were
identified with the company, and had no confidence in collective action, did then act, in the case of mobilisation, irrationally (understood in Goldman's terms as realistic goals within a market economy)?

As previously shown, internal and external conditions have influenced the process of mobilisation differently. A particular combination of factors has created a fertile soil for workers' collective action and this was not the product of picket lines, the union's coercion or any other form of instrumentalisation of workers' individual will. The evidence in our case pointed to the fact that collective action emerged spontaneously. Solidarity appeared as the natural basis around which a group of people, angered and betrayed by the union and the company, found its strength, leadership filtered and framed the grievances, activism maintained people mobilised and the conflict radicalised. People's solidarity changed into socio-political consciousness evolving through and in action.

It is particularly important to stress this point because it shows once more the inadequacy of cost and benefits calculations as valid elements in the analysis of mobilisation. The change in consciousness is fundamental to understand why, despite the adverse conditions of the struggle, FIAT workers continued in their action although aware that there were high probabilities of loosing the conflict and their jobs.

After the first factory occupation, the group of leaders who were elected during the mobilisation kept representing the workers with the company,
despite management never officially recognising the new organisation.

"the company never recognised them (the elected leaders) from a legal point of view, we always treated them as a fact, as a factual representation. In other words, if they were those with whom we had to discuss that's fine, we talked. But we never recognised them as trade union. They always demanded such recognition but the company always denied it. For us the trade union was SMATA" (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).xxxv.

In the three months that followed the first conflict a semi-clandestine union was formed and relations with the company were of daily confrontation. Apart from the struggle for formal recognition, with SMATA opposing it, the labour conditions of the new contract that after the conciliationxxxvi workers agreed to sign, were the main reasons for the constant state of conflict. This situation favoured more political debate among workers through small assemblies, and small discussions organised by the group of nine who led the first mobilisation and another 70 delegates. During these meetings the possibility of defeat was taken into consideration:

"we never said we were going to lose, of course nobody struggles if he doesn't see a possibility of winning, but we debated, and we voted in an assembly that losing was a possibility and that if we lost the conflict they were going to fire all of us. And we had to opt and this was very
important. We gave people the possibility of resigning. We looked around and we considered that resignation was one possibility and that the other was to struggle. If we wanted to struggle we had to do it well, if we wanted to resign as well. Nothing in the middle. In that situation resign meant shake your head [...] not just to accept Menem. Menem came together with other losses. The company was gradually trying to introduce new conditions, after the occupation it wanted to recover the space it had lost. We had to consider that fact” (FIAT mobilisation leader).

A similar discussion preceded the second factory occupation, which was justified as a reaction to the lay off of one of the commission’s members. Many opposed it, but the majority voted in favour because it was the only way to show the company the strength of the union and to defend its future existence. In the second factory occupation too, the risk was calculated but the decision was certainly not based on individual gains. At least for those who actively participated, the issue was to defend a collective interest, and the future existence of the union. The company was clearly trying to weaken the new union and workers were individually under pressure from foremen not to participate, job advancements were proposed to those who were not involved in any action, the possibility of being fired was constant.

“...foremen used to call me activist. Why are you calling me activist? Because I’m saying the truth? Because I’m fighting to protect what is my right? They tried to smash you so to push you to resign to your job. They
called me in their offices many times but I didn’t want to leave so they fired me” (FIAT worker La Morenita)\textsuperscript{xviii}.

“foremen used to tell you that they had seen you talking with the guys of the union and that this was going to create problems for you, that it was better not to do it anymore” (FIAT mobilisation leader and FIAT worker La Morenita)\textsuperscript{xxix}.

Despite of this strategy by the enterprise of dividing workers in action, half of them occupied the plant and defied the company. The conflict ended with 42 new layoffs.

4. Repression and counter mobilisation.

The role of repression as the main instrument available to the company in the counter mobilisation is very well documented and represented by the case of FIAT.\textsuperscript{xxx} There is evidence of this not just in the interviews with workers who directly experienced repression, but also in what was stated by management representatives in Argentina, and also in articles published by FIAT’s top management. In one of these, co-authored by the industrial relations director of the company, reference to the high level of conflict shown in the Argentine case is confirmed and that the strategy adopted was similar to the one used in Italy during the 1970's (in the so called conflittività permanente, continuous conflict): “The dismissals of the most violent activists have had a symbolic character and have re-
established internal order and management prerogatives" (Camuffo e Massone 2001, p.68)xxx1

The respect for internal order and management prerogatives in the control of the labour process has been and is the principle and the leitmotif always stressed by companies all over the world. Workplace case studies have frequently shown, even if not always directly, the centrality of the control of labour and the use of coercion, in the study and understanding of the dynamics of industrial relations and collective action (see for instance Fantasia 1988, Beynon 1984, Milkman 1997). It is true that there is a certain level of workers' consent in the exploitation of labour, as Burawoy discovered, but this co-exists with coercion. At the same time, it is important to stress that companies are not alone in the use of repression to control workers' protests and that states are often willing participants. The historical perspective presented in the previous chapter could show how, for instance in the case of Argentina, state repression has been widely used.

In addition, looking at repression and considering its role in the mobilisation process, it is necessary to specify the different meanings that the same concept can adopt. The cases analysed seem to suggest that repression can assume a more direct, explicit and violent form or can be used in a less evident way, through more camouflaged action, without explicit acts of violence. This distinction corresponds to the use of repression used directly against mobilisation events or as an instrument
for the prevention of conflict. The difference is particularly important in understanding how it influenced solidarity and the evolution of workers' consciousness.

FIAT, as well as Renault, has used all the methods available, legal or not, to break workers' solidarity, to divide them, to make them again loyal and obedient (*la familia FIAT*). Direct repression, as far as the case of FIAT is concerned, has been fundamental as an obstacle to further mobilisation. But at the same time, it produced radicalisation of the conflict and encouraged a faster development of workers consciousness. In the case of Renault, repression did not operate explicitly because the traditional union (SMATA) control of rank and file opposition, provided the company with the best instrument to control the labour force and to continue in the implementation of flexibility and outsourcing. Renault, probably also on the basis of FIAT's experience, avoided direct confrontation, implemented changes slowly and with union complicity.

In the case of FIAT, many elements (how the abrupt changes of salary and working conditions impacted on workers' sense of loyalty to the enterprise, union betrayal, the negation of the social development that many identified with work in the company) contributed to reinforce solidarity directly through action without an established organisation and leadership. These two components stabilised in the first three months after the first mobilisation when workers' solidarity transformed itself, under the action of organisation and leadership, into a new and a deeper socio-
political consciousness. Also, for this reason company repression had to be far more radical than the simple elimination of the leaders. One year after the first plant occupation, 1200 out of 1700 workers who signed the new contract with FIAT had been made redundant. A change in consciousness had already happened. In the case of Renault, where an active and challenging rank and file movement came under the control of the traditional union, workers did not progress in their socio-political consciousness. They felt impotent regarding the company, the union, the political power. In the years after the mobilisation they lived under the fear of losing their jobs and with a pervasive sense of impotence and frustration knowing that almost every day colleagues at work were fired (suspended) and that could be probably their turn next. Similarly some of the FIAT workers that remained in the plant after the “cleansing” now blame themselves for not having participated in mobilisations much more then they did; after this process of consciousness raising, their lives in the plant and their relation with the company changed completely.

These two different forms of repression, one “direct” to counter-mobilise and one “indirect” for preventing, could work effectively within a legal context that was not protective of workers' independent union action. We have already referred to the system for union recognition, its dependency on political decisions and how powerful the influence of traditional bureaucratic unions in such matters can be. The intervention of the provincial government as mediator of the two sides is also questionable. Especially in the case of FIAT, a company that had a plan to hire 5000
new workers, power relations have to be taken into consideration even if we believe that all the rules have been respected and no doubts are raised about the honesty of government executives. In the case of the second factory occupation, the intervention of the provincial ministry of labour, nullifying the effects of all the actions taken during the conflict, should have produced the ineffectiveness of the 41 lays off used by the company to repress activism. Through an interpretation open to debate, the conflict was not considered as collective and the firings acted as individual sanctions to be resolved in front of a tribunal. This action in practice supported company repression.

Last, but not least, the case of FIAT, as already mentioned, coincided with the introduction of flexible contracts in the industrial sector. The implementation of the contract was considered as a kind of test both for the other multinationals of the sector and for the government of Menem who put lots of stress on labour flexibility, as a panacea for unemployment and for his own credibility. Menem was expected in Córdoba for the opening of the new plant, but according to the local newspaper his decision not to participate in the events was not dependent on his health conditions but rather for fear of public protests in the province and in the same FIAT’s plant (La Voz del Interior, 19/12/1996). Workers were not willing to receive the person they saw as responsible for their situation and threatened management to mobilise on the day of the opening if the President was there. According to several interviews, during the days of the first occupation voices were saying in the plant that
The interviews also show samples of different forms of repression. The firing of activists was the most obvious way used by the company and aimed to weaken workers' resistance through the elimination of leaders. A more subtle way was to overcharge or move to the worst section of the production line those workers that had participated in mobilisation. This action served to create conditions of severe stress and isolation which acted psychologically on the capacity for resistance of the person. People were forced in this way to renounce to their jobs and the company could use this “voluntary decision” as proof that no firings were under way and that in reality workers were freely abandoning their jobs. Foremen and REPO introduced a climate of fear, suspicion, and threats in the factory for all those who maintained friendship and support with the people outside the plant. Being a former CORMEC worker meant being considered a rebel and workers at the new plant were kept at a distance from the possibility of “perversion”. At the same time the action of the company was inflexible in its recognition of SMATA as the only legitimate representation of its employees and the use of this form of legalised repression gave no chance to the recently formed independent union.

Repression can assume different meanings, forms and be promoted by the company, the state, the legal system, alone or in combination, and this through more or less direct intervention. In all these cases its fundamental
role is to break solidarity, to divide workers through an individualisation of the employment relation and of certain benefits, and to prevent collective action. Repression is a natural instrument available to companies not just to counter-mobilise and eliminate activists and leaders but also to impose managerial decisions, the respect of internal order and managerial prerogatives, to use the words of FIAT’s Industrial Relations Director. This kind of repression is the most subtle and difficult to grasp, because the logic of the management “right to manage” is the centre of the social system in which we are living. To challenge this “right” means to question the entire system. The decision of the company, and its right to impose it, will be always justified by the logic of the market, by international competition, and by trade agreements. Since no other alternative is offered, the impersonal action of the market, the need to be competitive will always provide a valid reason to legitimise management “right” to manage.

The cases of FIAT and Renault have to be seen in this light. Both companies implemented labour flexibility because international competition was pressing them to reduce the cost of labour. Workers had to be somehow convinced to accept a reduction of their salaries or precariousness in their employment. It was natural (for, as we have seen, the gap between the social needs constantly created by the system and the possibility to physically satisfy them always exist) and that people used to have a certain standard of living, oppose any decision that could have affected them. In both cases, workers mobilised for the same reasons but
specific conditions in the plants (companies' strategies, the action of union bureaucracy) produced different types of mobilisation and, consequently, different types of repression: direct as a counter mobilisation in the case of FIAT and indirect, more subtle, but nonetheless effective, in the case of Renault.

5. Conclusions.

In this chapter, three issues concerning the effects of mobilisation at FIAT have been considered: the emergence of leaders and the establishment of a representative organisation, the evolution of workers' consciousness, the radicalisation of conflict and company repression.

As far as the issue of leadership is concerned, at least in the case of FIAT, spontaneous and natural leaders emerged in the process of mobilisation basing their action on the solidarity produced by workers' interactions in the particular situation created by the change of contract. In this context leadership should be seen as the element that strengthened solidarity, and made explicit workers' grievances. But once collective action consolidates into organisational forms, leadership may become a constitutive element of solidarity rather than a product of it and this could explain the managerial tendency to eliminate leaders. In this transformation, the function of leadership also changes and assumes the role of a cohesive element unifying those individual perceptions into collective
The specific conditions that created the basis on which mobilisation occurred, an external situation favouring labour conflict and the repressive action of the company could explain how the conflict was at first radicalised and was later dissolved. Once the first occupation ended, workers realised that they were part of a much more complex reality and were forced to face this everyday in the constant confrontation with the company. This situation created a new deeper socio-political consciousness that strengthened itself in and through action. The analysis of events shows that workers' participation in the whole conflict, whatever the forms in which each person acted concretely, was certainly more conscious and possibly because of this, far from any Olsonian rational choice theory of collective action.

It may be argued that a characteristic of spontaneity is common to solidarity, as well as leadership and workers' consciousness and these can be seen as different points on the same continuous line of evolution/radicalisation. In this perspective a mutual influence is detectable, with leadership in particular filtering and framing the external and internal reality.

Repression, with its different forms and origins, intervenes on this line of evolution/radicalisation, breaking solidarity links and dismantling adversarial organisations through the elimination of leaders. This is true
also when repression does not assume a directly violent aspect as in the case of FIAT. At Renault the combined repressive action of the company and the union, even if apparently less violent, prevented conflict from emerging.

For analytical reasons I have looked at the process of mobilisation, focusing on its different phases. But it should already be evident that a full understanding of the same process and of the interests and power relations involved in it cannot be obtained by focusing on single events or sections. I have argued that the cases analysed could be characterised by the "presence" or "absence" of certain factors and that in this sense company strategies and bureaucratic unionism have been a determinant on the shape of the cases of mobilisation. A single model of collective action probably does not exist and this is not unexpected, as the first conclusion we can reach, but understanding differences helps to set directions in the development of social processes. Objective reality has been challenged many times, in different ways and forms. What the cases presented in the research can add might be new detailed examples of how concretely collective action has been put into practice, of its dynamics, of the role played in it by the different actors involved and which are the conceptual categories that can better define mobilisation. Overall, as discussed in the previous chapter, what can be generalised is the complex interaction between structural determinants and agency factors. But other cases might have proved that instead of company strategies and union bureaucracy, other factors as well, may have hampered or facilitated mobilisation and
that the way in which internal and external situations influence each other is different to the one I have considered as the usual pattern. However, the point is not just to put labels and find possible connections because there is always in this a risk of extreme empiricism and a potentially infinite number of equally valid cases and conclusions may emerge. Thus, maintaining the need for empirical evidence, what research like the present one can stress, is that mobilisation is, once more and fundamentally, the result of the interplay of two contradictory forces operating within market economies. Capital and labour, for all the reasons we have mentioned in the theoretical chapter, are intrinsically antithetical, physically counter opposed and cyclically produce events in which objective realities formerly taken for granted are collectively challenged. The research has certainly added new insights into the processes of struggle and in particular has investigated the ways and under which conditions, subjects collectively organise, react and change their consciousness. There are always areas that remain undiscovered or underestimated but whatever the accuracy we may use, the black hole of knowledge that all social research can hardly penetrate is that of generalisation. Tendencies can be established, similarities can be underlined and all the process of collective action clearly investigated but we will be always offering a partial view of a more complex and articulated reality.

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\(^1\) As mentioned in another section, workers had signed, the day before the change to the new contract, a paper supposed to authorise the union to negotiate a salary reduction of no more than 10%.

\(^2\) "Se estableció un debate, era todo un debate en la planta. Después de eso se comienza todo un..."
movimiento, empiezan a movilizarse. No sabían bien para donde ir ni qué hacer pero empiezan a juntarse. No sabían bien para donde ir ni qué hacer pero empiezan a juntarse, era mucha gente y comienza una movilización interna de fábrica sin líderes que la siguieran. Cuando se da esta situación ya en la propia movilización comienzan a aparecer los líderes naturales, propios, la gente de más carácter, más tamaño, el más malo, el que levantaba a voz y decía vamos. Ese que decía vamos era lo que encaminaba la movilización. Empiezan a perfilarse algunos representantes espontáneos, naturales” (FIAT, Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).

With reference to this general sensation, one of the interviewed argued that the occupation was in a certain way a reflexive act, not in the sense that it was planned before, but that many had reflected, during the night and in the discussions with their families and with other colleagues, on the consequences of the change to the new contract. Solidarity was already working.

"Al otro día los muchachos entraron en la fábrica......esa noche no durmió nadie. Se fueron a sus casas, hicieron las cuentas, se dieron cuenta que iban a ganar la mitad de la plata por el mismo trabajo. Se deprimieron, lloraron, no durmieron. Al otro día llegaron mal, colectivamente mal a la fábrica y sin que nadie les dijera nada se juntaron. Que hacemos?" (FIAT mobilisation leader).

"Yo me iba a ir y por lo tanto los trabajadores podían tener confianza en mí, yo no me iba a que r Y da (FIAT mobilisation leader).

"Ese día estábamos conversando al hilo de un momento en que llegó un silencio......porque fue generalizado el sentimiento y a mí me agarró nervios. Vos sabés que yo en ese momento...había una tablera de la máquina que yo empecé a pegar de puños, no me dolía, por sacarme la bronca. Pasa el jefe en ese momento y me ve y en esos momentos toda la gente a mí me seguía y los demás también empezaron a golpear y así todas las líneas. Donde probaban los motores a los motores empezaron a sacarle los silenciadores, más yo golpeaba más los demás me seguían “

"Me levanté y le di vuelta a la mesa y le dije 'acá nosotros vamos a hacer lo que la masa decida y si la masa decide no trabajar, no vamos a trabajar, está?'. 'Ustedes no son nada'. 'Si somos muchos, somos trabajadores'. 'Vos de esta manera no me hablás, soy tu jefe!'. 'Vos ahora no sos nada y yo me voy a levantar y me voy a ir afuera y quien me quiera seguir que me siga'.

"Ellos pensaban que yo era maravilloso como líder porque había logrado de transformar esa masa de corderos con la camiseta puesta en luchadores ejemplares. Pero fueron ellos a lograrlo!! Ellos lo lograron. Lo único que yo hice fue de explicitar esa situación nada más “ (FIAT mobilisation leader).

"Yo sé que en esos momentos hubo una tirada de bronca, le llamó la atención a la gente de personal porque no estaba esa persona en otro lado y no en contra de la empresa “ (former CPI FIAT).

"En la segunda toma con el activismo tomando un papel protagónico se rompió el vínculo democrático con la base, es otro un error. Muchas veces el activismo toma en sus manos el veneno que cada uno tiene encima “. (Independent union member).

"Después de la toma conoci a otro tipo de gente con la cual llegamos a la política...antes éramos una isla” (Fiat worker 4, Quality Control Department).

"Aumentaban los temores de que el conflicto se extendiera a otras plantas y que frente a la ex Cormec se realizara el acto central de la protesta del Jueves “ (La Voz del Interior, 24/9).

"Yo no me olvidaré nunca cuando Gallo decía: ‘hemos recuperado el poder de decisión nuestro, de tomar decisiones’. Nosotros recuperamos el poder de lucha, de discusión, antes no se discutía nada. Y era tan fuerte el grupo......era lindo “ (FIAT worker production line, La Morenita).

"La gente empezó a identificarse muchísimo con los equipos de trabajo y se recuperó la planta. Los voceros fueron abandonados y se empezaron a ir......los echamos” (FIAT Industrial Relations former REPO).

"No es posible recuperar a la gente. Se tuvo que ir mucha gente que no había posibilidad de que volviera a identificarse con el compromiso. Fueron despedidos se fueron solos” (FIAT Industrial Relations, former REPO).

"Yo creo que nosotros sí hubiéramos tenido un poco más de experiencia o si nos hubiéramos encontrado en la situación social del país de hoy......” (FIAT worker 4, Quality Control Department).

"Nosotros sentimos, y realmente era así, que estábamos solos, fuimos los primeros.“ (Independent union delegate)

"Vos ibas y le avisabas a los vagos ‘‘che loco, les van a bajar el sueldo” y los tipos “no, no creo’. Hasta que no te tocan no te metes. En la Chevrolet lo hacían salir de la puerta trasera y ninguno se acercó a nosotros”(FIAT worker 32, Quality Control Department)

"la fábrica no nos podía manejar. Cualquier cosa era batucada, golpear la máquina, se hacía batucada por cualquier cosa. La voluntad de la gente no era la misma. Los viejos que estaban acostumbrados a poner a punto las máquinas ya no lo hacían más por esa plata. La gente se fue haciendo rebelde” (FIAT worker 32).

"La planta era realmente un desmanejo, no se tenía control, tal como te digo, el operario hacia lo
que quería, trabajaba como quería y esta gente tenía realmente toda la sensación de la gente, porque la gente estaba realmente enojada. No que los querían a estos nuevos, si no que estaban enojados y lo representaban de esta forma” (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).

“Cuando se tomó la fábrica por primera vez, no teníamos mucha conciencia de los que estabamos haciendo” (FIAT worker, production line La Morenita).

“ahora habían cambiado, esa misma persona ya no era la de antes, ya veía el mundo diferente, había pegado un salto y esto le sucedió a todos, a todos. La lucha misma nos cambió a todos, nos fue cambiando, modelando, a mí y a todos. Entonces lo emotivo en lo nuestro yo te diría fue un elemento esencial en nuestra lucha” (FIAT mobilisation leader).

“Éramos parte de eso, estábamos en el medio de eso. Vos sabes que nosotros empezamos en ese momento a darnos cuenta de todo lo que era la flexibilización y de todo lo que iba a venir en el país” (FIAT worker 1, production line).

“la empresa nunca los reconoció legalmente, siempre se los trató como un hecho concreto, una representación de hecho, es decir si con ustedes que tengo que hablar, hablo pero no les voy a reconocer ningún carácter sindical. Para nosotros el sindicato era SMATA” (FIAT Industrial Relations Director, former REPO).

“En ningún momento nosotros dijimos vamos a perder, por supuesto nadie pelea si no tiene alguna posibilidad de ganar pero nosotros discutimos y votamos en asamblea que había posibilidad de perder y que si perdíamos nos iban a despedir a todos. Y que teníamos que optar, esto fue muy importante. Dimos a la gente la posibilidad de resignar. Nos miramos alrededor y nos dimos cuenta que la resignación era una posibilidad y la otra era pelear. Si peleamos bien y si resignamos bien. A media no. En esos términos, resignar significaba agachar la cabeza, no solamente que venga Menem eso sería lo de meno. Que venga Menem traía emparejado la perdida de otras cosas. La empresa de a poco te quería meter imposiciones, pasada la toma de a poco quería recuperar terreno. Y ese recuperar terreno nosotros lo teníamos que tener en cuenta” (FIAT mobilisation leader).

“los mismos jefes me decían activista y yo les decía, porque activista? Para decir la verdad? Para pelear, para reclamar lo que es justo? Ellos trataban de aplastarte, de que vos renunciara. Me llamaron muchas veces, yo no quise renunciar hasta que me despidieron” (FIAT worker, La Morenita).

Los jefes te decían que te habían visto hablar con los muchachos del sindicato y que esto te iba a dar problemas, que era mejor dejar de hacer esto” (FIAT mobilisation leader and FIAT worker La Morenita).

Nearly all the interviews pointed to the company's repression. Cases of physical aggression have not been recorded, but the use of psychological methods occurred daily. According to those interviewed, the mobilisation leaders and their families were shadowed by company security agents, activists were moved to the night shifts, and promotion was given to those who wanted to abandon the “rebels”. The company could also influence the media, just threatening television and newspapers with the suspension of adverts. During the first plant occupation that occurred in the Austral equinox, a local radio suggested workers' wives, with their husbands in the plant day and night, find a different way to celebrate the new season. The company could also influence the institutions. A video tape for the University television proved that during the general strike of the 26th of September, a group of the company security service was video recording the protest from the roof of the government building.

“I licenziamenti degli attivisti più facinorosi hanno avuto carattere simbolico e segnato la riaffermazione dell’ordine interno e delle prerogative manageriali” (Camuffo e Massone, 2001, p.68).

The majority of the videos produced by the internal surveillance in all these years refer to the time of conflict. Workers were identified through the video and put on a blacklist.

Those who were fired after the second occupation, built a tent in front of the plant to receive solidarity from other colleagues and to maintain links with the inside of the plant.
Chapter 6: The two dimensions of mobilisation.

1. Causes and dynamics.

In academic books, conclusions sometimes appear as nothing more than a good exercise in revisiting the essence of previous chapters and in expressing their outcomes in a clearer and sharper way. But this simple consideration, looking at conclusions as a sort of folder within which all research material is collected and summed up, could underestimate the creative process that the writing of a concluding chapter can represent. A reflection on specific issues raised at other periods of the investigation and the need to synthesise them in a few pages, potentially constitute the conditions for a reformulation of previous concepts and opinions in a much more original and creative way. This does not mean to reach conclusions not consistent with the rest of the thesis and the empirical evidence provided but, while writing the last chapter, there is an empty space that can be filled with a higher level of abstraction.

In the light of the above, this chapter will review the main findings of the research and while doing this it will develop some final postulations.

The research started as an empirical investigation into the causes and effects of two workers’ mobilisations occurring in two automobile plants in the city of Córdoba, Argentina, during 1996/1997. The aim of the research was to study the social processes that operate at the workplace
level in the formation and evolution of collective action, following Kelly's mobilisation theory as a main framework in the analysis.

In the first chapter, the hypothesis was advanced that a reformulation of the concept of injustice, namely that injustice acquires a meaning in action, is justified for both theoretical and empirical reasons. The cases have shown that mobilisation is not always a process that finds its origins in a perceived sense of injustice, because the meanings and the limits of it appear to workers once the action has already started. It is then that injustice, while framed by and within action, acquires significance and so doing strengthens the whole process of mobilisation, offering to workers and leaders an imaginary flag under which the continuation of struggle can be represented. Thus the point is not to argue that injustice does not exist at all before the mobilisation, but rather to underline that the category has a meaning and a function within collective action just if this latter has started already. Injustice has to be detached from the individual sphere and reconsidered as a category that while it could be useful to interpret collective actions, is not the basis of mobilisation. Historical examples of the relation between national politics and workplace conflict have been used to show how injustice is rather a volatile and subjective concept whose meaning varies considerably with the ideology, the power relations, the social environment and the material situation of the people considered. With reference to the history of Argentina's labour movement, we have seen how, even in apparently similar conditions and settings, mobilisation can follow different patterns. In the first months of the last
period of military rule, for instance, Ford and Mercedes workers spontaneously mobilised despite the risk to their security, while at FIAT this did not happen. At the same time, and for its subjective nature, the concept can be used either to refer to radically different situations that have nothing in common with mobilisation. Contextualisation it is a necessary and obvious condition to avoid emptying the concept of meaning and in the case of mobilisation, it is action that offers the context within which injustice acquires significance.

Considering the weakness of the concept of injustice, the attempt has been to address mobilisation by looking at it from a more objective point of view. In market economies labour is treated first as a commodity that can be bought and sold and, as a consequence of this, as a cost that firms, in particular under international competition, have to reduce and use flexibly in relation to business requirements. Workers live constantly in a situation of "inevitability" of their conditions, not having the individual possibility of influencing the law of supply and demand in the labour market, their living depends both on the salaries they can earn selling their labour and their subordination to the employer, and ratified by a supposedly free contract. Within this context, acutely defined as that of "structural unfreedom of the proletariat" (Cohen 1986), workers develop a set of interests objectively conflicting with that of the employers. These interests vary in relation to the level of social development that a given society in a given time has been able to achieve. It is the placing of workers in specific historical and social context that determines their interests as structured
around the existing level of material, necessary and social needs. However, due to the existing gap between capitalist development and workers’ access to the material possession of those commodities considered at a time in question as needs, a struggle between two groups going in opposite directions is always to be expected. The differences between what is promised or expected and the harsh reality of the law of the market, increases in the production rhythms, fragmentation of working time, stress on the job, can all be seen as situations that generate the impossibility of satisfying (in terms of lack of money, time and freedom of enjoyment) those social needs regularly produced in our societies.

The identification of these objective trends and the definition of workers’ needs could better frame the context within which mobilisation occurs. However, it is the analysis of micro contexts that offers the possibility of understanding how at certain times, subjects collectively contest the status quo. Consequently, a second issue treated extensively in both the theoretical and empirical chapters is solidarity. The concept and the role of solidarity in mobilisation are highly debatable and can undoubtedly raise concerns. Firstly, it is common sense for those who study conflict and collective action, to consider at least a minimum level of solidarity as a rather obvious and natural condition of any mobilisation and consequently most of the time it is taken for granted or considered implicitly. Secondly, and related to this latter point, there is a problem with the definition of the concept that varies with different groups and historical situations. Thirdly, the difficulty to provide a fixed, static
understanding of solidarity is shown by the fact that often the methods used to investigate it do not produce entirely reliable results. Quantitative, survey analysis has been criticised because it is considered inappropriate to study concepts, like solidarity and class consciousness, that cannot easily be framed into the structure of a questionnaire (Fantasia 1995, Portelli 1991). Nevertheless interviews or participant observation, although more suitable, have their limitations because the concept is in itself difficult to grasp. In addition, solidarity has often been studied together with issues related to the labour process (for instance Beynon 1984, Edwards and Scullion 1982), and to class consciousness (Rosendhal 1985, Fantasia 1988), within cultural accounts of the working class (Bruno 1999) or in historical perspective (Hanagan 1980). The fact that, directly or indirectly, solidarity has influenced studies of labour and the abuse of the concept in the internationalist literature and political propaganda, have added to the confusion, even more.

The data collected during the fieldwork for this research showed, once again, evidence of the problems that the concept of solidarity can create, both as a theoretical formulation and as a valid category in investigating the causes of mobilisation. In all the interviews I have conducted, the word "solidarity" does not appear very frequently and when this happens it is, most of the time, as an answer to a question in which I first drew the problem of solidarity to the attention of the interviewee. Before the conflict, at least in the discourse of workers, solidarity was to a large extent absent from both workplaces and in this a combination of
unfavourable conditions probably played a major role. The inheritance of the repressive climate introduced by the last military dictatorship, the instability of the labour market, the fear of losing comparatively well paid employment, the desire to maintain unaltered the social status achieved, union bureaucracy, diffuse company paternalism, restricted the room for solidarity. In particular, these conditions played a fundamental role in fragmenting and individualising the workforce and in creating selfishness, and the reproduction of these attitudes provided, to the new employed workers, fundamentally individualistic examples and behaviour.

We can certainly argue that within this unfavourable background, solidarity could not easily appear to workers as a resource for their mobilisation. But, if this is true, how can we explain two factory occupations that lasted for one week carried out by a workforce defined as scared, passive and not used to conflict? In the case of FIAT in particular, the mobilisation was unexpected and inexplicable for the majority of workers, and was not planned. They felt uncomfortable with the conditions introduced by the new contract but at the same time they accepted it and did not dispute the decision of the company. The day after the change to the new contract they went to the factory not thinking about a mobilisation but rather about how to manage, how to rearrange their lives, to the new situation of reduced rights and salaries, they were continuing to think in terms of individual interests. Social unrest and mobilisations were appearing frequently in the country since the process of privatisation and workforce reduction created a new mass of
unemployed and marginalised people. But our cases show that external conditions, at least at the beginning, did not play any role and the mobilisations can be explained on the basis of internal factors. With this background what was the cause of mobilisation then, if injustice appeared in action and the leadership was a not formed at first?

The fact that workers found their own mobilisation inexplicable and unbelievable and could not clearly express which internal motivation pushed them to abandon their machines and group together and talk about their situation, is evidence of both the difficulty to give names and precise meanings to what they were collectively feeling and, at the same time, of the spontaneity of their action. This element of spontaneity emerges as well in the interviews with managers, and this is very strange for people that, in other occasions, understood mobilisations and collective action as basically the product of a charismatic leader. It is useful to reproduce part of the interview with the industrial relations director, the former representative of the personnel office in the plant:

"a debate started, in the whole plant there were discussions. After this a movement started to grow, they started to mobilise. They had no idea of where to go and what to do but nonetheless they started to gather, they were many, and then an internal mobilisation of the plant, without leaders, started to emerge".

The person who later on was elected as workers' representative and leader in the mobilisation also points to it as something spontaneous and unexpected, as something emotional for many of them:
"it was a situation for crying because of solidarity........., everything was unexpected, it was as though something got free, it was released and this was positive for the people".

In the words of the manager there is just a reference to what spontaneously happened: first a debate, then discussions, then a movement, a mobilisation. No leaders, just an "internal mobilisation of the plant". What is the relation between an internal mobilisation and a spontaneous action? Is solidarity an emotion as the second interview suggests?

Thus far, it has been shown that if we want to assume solidarity as being central to the understanding of mobilisation, a further reflection on theoretical aspects is necessary. The notion of solidarity adopted in the thesis on the one hand assumes that, particularly when talking about collective actions, a minimum of mutual help has to be identified among those people jointly involved in production activities. On the other hand and based on this latter consideration, the emphasis is on the need for a dynamic view of the concept. Solidarity, as something static and precise, probably does not exist because it is in itself fluid and it operates in the fluidity of social relations. This means that many factors at different times can shape the forms solidarity takes, the periods in which it appears, and if it appears. This imposes us a look at solidarity as a social phenomenon whose boundaries are defined by the same process in which it appears. Interviews collected for this research, suggest interpreting the concept in this way. Thus, the emphasis on processes also invites us to look at those
elements/factors whose presence and absence could have altered the forms solidarity takes in specific occasions, which then influence the mobilisation.

The validity of the analysis and arguments put forward concerning solidarity is not in antithesis with the role played by leaders in mobilisation. Their importance in the understanding of collective action has been stressed many times from different academic schools and within different historical and political contexts. Workplace case studies that flourished in the 1970's and beginning of 1980's, have directly or indirectly recognised the role of leaders in shaping and framing workers' grievances. Researchers of social movement have devoted to the issue a wide coverage. More recently a new wave of studies inspired by Kelly's work on mobilisation has contributed to enrich and give detail to our knowledge of the function of leadership. But the importance of this latter in industrial relations and social mobilisation is best represented by a simple search in a library catalogue. Under the term "leadership" and under that of "leadership and management", approximately 3000 and 200 titles respectively appear on the screen. The extensive work on this subject speaks for itself.

This research underlines the role that leaders play in the organisation, stimulation and cohesion of workers' protests and at the same time tries to reflect on the social processes that support the emergence of leadership. The cases have shown how companies, as well as union bureaucracy, tend to weaken, prevent and, eventually repress, the emergence of people from
Moreover the fact that leaders are often considered the cause of mobilisation and become a target of managerial strategies, are elements that invite further reflections on the function of leadership.

I have argued that, in particular with reference to the case of FIAT, solidarity emerged out of workers’ interactions in the particular situation created by the change of contract. In this context, leadership should be seen as the element that, born out of a solidarity movement, transformed it into a more solid mobilisation making explicit workers’ grievances. Nevertheless, once collective action consolidates into organisational forms, leadership may become a constitutive element of solidarity rather than just a product of it. In this transformation the function of leadership changes and assumes the role of a cohesive element which unifies individual perceptions into collective thinking/actions. In a way, leaders represent an ideological continuation of the same mobilisation that had produced them.

2. Effects.

Until now I have drawn some conclusions by reviewing the dynamics/causes of the mobilisations analysed and the role played in them by the conceptual categories of injustice, solidarity and leadership. This can be considered as the first dimension of the study. I did not directly mention those contingent factors that, in the specific cases, produced different outcomes in terms of collective action and this is an intended,
voluntary decision. I could here repeat, by summarizing, that at FIAT the abrupt change of contract left workers first astonished, then perplexed and finally angry. They felt betrayed by the union that had promised to maintain the salary reduction within the 10%, they felt abandoned by the company whose paternalistic policies could not resist the pressure of international competition. They spontaneously occupied the plant and soon established their own representation and organisation within the vacuum of power created by the contemporary absence of both the union and the company. In the case of Renault, conflict was diluted through clear managerial strategies of gradual workforce reduction and externalisation of production sections. The bureaucratic union SMATA supported covertly the decisions of the company and maintained unaltered its leadership, first controlling and then co-opting internal opposition. The mobilisation at FIAT, whose workforce was legally with SMATA, and the Renault workers’ protests put pressures on the union leadership and a factory occupation took place.

Of course it is fundamental to know what concretely provoked a particular mobilisation, the subjects involved, the external and internal influences on the process, the role played in it by the conceptual categories mentioned before. The use of comparison can help to establish a set of rules, or tendencies towards mobilisation. This latter point in particular has to be treated cautiously. Historical evidence, at least in what concerns Argentina, shows that mobilisation does not always respond to predetermined criteria and, thinking in terms of process, fluidity in the interpretation has to be maintained. In this sense by saying that company
strategies and union bureaucracy are the factors that can explain mobilisation does not necessarily mean arguing that their presence, as in the case of Renault, prevented open conflict, as if this latter one was the norm. But the comparison provides evidence that in the case of the absence of both, a certain type of mobilisation happened and in the other case it did not. Without the elements mentioned above, conflict does not necessarily explode, but is certainly possible to argue that the same factors could hamper or influence mobilisation outcomes.

Putting it in another way, as far as the cases of this research are concerned, on the one hand, we cannot easily generalise and establish secure patterns of the origin and development of mobilisation, but just tendencies. On the other hand, we can certainly affirm that the absence or presence of a specific company strategy and of a bureaucratic union have hampered and/or influenced the mobilisations considered in this research. The alternation of "absence" and "presence" is the second, but not the less important, dimension in the analysis and explains the title of the chapter.

By looking at mobilisation with the aid of this second dimension, allows us to understand how the alternation mentioned above has influenced not just the dynamics and causes of mobilisation but also the effects of it. In the case of FIAT it is possible to observe how these particular conditions, that we have defined as "absence", have provided a fertile soil for a radicalisation of workers’ consciousness and of their behaviour and for a repressive action from the company.
These two effects often come together and it is not a surprise that they mutually influence. Green (1990), for instance, from the perspective of criminal sociology, shows the effects of policing on miners consciousness during the 1984/1985 strike in Britain. Although in the case of FIAT direct police repression was not used, psychological violence by means of threats and discrimination for all those involved in the conflict was normal and put consistent pressure on workers. Green's analysis goes very close to what I have argued on the issue of repression and consciousness in the empirical chapter. In particular she refers, following Brecher (1972), to mobilisation (strike in her case) as a process based on solidarity that transforms the people involved, changing their passivity and individualism into collective action. She also argues that mobilisation can create consciousness and politicisation, pointing at policing as a potential amplifier of this and at the action of the union bureaucracy as an element that, on the contrary, contributes to lessen the conflict.

The case of FIAT shows a direct dependency of workers' reactions with the repressive measures adopted by the company. On the one hand, the elimination of leaders and activists weakened the organisational structure, rendering increasingly difficult any form of possible resistance. On the other hand, those who did not refuse to abandon the conflict, strengthened their solidarity links and accepted the risk of a protracted confrontation. The internal struggles with the company and the rhythms and the times of the conflict set the quality and the level of workers' consciousness.
This latter changed in and throughout the entire mobilisation, affecting the majority of workers who, even if they gradually abandoned open confrontation and activism, had already "jumped" into a different vision of their reality with regard to both the workplace and the society as a whole. One year after the factory occupation 1200 out of 1700 lost their jobs because, as a manager said, they could not accept the compromise anymore.

The radicalisation of conflict has then to be seen as a process of evolution of workers’ socio-political consciousness that the 'absence' of union bureaucracy and the strategy adopted by the company facilitated. Without those elements that for many years maintained conflict at a low level and controlled workers' protests, the introduction of the new and worse contract (read also as the impossibility to satisfy social needs) represented the spark for the mobilisation. This unleashed a chain reaction and, as in a line of continuous evolution/radicalisation, solidarity transformed and evolved during the conflict to become socio-political consciousness within a context filtered and framed by leadership and organisation and in which the connection between the external situation of labour conflict and the internal struggles appeared as forms of the same reality.

A process of mobilisation should be seen in a temporarily wide perspective because in this way the importance of each conceptual category can be perceived entirely. The nexus of cause/effect, the
alternation of "absence" and "presence", will become more clearly understandable and can explain other cases of less open mobilisation/radicalisation. Although probably the topic of another piece of research, if it is true that there is a component of absence/presence that can explain different dynamics, causes and effects of mobilisation, the question could be then to know on what the absence/presence dynamic depends. Historical examples of mobilisations have shown how people challenge the objective reality surrounding them in many different ways and forms. With other empirical data, the thesis might have concluded that other factors, different from union bureaucracy and company strategy, were the causes of mobilisation and this not necessarily within the absence/presence dynamic. But these different conclusions would not have changed the whole picture within which mobilisation has to be placed since the logic dominating collective action remains that of two opposed groups with different objective interests in contrast to each other. The absence or presence of bureaucratic unionism and company strategies are some of the possible forms through which this counter opposition is expressed.

3. Lessons from Argentina?

The historical analysis of workers' and social mobilisation in Argentina is very rich for cases and experiences that do not leave room for doubts as to the importance the country has for all those who study events of collective action and popular uprisings. Whatever the government, the party in
power, the ideological framework, the temporal dimension, the level of organisation or the charisma of leaders, Argentineans have always, and stubbornly, I am tempted to say, mobilised. This heterogeneity of examples puts under severe scrutiny the validity of any static formulation of the mobilisation theory both in micro and macro perspective. Certain conceptual categories and their interrelations may be questioned, assumptions tested and the evidence of new cases considered.

As far as this research is concerned there are elements that may be useful to evaluate in a different light: the role of traditional unions as organisers of protest and the existence of a set of necessary conditions for workers’ mobilisations. Especially when we compare the Argentinean case with that of Western Europe, the image of trade unions as responsible and “rational” institutions part of a system of industrial relations becomes less clear and precise. Peronism empowered these organisations, transforming them into political and electoral machines, but at the same time workers always maintained a strong pressure on leaders for the fulfilment of their needs and demands. This double function as organisers of mass for both political and class interests coincided with their power as mobilisers. But the contradictions between peronist ideology and workers’ needs often produced grassroots movements that confronted the power of bureaucracy, once again, on their capacity to mobilise the workforce. This dynamic has strongly influenced labour relations in Argentina, at least from the second part of the XX century, and has shaped people’s cultural references and understanding of politics: it is not untrue to say that mobilisation is quite a
familiar concept for the majority of Argentineans.

The existence of this sort of structural idea of mobilisation goes with the economic instability that has characterised Argentina in the historical period considered, and particularly in the last decade. As for many peripheral countries, during the 1990's, a programme of privatisations, labour flexibility and neo-liberal restructuring had been implemented under the auspices of the IMF. The results of these "therapies" were visible worldwide during the popular uprising of December 2001, but this was just the tip of the iceberg. Mobilisation started well in advance middle class “cazerolas revolution” occupied the street of Buenos Aires claiming back their savings. Analysing the situation at FIAT and Renault in 1996, with the knowledge of the events which have happened since, gives us a perspective on a medium period of time during which the socio-political conditions for mobilisation emerged gradually and at different times. “We were the first” said once FIAT mobilisation leader, showing a newspaper reporting *piqueteros* roadblocks in the outskirts of Córdoba. The flexibility of working conditions in the industrial sector, was the second target of the reforms introduced under Menem's governments, and this because the first attack was to acquired workers’ rights, put in place during the waves of privatisation of former state enterprises. But it is true that the formal sector in Argentina started to decline approximately at the same time, and with this created a mass of unemployed people whose only resources for survival, to guarantee their material reproduction, was mobilisation. Those who went on strike at FIAT and Renault, and in
similar industrial areas of the country, almost contemporaneously were not starving but defending an achieved level of social needs and framed their mobilisation within this concrete threat to their rights. Although situated in a period of generalised social unrest, workers’ struggles at FIAT and Renault remained substantially isolated from the rest of the protest. All these considerations seem to suggest that waves of mobilisation may be coincident and favoured by moments of economic recession but, at least in the cases presented, it is the extent to which social needs remain consistently unfulfilled (for reasons of both trade union incapacity and government absence) that determines the necessary conditions for mobilisation. Thus, while evaluating the perspectives for widespread mobilisation, even just by reference to the national context, the tendency for struggles to be fragmented has to be considered. Workers’ solidarity may be a powerful resource for mobilisation, as I have tried to show, but it has to be considered with reference to the situation of a particular group of workers. People at FIAT realised they “were the first” just when they mobilised, when they became conscious and it was not a surprise for them to be almost alone in their struggle. Despite political calls for solidarity, the cases show that in situations of economic recession what counts is often a short term perspective based on the satisfaction of immediate needs.

The struggles of the 1990’s, although scattered, with a short-term vision and limited, remained as part of the social experiences of those who mobilised, and were the signals of an unstable economic system for those
at that time unaffected, and were the examples and the pool for recruitment for those who were organising the new forms of resistance, which have appeared in the last few years. In Argentina, new proletarians have emerged from the ashes of formal employment, traditional industrial conflict has to a certain extent disappeared and changed its forms and increased the strength of working people's mobilisations.

4. Limitations and final considerations.

This thesis, as is the case in qualitative case study research, has structural limitations. Despite the efforts to select representative cases, to add elements of comparison and to maintain a methodological accuracy, FIAT and Renault still remain two of the potentially infinite number of cases that could reach the same, or totally different, conclusions. It is important to stress this point, to avoid considering the findings of the research, as both easily applicable to other similar realities or, on the contrary, impossible to generalise. The identification of specific factors influencing the process of mobilisation has been supported by the reference to other works on the issues and to historical data on similar events and this should have increased the chances of generalisation. Yet the research remains far from an objective, true and "certified" reality and this requires, for the future, the need to add more cases and evidence to the study of mobilisation.

The attention to the micro contexts and to the dynamics of collective
action has certainly produced a less detailed analysis of political processes and social mobilisation external to the plants. In particular I refer to the way in which conflict has been politicised and how both workers and companies have reacted to this. Which are the boundaries between workplace and social mobilisation? What's the level of needs around which these two different instances of action are structured? Questions like these still remain unanswered. In the same line of criticism and with the same goals, more focused research could have offered deeper cultural accounts of the process of mobilisation and on the meaning of struggle.

As I said, I do not consider my findings as objectively true, I have simply offered an interpretation of reality on the base of the data in my possession and I am not too much interested in defending what concretely emerged from the cases studied with the positions of those who have found something different. I recognise the possibility to be corrected soon by an equally valid work by another author who will discover, for instance, the importance of gender (the absence of women representing another structural limitation of this research) for recruitment and mobilisation. However, in the social sciences and in case study research in particular, there is a sort of passion for details and micro conditions, an extreme attention to the correct balance of all the possible factors involved, an abuse of categories and definitions that can sometimes produce the perception that what we are describing is, to be frank, almost an abstraction from the reality. This tendency of extreme empiricism and to debate just on "facts" inevitably leaves aside those elements that could
contribute also to understand the whole picture. As a consequence of this
tendency, instead of moving dialectically from theory to facts and vice
versa, we can observe theories based exclusively on facts and case study
research that on the basis of different findings (facts) criticise a theory
based on other "facts". A potentially infinite and circular process.

In this research I have also tried to give attention to those objective
elements of the social reality that are often taken for granted because they
are considered obvious and hence do not add much to the understanding
of our realities. In this sense the study of workers' mobilisation may imply
the following "obvious" conditions: the pressure of the labour market and
the lack of alternatives, the "inevitability" of workers' dependency on a
salary to earn a living and consequently their subordination within the
employment contract, companies' repressive methods, ideological
dominant values produced by global competition, inequalities and lack of
access to social development. As far as mobilisation is concerned all these
factors are not old, or ideological but are simply facts that we cannot
avoid considering as immanent in the lives of the majority of workers and
hence, to different extents, profoundly influencing the opportunities for
people to mobilise.

The existence of these objective and historical conditions may be
considered as the foundation upon which the analysis of collective action
has to be placed and the categories identified in the theory can be tested
and compared. While refusing an individualistic account of social reality,
this research recognises an important role for subjects in the ways in which they shape and give form to their reactions to an imposed system of rules. The understanding of these processes of social mediation and the questioning of the inevitability of a system formerly taken for granted, represents the turning point in the interpretation of mobilisation. I hope my thesis may have contributed to this.
Annex: interview with FIAT's mobilisation leader

Cuándo entraste a la Fiat?
En el año 1992.

¿Qué hacías en ese momento? ¿Cuál era tu salario?
Operario, operario.

Especializado?
No, no operario. Todos entramos iguales no importaba el estudio que tenga. Es más cuando me hicieron la entrevista me dijeron que tenía demasiado estudio para entrar, cosa que me sorprendió, después lo fui entendiendo.

¿Por qué?
Porque el trabajo que se tenía que hacer era muy sistematizado, mecanizado y quizás ellos necesitaban gente que no tenga ninguna otra pretensión que hacer ese trabajo.

Después lo que ellos tomaron con la nueva fábrica tenían como un nivel más…..
No después, cuando ellos tomaron en el 96/97 empiezan a tomar la gente empiezan a cambiar su segmento y van orientando la toma de la gente según algunos criterios que después van variando de acuerdo a la evolución de la lucha. Por ejemplo ellos tomaron pibes jóvenes primero, muy capacitados.

¿Cómo nivel de educación?
Con nivel educacional alto. Rápidamente nosotros se los ganamos. Cambiaron, tomaban gente grande y sin educación. Nosotros le dijimos es un error. Ustedes lo han cambiado porque solo se los ganamos pero es un error porque la gente grande viene con manías, costumbres. 40/45 años, muchas costumbres, la disciplina de la fábrica no…….y sin estudio. Empezaron a faltar a romperse las máquinas, bajo la cualidad del trabajo. Así
que fueron variando la composición de acuerdo a como fue evolucionando la lucha. Después cambiaron...porque tan grandes como le dijimos nosotros no funciono’ no existía. Entonces empezaron a tomar gente mas chica pero con primaria, sin estudios y allí' empezaron a tener problemas con los robos porque la mayoría lo tomaban de las villas miseria. La composición que venia no era uniforme, era muy variada, entraba de todo, entonces empezaron a tener problemas con los robos. Era un problema sistemático porque la variable de ellos fue la lucha nuestra.

Claro, como empezó la............
Ellos determinaron su perfil de operario a partir de lo que no querían.

Y no querían gente como Gallos....... No querían gente que nosotros podíamos llegar rápidamente. Y entonces tenían un problema grave. El problema era estratégico. Nuestro cuerpo de delegados era realmente democrático. Eso significaba que realmente la gente elegía los mejores. Su cuerpo de delegados, son los jefes. Son perros. El cuerpo delegado de la fabrica, para mí, para nosotros eran los jefes su cuerpo delegado. No eran los mejores, eran los mas alcahuetes, lo más buchones como le decimos nosotros, chupamedias. No eran los mejores. Entonces nosotros les llevábamos distancia en la cualidad de nuestros dirigentes.

Estas hablando de que momento?
Todo el momento de la lucha, todo, todo lo que duro’ la lucha, estoy hablando de septiembre de 96 hasta mediado de 97. Después siguió pero muy atenuada.

En todo ese tiempo hubo dos tomas de fabrica y diferentes, me las podes describir?
Sí, sí. La primer toma yo no participe’ porque yo estaba afuera.

Afuera de la fabrica? No era tu turno?
No era mi turno y había renunciado un día antes
Habías renunciado?
No, lo que pasa es lo siguiente, algo parecido. La fábrica, nosotros sabíamos que iba a haber cambios eso es todo lo que sabíamos.

En el contrato, en el salario?
En algo, en algo. Se venían los italianos a la Argentina a ampliar a la fábrica e iba a haber cambios.

Eso como es que lo sabían?
Comentarios, totalmente informales.

Y del contrato firmado por el SMATA?
No sabíamos nada, nada. La UOM lo escondió y el SMATA también. Hacia ocho meses que estaba firmado y no sabíamos nada, nada.

No tenían la posibilidad de enterarse?
No, no. Yo personalmente me imagine’ que venía una rebaja salarial. Tal es así que hablé con mi señora, mi mujer y le dije nos van a reducir el salario porque si vienen acá van a querer imponer otras condiciones.

Y las leyes nacionales de flexibilización laboral ya las habían introducido?
No, esto era el inicio. El acuerdo entre el Gobierno y la Fiat fue la primera pata. O sea la punta de lancha para meter la ley de flexibilización laboral. Entonces le digo a mi señora si me bajan el salario menos de este valor no acepto y nos vamos a vivir a Mendoza, porque yo no tenía casa, tenía que alquilar y con un valor menor que ese no me iba a alcanzar para alquilar. No iba a aceptar. Un día llegaron y nos dijeron: están todos echados. Ahora lo contratamos de nuevo.

Quién llegó?
Los jefes de línea, tres por cada línea de producción con policía y abogados. Están todos
Y hicieron una asamblea, un comunicado?
No nos iban llamando de a uno.

De a uno?
Sí. Te llamo a vos, te sentas ahí. Estas despedido. Cómo estoy despedido? Si estas despedido pero te vamos a tomar de nuevo. Antes ganabas 4 pesos y 80 la hora ahora vas a ganar 2 con 80. Me Comprendes? De 4.80 a 2.80. Y las horas extras no van a valer más el 100%, van a valer el 50%. Y las vacaciones no te vamos a pagar mas las 135 horas de premio, te pagamos 85 a este valor nuevo. Aceptas o no? Y vos le decías, "para', que voy a llamar a mi mujer para preguntarle".......no, no es ahora. Si te vas, si te paras no aceptas. Si no aceptas. Si aceptas firmas. La mayoría firmo', quedarse sin trabajo era peor y aparte todos pensaron yo firmo después lo comentare' con mi mujer y veo si no me gusta no lo hago, ya la indemnización la tengo porque me despidieron. Yo no lo agarré' porque ya era menos del valor que había.......para mi no era una sorpresa todo eso que estaba sucediendo, ya me lo había imaginado y lo había conversado con mi señora.

Y en esta negociación de a uno con la empresa estaba también el sindicato?
Nooooo. El sindicato había ido un día antes lineas por lineas a avisarnos que el otro día nos iban a echar..... Yo a uno lo agarré' del cuello, me lo tuvieron que sacar.

A uno de la UOM?
O del SMATA, no sé que era porque'.... era cualquier cosa. Me los sacaron de las manos porque yo le decía de como es que me venia a echar él, el sindicato. Me tenía que venir a echar la fábrica. no el sindicato. Él, el compañero mio me venia a informar que me iban a echar.

Y que explicación te dio'?
Quemo' el problema. Nos iban a bajar el sueldo pero solo de un 10% y ellos estaban peleando para que sea un 5% en vez que un 10% pero que te dan toda la indemnización. Si ustedes firman acá' nos dan el aval a nosotros para que peleemos por el 5% en vez que 10% de rebaja salarial........me lo sacaron de la mano, después que me lo sacaron de la mano dije que no y me fui a mi casa.

Dejaste el trabajo?

Deje' el trabajo

El día anterior a la firma?

Claro. Al otro día los muchachos entraron en la fabrica.....esa noche no durmió' nadie, se fueron a sus casas, hicieron las cuentas, se dieron cuenta que iban a ganar la mitad de la plata por el mismo trabajo, se deprimieron, lloraron, no durmieron, al otro día llegaron mal, colectivamente mal a la fabrica y sin que nadie le dijera nada se juntaron. Que hacemos?

O sea, fue como una decisión espontánea?

Que hacemos? Y un muchacho, Daniel, después uno de los lideres de la toma Daniel Moyano, de la bronca agarro' un portón, pero grande, que tenia como 20 metros, perdón 10 metros, muy grande. Y lo tiro' así' y se rompieron todos los vidrios. Y todo el mundo se dio vuelta y dijo ese es el líder, y él dijo vamos a tomar la fabrica. Esto me contaron......yo no estaba adentro de la fabrica. Y se tomo' la fabrica. Una vez que se tomo' la fabrica.....para' después te cuento algo mas porque 20 dias antes habíamos hecho una pelea por primera vez en la historia de Fiat después de 25 años, muy grande, 20 días antes de esto, era previa a esto. Se tomo' la fabrica y lo primero que se hizo fue votar que ningún sindicato iba a entrar, la prima. Que se elegían delegados nuevos y una comisión nueva y que nadie más podía llegar a entrar a la fábrica, de los sindicatos.

Y la comisión que estaba antes era de obreros?

De obreros
O sea eran compañeros que estaban con el sindicato UOM?

Vendidos totalmente con la UOM o con el SMATA, con cualquiera de los dos o lo dos juntos, no importaba.

Bueno, personalmente yo llegué al otro día porque tenía que cobrar una diferencia de haberes. Y estaba haciendo las cosas para irme a Mendoza y venía de averiguar cuanto me salía la mudanza. Llegué a la fábrica y estaba tomada, me alegré muchísimo... con mi mujer los dos nos quedamos afuera.

Y esto cuando fue?

A la mañana

El turno empezó a las......?

El turno empezó a las 6 y media y yo habré ido a las 9, 8 y medias. Y la fábrica ya estaba tomada desde la 7 u 8 de la mañana e hicieron esto que yo te digo. Se juntaron, este tiró la puerta, se rompieron los vidrios, vamos a tomar la fábrica y se tomaría.

Y la empresa que hizo en ese momento?

Nada. No sabían que hacer.

No había ningún representante de la empresa hablando con los obreros?

Sí......no había representante de los obreros. La empresa estaba analizando qué hacer.

La gente de la empresa estaba en las oficinas?

Ellos sí, los trabajadores tomando la fábrica, serrando los portones, cuidando los portones.

Una toma.

Y las guardias que hicieron?

Las guardias estaban afuera
Las echaron y no reaccionaron’?
Claro, porque a las guardias también les bajaban el sueldo. Las guardias no dijeron nada
se hicieron los tontos, nada más que eso y la empresa no tenía con quien dialogar, eso era
bárbaro, eso resolvía el problema, que no había......con nadie.

Y tampoco ese Daniel se quiso poner?
Daniel que hizo, dijo que se hace para legalizar una comisión nueva? Y .....hay que traer
a un escribano y mando’a buscar el escribano, y trajeron a un escribano y a un abogado y
el abogado era muy amigo mio, pero de casualidad, y bueno unos muchachos que
estaban afuera empezaron: “Gallito...metete”. Paréntesis ahora.
Veinte días antes nos habían sacado el salario familiar, asignación familiar, lo que se
paga por hijo, por escolaridad, lo habían borrado con una ley nacional. Ese día que se
saca el salario familiar fue la primera vez que se organizó’ una pelea en Fiat, grande.

Y que paso”?
Lo que paso’ es que en 4 o 5 nos pusimos de acuerdo con las miradas y salimos a
caminar por el pasillo aplaudiendo y se nos sumo’ toda la fabrica e hicimos un abandono
de tareas.

Así’ espontáneo?
Así’ y fuimos hasta el gremio y le dijimos que hagan algo.

En la fabrica?
En la misma fábrica tenían una oficina, que hicieran algo porque queríamos el salario
familiar. El gremio nos respondió’ que era una ley no un problema de la fabrica y
nosotros les dijimos no nos importa esta fabrica tiene plata suficiente para pagar a
nosotros el salario familiar, queremos el salario familiar. El resto de los trabajadores
vera’ nosotros queríamos el salario familiar.

Y en ese momento no había un representante de la empresa en la línea?
Si pero no pudo hacer nada, toda la gente se fue.

**Ni tentó’?**

Ni tentó’ porque tenían todos los mecanismos oxidados, esto no pasaba en la fábrica hasta 25 años. Ellos no tenían mecanismos represivos puestos a la orden del día como si’ lo han tenido después. Era un desastre...

**Siempre hablaban con el sindicato.........**

Claro el sindicato arreglaba y listos. Bueno fue un abandono de tareas, vino el sindicato, la UOM, corriendo, y nos paró’, que no podíamos abandonar. Eso fue veinte días antes de la toma. Y votamos, votamos tres veces, porque ellos no querían reconocer la votación y el 80% voto’ por el abandono y ese día no se trabajó’. De esta lucha tres o cuatro fuimos los que estuvimos al frente en el turno tarde. Cierro paréntesis. Estos tres o cuatro fueron lo que me vieron a mí fuera de la fábrica y me llamaron. “Vení Carlos, te necesitamos, vos fuiste uno de esa pelea” “No yo voy a Mendoza” “Si, pero vos sos un tipo que tiene título de estudio, no todos lo tenemos, y necesitamos gente rápida que de’ respuestas” “Yo me voy a Mendoza” “Bueno ándate a Mendoza pero ven’ ayudanos en esta asamblea”. Bueno me meto. La asamblea era un quilombo. Nadie, a ver, tenia idea de lo que hacer. Que hacían?

**También entre los obreros todos los mecanismos estaban oxidados**

Claro. Que hacemos? Esta’ bien tomamos la fábrica y ahora? Entonces yo..... me suben en una mulita a mí, me metió’ la comisión, la comisión estaba elegida yo no. Era tal el grado de desorientación......yo pedí’ la palabra. “Miren lo que yo pienso es que hay que hacer esto y esto. Nada mas ordene’ un poquito. Se hizo silencio y automáticamente me paro’ uno y me dijo “repetilo” y lo repetí’ y automáticamente la gente “ole’, ole’ ole’ ole’ Gallo, Gallo”. Y creo que hubo dos factores elementales, que sirvieron para que esto sucediera. El primer factor fue que yo me iba a ir y por lo tanto los trabajadores podían tener confianza en mí, yo no me iba a quedar. Yo pienso que unos de los factores fue ese porque’ alguien que se va a ir no me puede joder, porque’ no tiene pretensiones de
queda. Es más lo primero que yo dije cuando subí fue que me iba a vivir a Mendoza. Estoy acá nada más porque me lo pidieron los muchachos que este, nada más. Y se empezó a corear mi nombre y a partir de allí ya no pude decidir solo y irme a Mendoza, ya era una decisión colectiva de toda la gente.

Te sentiste responsabilizado?

Me sentí responsabilizado frente a otra gente. Bueno me fui a mi casa con otro muchacho y le dije a mi mujer: “mira me parece que no nos vamos a Mendoza y le conté lo que sucedió”. Y hay fue todo el devenir de..........

Se hizo otra votación para elegirte?

Ahí me eligieron y después la fábrica me rechazó y dijo que no quería hablar con migo porque ya había renunciado. Y los trabajadores dijeron que si yo no estaba..........

Y además la empresa no sabía con quien dialogar.....

No tenían nadie con quien dialogar, discutir.

Y la gente de UOM se había borrado?

La gente de UOM no podía entrar, los trabajadores los sacaron a patadas, a patadas. Yo personalmente participe en una de esas. Si a bollarle el auto y a pegarle. Y el SMATA no se animaba. Lo que yo propuse, me acuerdo, y que después lo hicimos fue buscar al SMATA y que legalizara nuestra lucha. Porque en la Argentina uno de los problemas más grave es que cuando vos no tenes sindicato....... hay una ley en Argentina que le da personalidad a los sindicatos a diferencia de los países europeos donde son libres asociaciones. Acá no, acá hay una doble personería, una personería sencilla como la de ustedes y una personería llamada gremial. Quien no tenga la personería gremial no puede tener los delegados, no tiene defensa legal, cobertura legal, no pueden hacer nada los sindicatos que no tengan esa personería y la personería gremial es una decisión política, no se le da personalidad gremial a un sindicato desde 30 años.
Así que propusiste la afiliación al SMATA?

No la afiliación no. Que venga el SMATA y no represente

Y no sabían que SMATA había firmado el convenio?

No sabíamos nada. A la UOM no la queríamos porque nos había traicionado. Tampoco sabíamos de los del SMATA pero la UOM ya no la queríamos. Y fuimos a buscarlo al SMATA y el dirigente del SMATA es de lo peor, fascista, él entero como interventor, colaborador de la dictadura militar, muy jodido, muy jodido. Bueno vino.....

Un burócrata?

No alcanza la palabra burócrata. A ver burócrata es, una buena definición es aquella persona que manda a hacer a otro lo que no se anima a hacer él. Fue entregador de personas durante la época de la dictadura militar, hubo desaparecidos por culpa de él. Este tipo vivía de la renta de la empresa......bueno ya la cosa se hace mas complicada.............lo fuimos a buscar a el, la gente lo odia, lo llevamos, vino, lo pusimos arriba de la mulita y tubo que prometer paros, huelgas, luchas, movilización, porque’ si no no bajaba, lo comían.

Prometió’ que iba a pelear por los obreros.......... Lo filmaron en directo, salió’ por todos los canales, las radios. Esta’ todo grabado. Eso era lo que nosotros queríamos, que el tipo se comprometiera en algo, que no tuviera opciones de zafar. Lo hizo. Bajo’, mucho gusto y chao, se fue’. Y la toma siguió.

Como quedaron......

Él amparaba con su personería todo lo que hiciéramos nosotros, claro mientras tanto discutían con el gobierno cuanto despedidos tenía que haber, llego’ a pactar con el gobierno.....

Con el Gobierno de Córdoba?

Cierto. 550 despidos definitivos que el Gobierno provincial no se animó’ a hacer
Pero no es que la FIAT había prometidos a todos ustedes la reintegración bajo nuevas condiciones salariales?

Entonces termina la primer toma después de cinco días y con el amparo legal pudimos negociar y se da la conciliación entre la fábrica y la comisión nuestra con el amparo legal del gremio. Este gremio firmaba todo lo que nosotros resolvíamos en la conciliación. Termina la conciliación y negociamos el 95% del salario, nos pagan la indemnización, perdón el 92% del salario y a los tres meses se iba al 95. Perdíamos un 5% del salario anterior que era lo que nos habían prometido lo de UOM, por lo tanto nos parecía lógico perder algo, muy poco, y quedarse con mucha plata en el bolsillo por la indemnización porque el que menos tenían eran 10 años de antigüedad por lo tanto se iba a llevar 15000/20000 pesos lo que menos se llevaba.

Los obreros tenían mucha antigüedad?

Sí y las máquinas eran muy viejas, obsoletas, esas máquinas no las hacía andar nadie. Esto fue un punto fuerte de nuestra lucha que las máquinas no las podían hacer andar con pibes jóvenes porque tenían muchas manías. Para hacerla andar ponían un palo de escoba y le hacían fuerza de allí, y andaba.

Eran máquinas que producían motores?

Motores y cajas de velocidad. Muchísimas máquinas y muchísima plata. Toda la producción de motores y cajas. En la nueva fábrica había chapistería, pinturera y asamblaje. Todo moderno, de última generación. Los motores del 1900......

Y cual fue la actitud de la empresa?

Bueno la empresa se sentó con nosotros a negociar. Y nos dijo que no tenía problemas en negociar con nosotros. La actitud fue cambiando. Fue cambiando a partir de que ellos empezaron a tener una lectura de que nosotros teníamos una posición de clase definida.

La empresa se dio cuenta de eso o.....?
Se fueron dando cuenta en la práctica. Nosotros nunca los dijimos. Mis discursos eran flores, rosas, primaveras y nuestra práctica era otra. Entonces se nos venían.........eso fue en Septiembre. Octubre, Noviembre, Diciembre trabajamos.......  

**En la conciliación la actitud de la empresa como fue?**  
Ellos no querían negociar con nosotros. Después tuvieron que negociar con nosotros porque’ teníamos el respaldo de los trabajadores. No podían mover la fábrica. Nos decían “los vamos a echar a todos”. Y echen. Nosotros nos apoyábamos en el hecho que eran muy viejas las maquinas, echándonos echaban toda la experiencia. Por lo tanto toda la gente nueva que entraba no tenían quien la capacitase más lanzarnos la consigna “no capacitar” a los trabajadores nuevos. Entonces empezaron a poner gente al lado nuestro para que aprendiera.  

**Esto cuando, después de la toma?**  
Después de la toma. Nosotros lanzamos la consigna que la fuerza nuestra estaba en la experiencia y que si esta experiencia se la dábamos a otros perdíamos nuestra fuerza. Por lo tanto no hay que capacitarse, pero hay que explicarle a los compañeros ’ porque’ no íbamos a capacitar.  

**Bueno entonces en Septiembre se acaba la toma......**  
En Septiembre negociamos el 92 % del salario anterior, a los 3 meses 95, 120 horas de vacaciones. Les quitamos todos los puntos flexibilizadores: no se podía suspender personalmente, no se podía suspender a un grupo que sea menor que una línea completa.  

**Esto también como sanción disciplinar?**  
Por sanción disciplinar sí’ se podía suspender individualmente pero no se podía suspender por falta de trabajo si no era menor de una línea. Pero ellos querían suspender individualmente, con lo cual al jefe no le gustaba tu cara y.....te suspendía y te reemplazaba con otro.
Después de la toma?
Nosotros quedamos conformes, la empresa quedó muy mal no quería reconocernos y tuvo que aceptar. En el Gobierno nacional Menem, digo para tener idea en qué situación estábamos peleando, el país menemista con San Cavallo ministro de Economía, la convertibilidad intocable. Nunca un corte de ruta en la Argentina, no había sucedido jamás

La primera en todo el país. Y ustedes se daban cuenta de esto?
Nos dimos cuenta después de la toma en el medio de la toma no tuvimos tiempo de reflexionar esto. Después cuando paramos la pelota nos empezamos a dar cuenta y empezamos a preparar otro tipo de pelea.

Y en los 25 años anteriores nunca hubo una pelea abierta y siempre se negoció con un sindicato “amarillo”?
Sí, siempre, siempre. Pasa esto, termina la toma y logramos que al otro día terminada la toma se se trabaje porque estábamos todos cansados. Bueno esa fue una peleita pero buena. Empezamos a trabajar y la comisión de los nueve que éramos la comisión elegida teníamos libertad para movernos en toda la fábrica

Eso fue arreglado en la conciliación?
Sí fue parte de la conciliación

La empresa reconoció a los nueves?
Sí, si firmamos nosotros la negociación

Y el SMATA también?
Sí también pero teníamos, según el ministerio, y tal como había empezado la conciliación si no firmábamos nosotros tampoco se acaba la conciliación. Lo cual ya no daba una figura legal, mínima, pero legal. Es más hubo algunos juristas que empezaron a sacar
nota por el diario de que como nos daban a nosotros esa autoridad si no éramos un
sindicato constituido. Que nos daban demasiado espacio. Claro esa fue una decisión
política del Gobierno de la Provincia. Menem le estaba diciendo al Gobierno de la
Provincia que mande la infantería para desalojarnos a todos. Mestre que era Gobernador
me llama a mí, yo no lo conocía. Tengo a Menem con la infantería, se vienen. Que
vengan somos 1700 trabajadores con bullones y tuercas van a tener que venir en mas de
5000 para sacarnos, esto va a ser un hecho nacional. El Gobierno de acá era Radical el
Gobierno nacional Peronista, no quiso pagar el costo, era un costo permitir que se vengan
los soldados. Nosotros nos jugamos a esa, salió bien. Menem nos hubiera metido la
fuerza.

Y esto tus compañeros lo sabían?
Si’ lo discutimos en la comisión y me respaldaron, pero no fue una decisión votada. El
99% de las decisiones fueron votadas.

Y adentro de la comisión tus compañeros te daban un poder de negociar?
A mi adentro de la comisión siempre se me respeto’ la relación mía con la gente. La
gente me reconocía mucho a mí y menos al resto de la comisión y eso siempre se respeto
dentro de la comisión a la hora de decidir pero toda la comisión participo en todo lo que
era decisorio salvo lo que no querían participar en determinados momentos, nunca
entraba nadie solo en ninguna discusión, siempre tratábamos de involucrar a la mayoría y
a veces llevamos al cuerpo de delegados que era muy grande, 100 personas
aproximadamente.

Eso para ser capilar?
Si era muy grande y muy activo. Apenas salimos de la toma, cuando empezamos a
reflexionar en que país estábamos, todas esas cosas, empezamos a armar una
organización, salimos rápido a armar una organización. Entonces como podíamos
movernos en toda la fabrica, pero la fabrica no nos pagaba el sueldo porque nosotros no
producíamos...........entonces nosotros decidimos en una asamblea que todos les paguen el
sueldo a los nueve, todos los trabajadores que se junten en la quincena la plata pagarnos el sueldo y que nosotros nos íbamos a mover en toda la fabrica para ver los problemas.

Así que ustedes no tenían salario?
No. Que hacíamos todo los días? Pasábamos línea por línea organizando la gente porque nosotros preveíamos que se venían Diciembre Genero y Febrero muy difíciles porque en todos estos meses hay baja producción. Cuando hay baja producción la fábrica no te necesita y tiene todo el tiempo del mundo como para buscarte todas las vueltas necesarias para jugarte. Eso suponíamos. En Noviembre, Octubre los dedicamos a hacer asambleas por líneas, permanente. Por turno de trabajo y por línea se perdía 15 minutos por día en asambleas. Que hacíamos nosotros: la asamblea no podía ser nunca democrática si previo a la asamblea no se discutía el temario, una asamblea de 2000 personas, entonces pasábamos línea por línea informando el temario y pre-discutiéndolo. La pre discusión significaba que se podían escuchar todas las posiciones en cada asambleíta. Cada línea tenía entre 30 y 40 operarios. A mi y mis compañeros llevaba un turno completo. Sin parar

Hacían pequeñas discusiones y ponían a votación
Sí. Sin parar

Esto por cualquier tipo de problema?
Nosotros nos dimos una política de meter mucho en las discusiones respeto de la organización y el problema de ir fijando un plan mínimo de acción, de formación de un gremio. Discutíamos que íbamos a defender de nuestras conquistas, que era lo más importante para nosotros. Entonces hay se discutió muy mucho sobre nuestra posición de clase, se politizó mucho. Tal es así que cuando la fabrica dice el 20 de Diciembre se va a inaugurar nosotros decimos sí pero si el presidente va a inaugurar la fabrica ese día no va a haber producción y la comisión de los nueve, con la dirección de Fiat y Menem al teléfono se decidió que Menem no venia. A Menem esto lo jodía porque era en su mejor momento. Vino Mestre. Eso se discutió hasta la 5 de la mañana del 20 de
Y esta posición cuando fue discutida entre ustedes?

Esto fue pre discutido en todas las asambleas

Y todos los compañeros estaban de acuerdo?

Por supuesto. Por eso en esa ocasión nosotros politizamos nuestra posición porque indicábamos a Menem como responsable de la flexibilización laboral y nosotros decíamos y llegamos a hacerlo colectivo eso, se discutimos entre 2000 personas que primero era la Fiat pero que después iba a tocar toda la clase trabajadora y que después de los trabajadores iban a venir los pequeños y medianos empresarios y que no se crean que solo porque’ son empresarios......a ellos también le iba a llegar la flexibilización. Por lo tanto la pelea no era solo nuestra era de más gente que la estábamos empezando y nos dimos cuenta que la perdíamos.

Sabían que la iban a perder?

Sabíamos que la íbamos a perder.

Pero no obstante eso...........

La pelea teníamos que darla. Discutimos eso en las asambleas

O sea de la posibilidad de fracasar.....

Sí’, así’ y decidimos pelear, eso fue lo más maravilloso

Cuándo fue eso?

No tengo la fecha exacta pero fue antes de la inauguración. Esos tres meses después de la toma nos sirvieron para llegar a esa discusión. Y porque’ llegamos a esa discusión?

Porque’ después de la toma, como te decía, vimos lo que pasaba. Ahí tuvimos que parar la pelota y decir a ver donde estamos. Perdemos, perdemos, ya lo sabíamos.
Ya sabían que se iban a enfrentar........

Con el Gobierno Provincial, el Gobierno Nacional, con todos los sindicatos y con la empresa y que nosotros a lo sumo podíamos elegir...............En ningún momento nosotros dijimos vamos a perder, por supuesto nadie pelea si no tiene alguna posibilidad de ganar pero nosotros discutimos y votamos en asamblea que había posibilidad de perder y que si perdíamos nos iban a despedir a todos. Y que teníamos que optar, esto fue muy importante. Hubo una discusión de un día entero, primero en la comisión y después con el cuerpo de delegados. Había compañeros que me decían que no se podía discutir con la gente la posibilidad de perder y yo y otros compañeros más dijimos que había que discutir todo con los demás. Dimos la posibilidad a la gente de resignar, si lo llamamos así: es posible resignarse si no miremos a nuestro país, esta’ resignado. En ese momento estaba totalmente resignado y es mas ahora esta’ bastante cierto. Nos miramos alrededor y nos dimos cuenta que la resignación era una posibilidad y la otra era pelear. Si peleamos bien y si resignamos bien. A media no. En esos términos, resignar significaba agachar la cabeza..........no solamente que venga Menem eso sería lo de meno. Que venga Menem traia emparejado la perdida de otras cosas. La empresa de a poco te quería meter imposiciones, pasada la toma de a poco quería recuperar terreno. Y ese recuperar terreno nosotros lo teníamos que tener en cuenta.

Cómo recuperaron terreno, dialogando con la comisión?

No, tratando de meter contradicción entre la gente y nosotros, la comisión y los obreros. Trataban de meter contradicciones, por ejemplo. Todo un día la gerencia del personal se reunía con nosotros y de 15 puntos 14 los habíamos logrados, pero todo el día ellos mandaban para abajo la información de que no se había logrado nada. Vos saliste de allí después de todo un día de defender y la gente de decía que mierda están transando? Se están arreglando? Permanentemente estaban tratando de romper el vinculo nuestro con la gente.

A través del REPO?

REPO y todos los mecanismos que ellos tienen, mecanismos que consistían en el REPO,
jefe de línea, sección, los psicólogos que tenían trabajando en la fábrica. Los REPO eran los que más trabajaban en eso, lo más rápidos.

Los compañeros se la creían?

No pero siempre había un grupo más... que se la creía más fácil, era un grupo menor pero existía. Siempre existe. Y sobre ese grupo hacían presiones para agrandarlo.

Después llegó Enero que nosotros suponíamos muy duro y nos echan a un compañero.

Cuando nos echan a un compañero.....

Por disciplina?

Provocan, provocan la situación, quieren llegar a una situación extrema. Nosotros nos dimos cuenta que no había otra forma que pelear, fuimos. En la media habíamos creado un sindicato porque el SMATA no quiso reconocer la sección de Ferreira. Preguntamos a los trabajadores que querían, fuera de las puertas de fábrica.

Todos los trabajadores votaron. Impresionante. Fue una demostración de fuerza alevosía, la fábrica se quedó con los ojos abiertos. Todos los trabajadores que a la salida normalmente se van tenían que hacer cola para votar y lo hicieron. Todas las asambleas eran a la salida y ellos ponían cámaras para filmar a las asambleas. Eso era fuera del lugar y del horario de trabajo, te filmaban, una persecución total, total. Pero como eran tan masivas las asambleas...... Después agarraban a uno y le decían vos estuviste en la asamblea? Si estaban todos?

El otro maravilloso fue cuando cada quincena los trabajador a la salida del turno versaban la cuota sindical en una cajita...... no era por descuento sobre el salario, era voluntaria. Era realmente un estado de movilización y de concientización muy alto.

Cómo se logró ese estado?

Con debate. Con mucho debate y con mucha democracia.

En los 25 años anteriores había solidaridad entre los trabajadores, alguna forma de resistencia?
Lo que había era compañerismo y nada más. Por eso la gente el día de la toma lloraba........a ver me subían muy alto en la mulita y yo veía a toda la gente, era una cosa.....yo lloraba, cada media hora estaba llorando. Por ejemplo uno me dice “che Gallo me das la autorización a dejar la toma?” , tenía la mujer internada y estaba por dar a la luz. Como no vas a ir hermano, vas a ser padre, anda’ no me pida autorización para abandonar la toma. Hubo algunos que quisieron trasladar el casamiento a la toma, tenía pensado casarse ese viernes, ya teníamos cura y todo......También en la segunda toma pasaron de estas cosas. Era para llorar porque’ la solidaridad, todo esto nació’ de golpe, fue como algo que se libero’ y eso le hacía bien a la gente, ya no bien en el sentido económico. Bien en el sentido de realizarse como persona. Se sentían dignos y hoy cualquier persona se acuerda de esa lucha y que hizo bien, porque’ se sintió’ bien.

Menos mal que nos echaron ahí’ adentro nadie se hubiera podido quedar. Ahora habían cambiado, esa misma persona ya no era la de antes, ya veía el mundo diferente, había pegado un salto y esto le sucedió’ a todos, a todos. La lucha misma nos cambio’ a todos, nos fue cambiando, modelando, a mí y a todos. Esta sensación, este sentimiento fue muy fuerte. Entonces lo emotivo, en lo nuestro, yo te diría fue un elemento esencial en nuestra lucha. Tal es así’ que cuando fuimos a hacer la solidaridad a los compañeros de Renault decidimos en asamblea que no podíamos mandar un papelito.......hay que ir, y fuimos en caravana. Te imaginas cuando llegamos!!

En Renault había un dirigente combativo, Tello que pertenecía al SMATA pero que venía peleando de abajo que había ganado las elecciones en Renualt. Campellone después le gano’ a Tello en la conducción del sindicato por los concesionarios de auto.

Pero Tello gano’ en Renault. Y yo le digo a Tello, “Tello llamemos a un paro provincial, esta historia no esta’ escrita, no dice que vas a llamar a un paro provincial?”

“Y como se hace eso?” Es fácil le digo “llamamos a todos los medios y nos presentamos y decimos tal día paro provincial, la Fiat nosotros la paramos, la Renault esta’ tomada, la Perkins se va a unir y Transax apoya si nosotros estamos unidos, le podemos parar todo el cordón industrial y si logramos esto, cosa que en ningún paro es fácil de hacer. todo el resto se suma y el que no se suma pierde”. No me dice.

Esto nosotros los habíamos votado en una asamblea, Tello nos dice no y a partir de ese
no nosotros hacemos otra caracterización de Tello, hoy es el secretario adjunto de SMATA. Cuando nosotros le propusimos esto creíamos que era muy combativo y cuando nos da esa respuesta nos dimos cuenta que no. Le propusimos armar un inter fábrica, un cuerpo de delegados de todas las fábricas, en un solo lugar votando. Y no acepto’. Eso hubiera cambiado la historia de nuestra pelea. Nosotros estábamos buscando esa posibilidad porque’ sabíamos que solos……..necesitábamos rodearnos. Y bueno vino Enero, echaron un compañero, nos provocaron con esa echada, fuimos a una pelea más fuerte, nosotros lo sabíamos pero no teníamos opciones.

Y tomaron la fábrica...
Tomamos otra vez la fábrica

En este caso la toma fue más programada?
Mas programada, más pensada. Fue votada en asamblea y enseguida fue ejecutada. La fábrica de toda manera ya estaba prevenida. Ellos nos llevaban a una situación así’ y nosotros lo sabíamos, pero no teníamos opciones.

En este caso las guardias no actuaron?
En esta segunda toma fue diferente. Las guardias anotaban gente, los jefes, los repos salían a tomar nota, fue totalmente diferente, la empresa ya tenía un aparato montado. Salimos de esa toma con 42 despidos después de la conciliación. El SMATA se enojo’ con el Gobierno porque’ querían 550 despidos.

Porque?
Era la forma con la cual podían entrar de vuelta a la fábrica y hacerse cargo. Ese me lo dijo Chiaravino que en ese momento era secretario de trabajo, una versión oficial. Bueno echaron a 42 compañeros.

La conciliación no los ayuda’?
Nosotros provocamos la conciliación como una forma de salida de la toma. A esos
compañeros despedidos le pusimos una carpa y todos los días les preparábamos el mate a los compañeros que iban a trabajar y que pasaban por la carpa. A la salida toda la gente pasaba de allí, conversaba con los muchachos, no se rompía el vínculo. Ya pensábamos hacer una cabaña en madera porque la carpa ya no.......En la toma nos ganaron terreno porque salimos perdiendo entonces ningún miembro de la comisión podía hacer su trabajo sindical tenía que trabajar. Tuvimos que armar una organización capaz de hacer un montón de cosas sin..........fue difícil pero ya veníamos con cierta preparación de antes. La fabrica supuso que nos tenia aniquilados, nosotros nos dimos una política de juntar la gente en la derrota, estábamos derrotados, juntábamos de a 3 a 4 compañeros y le dábamos tareas, pegar calcomanías en los baños, escribir con un aerosol y así’ íbamos comprometiendo a la gente

La gente seguía participando?

Si de estos compromisos, no hacíamos asambleas. Nos dimos una política de clandestinidade y juntamos la gente así’ por grupos, en la ora de la merienda, pasábamos consignas cortitas por una más rápida difusión y haciamos la batucada. La batucada fue un arma organizativa impresionante se paraba un muchacho delante de toda le línea y hacia tam, tam, tam, pegando dos veces las machinas. Llegamos a hacer batucada de toda la planta. Teníamos un nivel organizativo muy alto y en un momento determinado hacíamos paro de tareas. Abandonábamos las tareas, salíamos nos movíamos y asamblea. Durante tres meses después de la segunda toma hemos tenido esta táctica de clandestinidade y exigíamos la legalidad de nuestra organización. Hicimos una asamblea de 1500 trabajadores y decidimos marchar hacia el centro, 1500 trabajadores a pata 15 Km hacia el centro. Fue nuestro principal acierto y nuestro principal error. Fue nuestro principal acierto porque’ logramos un grado de afinidad tremendo, un espíritu de cuerpo. Y nuestro principal error porque’ le mostramos a la fabrica toda nuestra capacidad organizativa y la fabrica ese mismo día decidió’ que con menos de 1200 despidos ese problema no se iba a resolver. A partir de allí’ hubo tres semanas seguidas que nosotros todos los miércoles hacíamos paro. La sorpresa era que allí’ hacíamos una asamblea y decidíamos. Hubo una asamblea que fue maravillosa y duro’ dos minutos, la mas corta,
nos pasamos línea por línea la consigna de que la medida que se iba a votar era tal era
del si o por no, no queríamos que nadie se enterara ni la prensa ni la empresa. Entonces
salimos todos, la prensa filmando en directo yo me pare y pregunte: “Bueno muchachos
por SI, y levantaron las manos, por NO”, ganó el SI, vamos y con el SI decidíamos
abandonar las tareas el día después a una determinada hora. La prensa preguntaba que es
SI, ya vieron ustedes se votó por el SI y esto es lo que vamos a hacer. Ese era el nivel
organizativo que logramos.

Cuantos de los trabajadores de Cormec estaban con SITRAMF?
Nosotros hicimos en los primeros días de afiliación 960 afiliados y llegamos a tener 1200
afiliados.

A vos te echaron en Mayo con que excusa?
El despido mío viene con una excusa disciplinaria, yo dije que no había que sacar a la
gente, no había que salir a pelear, porque ya estábamos muy golpeados. Al final echaron
1200 compañeros en 5 meses. Quedaron los más comprometidos con la empresa pero
así también algunos de lo nuestro porque a la empresa le faltaba información correcta. Un
año después de todo esto, en que ya no había lucha, se rentaron motores de la línea de
montaje, una medida de protesta organizada, la fábrica lo tomó como un sabotaje
organizado fue un nivel bajo pero fue una medida de compañeros que todavía estaban
adentro de la empresa. Nosotros no estábamos de acuerdo pero....... 

¿Qué relación tenían con los que trabajaban en otras partes de la fábrica?
Poca, a la gente nueva, con perfil jóvenes y formados, los primeros 600 habíamos tenido
llegada. De los 600 470 votaron en el plebiscito. Fue allí que la empresa pago el perfil
de los nuevos. Llegaron viejos y con perfil educativo bajo, ellos no nos dieron pelota
pero tampoco a la empresa.......... Según Fiat solo en propaganda ellos perdieron 250
millones de dólares con la pelea nuestra, yo no sé si será cierto. Solo en propaganda, es
muy muchísima plata. Una parte de esa plata la gastaron para que nosotros no nos metiéramos
a ningún medio de comunicación, pagando. Una vez unos periodistas de la Voz del
interior me invitaron a una cena y me contaron que ya no podían comprometerse más porque la empresa le había regalado un auto a cada uno. En un canal de televisión nos invitaron pero no pudimos pronunciar la palabra FIAT, decidí no ir, a hablar de qué, de fútbol? Ellos re contra re pagaban. Ellos gastaron mucha guita porque nosotros sacamos una publicidad: NO COMPRE FIAT, volanteando toda la ciudad. Si FIAT no mejora la relación con sus trabajadores, los trabajadores de FIAT no van a poder cumplir con los niveles de cualidad. Era muy dura, por toda la ciudad con pintadas, volantes ese en el momento final de la pelea. Era lo que quedaba para hacer.

Así que fue una decisión colectiva la de luchar hasta el final?

Si la decisión colectiva fue un poco después de la primer toma, antes la venida de Menem. Para llegar a esa decisión colectiva pasamos tres meses en ayuda a generar un debate político bastante profundo. Una vez terminado ese debate político estábamos en condición de decidir al respecto y decidimos.

Cómo llevaban la concientización?

Con discusión permanente en la línea de producción en todo el tiempo que pudimos dar vuelta por la fábrica.

Eran discusiones sobre aspectos de la producción?

Sacamos un periódico semanal, tuvimos que armar todo un equipo de redacción y los delegados, teníamos un cuerpo de delegados muy aceitado, generalmente de jóvenes.

Los delegados eran amigos?

Algunos sí. El cuerpo era muy dinámico hacia cosas permanentemente, las líneas estaban siempre informadas. Y todos esperaban el miércoles el periódico nuestro. En el boletín había notas de fondo sobre la producción, la situación política del país, sobre otros lugares del mundo, veces. Los de Brasil vinieron y yo fui para allá. Lo de Brasil, de Uruguay estuvieron en asambleas lo de Italia, FIOM, vinieron también cuando un 1 de Mayo nos reprimieron. Vino la gente de Piccinini de Villa Constitución. Los italianos no
entendían nada, balas de goma por todo lado. Después tuvimos un desarrollo bastante
bueno en el terreno de las ideas respecto a lo que era la flexibilización laboral y el
toyotismo. Hicimos seminarios de información con los delegados, vino gente de Bs. As.
que nosotros invitamos. Un compañero nuestro conocía alguien porque era del
MÁS(Movimiento al Socialismo) y vino un compañero que trabaja por el CONICET a
darnos un seminario. Las conclusiones del seminario fueron escritas, divulgadas.Desde
el punto de vista ideológico fue una discusión muy interesante.

**Había gente con formación y experiencia política?**

Pocos

**Fueron como una base para después desarrollar.......?**

Si eran los más abiertos. La izquierda argentina organizada no estaba con nosotros. O sea
estaba porque’ no podía dejar de estar.......digo Partido Obrero, Izquierda Unida.
List of abbreviations

AAA: Alianza Anticomunista Argentina/Argentine Anticommunist Alliance.

ACINDAR: Industria Argentina de Aceros/Argentine Steel Industry.

CGIL: Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro/General Italian Confederation of Labour.

CGT: Confederación General del Trabajo/ General Confederation of Labour.

CGTA: Confederación General de los Trabajadores Argentinos/ General Confederation of Argentine Workers.

CORMEC: Córdoba Mecánica/ Córdoba Mechanical Workshops.

CPI: Conduttore di Processi Integrati/ Foreman.

CTA: Congreso de los Trabajadores Argentinos/ Congress of Argentine Workers.

ENTel: Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones/National Company for Telecommunications.

FIAT: Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino/ Italian Company Automotive Torino.

FIM: Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici/Italian Federation of Metalworkers.


IMF: International Monetary Fund.


MTA: Movimiento de los Trabajadores Argentinos/ Movement of Argentinian Workers.
 Argentine Workers.

**REPO**: Rappresentante dell'ufficio Personale/Representant of the Personnel Office.

**SITRAC**: Sindicato de Trabajadores de Cóndord/ Cóndord Workers Trade union.

**SITRAM**: Sindicato de Trabajadores de Materfer/Materfer Workers Trade Union.

**SITRAMF**: Sindicato de Trabajadores Mecánicos de Ferreyra/ Trade Union of Ferreyra's Mechanical Workers.

**SITRAP**: Sindicato de Trabajadores de Perkins/ Perkins Workers Trade union.

**SMATA**: Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines del Transporte Automotor/Trade Union of Mechanics and Automotive Transport Workers.

**UCR**: Unión Civica Radical/ Radical Civil Unión.

**UILM**: Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici/Italian Union of Metalworkers.

**UIA**: Unión Industrial Argentina/ Argentine Industrial Union.

**UOM**: Unión Obrera Metalúrgica/ Metalworkers' Trade Union.
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