

## **Worlds of Labour in Latin America**

# Work in Global and Historical Perspective



Edited by

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*Work in Global and Historical Perspective* is an interdisciplinary series that welcomes scholarship on work/labour that engages a historical perspective in and from any part of the world. The series advocates a definition of work/labour that is broad, and especially encourages contributions that explore interconnections across political and geographic frontiers, time frames, disciplinary boundaries, as well as conceptual divisions among various forms of commodified work, and between work and 'non-work'.

## Volume 13

# Worlds of Labour in Latin America



Edited by  
Paola Revilla Orías, Paulo Cruz Terra,  
and Christian G. De Vito

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In memory of María Ullivarri.



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Victoria Basualdo

# Dictatorships, workers and trade-unions in the second half of the 20th century: Dialogue and connections among the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay

**Abstract:** This chapter aims to propose possible future lines of research for studies of workers and trade-unions in the dictatorships of five South American countries. Starting from a central focus in the last Argentinian dictatorship (1976–1983), it seeks to open lines of dialogue with recent academic contributions on the dictatorships of Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay in the second half of the 20th century, and particularly during the Cold War period, which presented specific features in Latin America (Pettinà, 2018). These countries were selected for their historical and geographic proximity, the links between their historical processes, and also because of the growing contact between researchers and academic institutions that has enabled these exchanges. Recognising that, until very recently, studies of dictatorships, workers and unions have been relatively marginal in the overall consideration of the different phases of the dictatorships, three main issues will be addressed here. First, we will review some of the existing research on the impact of dictatorial policies on workers and trade-unions, looking at repression, but not limited to that. Second, we will look at analyses of what is commonly referred to as “resistance” to the dictatorships among workers and unions. This covers a wide range of action and forms of organisation within different sectors of the working class and the trade union movement during the dictatorships. Third, we will analyse some recent perspectives that seek to address “social consensus” or “consent” to the dic-

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tatorship. Finally, we will make some proposals for future research in these fields, with the aim of consolidating a possible research agenda on the subject in South America.

**Key words:** Cold-war dictatorships; workers; unions; South America; dictatorial policies; workers' and union resistance

## Introduction

Academic contributions on workers and dictatorships around the world has diversified in recent years, however, an overview of the cycle of dictatorships in South America during the second half of the 20th century remains a pending issue. Studies on the impacts of the dictatorships on economic and social structures, labour relations, and living and working conditions for workers, require deeper and more systematic approaches. We have established some areas that require further research, and, in line with that, this chapter seeks to contribute to the construction of transnational perspectives based on national case studies, from an interdisciplinary perspective that links the fields of economic, political, social and cultural history.

If we are to account for the transformations that occurred in productive systems, socio-economic structures and labour relations, it is essential to go beyond individual analyses focused on a single nation. It is important to identify transnational and/or regional dynamics and points of contact, because they indicate processes that transcend specific experiences. With this in mind, we have conducted a review of recent literature on workers and the dictatorship in Argentina, putting that into dialogue with new contributions on dictatorships during the Cold War in Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. These countries were selected for their historical and geographic proximity, the links between their historical processes and also because there is growing contact between researchers and academic institutions working on these themes. We are not aiming to conduct an exhaustive historiographical review of all the national case studies, nor at a comparison in the strictest sense of the term. Rather, we aim to establish key points of contact based on recent research contributions. The modest proposal of this text is simply to highlight points of contact and dialogue between some recent national case studies, as a possible, tentative starting point for the creation of new, more comprehensive lines of research that could shed light on regional dimensions that have, until now, been very difficult to approach.

This chapter analyses the impact of dictatorial policies on workers and trade-unions, with a particular emphasis on repressive policies. A preliminary re-

view of the literature suggests that, beyond the peculiarities and specifics of the national cases, there are significant points of contact that demonstrate the importance of looking at dictatorships from the point of view of the history of the working class. In doing so we take into account structural transformations and their impact on distribution, as well as changes in labour relations and workers' rights, although significant difficulties remain when incorporating this perspective into global overviews. We also reconsider various analyses focused on "resistance," a concept often used to approach the wide range of forms of action and organisation deployed by different sectors of the working class and the trade union movement during the dictatorships. Thirdly, we address recent perspectives that explore and reflect on ideas of "consent" or "social consensus" in the context of dictatorships. Finally, we make some proposals for future research with the aim of consolidating a research agenda on this issue in South America and beyond.

## The dictatorships and regional dynamics in figures

Putting the dictatorial processes of the five countries into dialogue with each other raises a series of challenges, not least of which is the chronological framework. While the dictatorship of Argentina, self-denominated as the "National Reorganisation Process," lasted from 1976 to 1983 (and previous dictatorial processes, 1955 to 58 and 1966 to 1973, must also be taken into account also); the Chilean dictatorship was in power from 1973 to 1990; the Uruguayan dictatorship lasted from 1973 to 1985 (according to the most accepted chronology); the Brazilian dictatorship is considered to have lasted from 1964 to 1985 (with debates about whether the period should be extended to 1988); and finally the Paraguayan dictatorship lasted from 1954 to 1989. With the exceptions of the dictatorships of Augusto Pinochet in Chile and Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay, these countries saw changes to the top military leadership during their dictatorships. Although it is not possible to develop the subject in all its complexity here, we consider it important to frame these processes within the context of the Cold War (from the late 1940s to the late 1980s), the process of radicalisation of political, social and labour organisations after the Cuban revolution, and the links with the processes of decolonisation of the "Third World." There are also historical and judicial precedents for considering regional repressive dynamics, particularly those related to "Operation Condor" that are of great relevance for this analysis (Slatman, 2012).

The impact of the repressive policies of these dictatorships are enormously difficult to measure and conceptualise, not only because it is difficult to access key sources (due to the very nature of repression), but also because in each of these different countries, victims are defined and counted in very different ways. In its final report, the National Truth Commission of Brazil (CNV by its initials in Portuguese) set the number of killed or disappeared at 434, however no confirmed figures exist for other types of victims such as numbers of people imprisoned, tortured, kidnapped and released, or exiled, among other possible forms of repression. These difficulties grow when we look at events in rural areas, which, based on preliminary evidence, affected thousands of victims. Argentina has paid particular attention to the numbers of disappeared, estimated at 30,000, considering not only the statistics established by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP by its Spanish initials), but also data from the armed forces themselves, which estimated the number of victims disappeared by 1978 at 22,000 (with high levels of under-reporting and/or under-recording). However, the same emphasis has not been placed on counting the numbers of people murdered, imprisoned or tortured, or quantifying processes of exile, for which published figures vary widely. In the case of Chile, according to the reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the Rettig Report) and the National Commission on Political Prisons and Torture (the Valech Report), the number of direct victims of human rights violations is considered to be at least 35,000, of whom around 28,000 were tortured, 3,197 killed (counting 2,095 extrajudicial executions and 1,102 disappeared). Furthermore, some 200,000 people suffered exile, and an unknown number (estimated in the hundreds of thousands by some sources) passed through clandestine and illegal detention centres. In Paraguay, during the 35 years of dictatorship, serious and extensive human rights violations were perpetrated, which included the arbitrary or illegal detention of at least 19,862 people, the torture of 18,772, the extrajudicial execution of 58, the forced disappearance of 337 and the exile of 3,470 (Truth and Justice Commission, 2008). Finally, in the case of Uruguay, a 2011 government report recognises 465 victims of the last dictatorship (1973–1985), but it only counts those who were murdered and/or disappeared. Recent academic estimates place the number of people forced into exile by the Uruguayan dictatorship (1973–1985) at around 380,000 people, which is almost 14 percent of the population.

For various reasons, including differing criteria and methodology applied, it is difficult to compare these figures concerning human rights violations, all of which are provisional, despite the time that has elapsed, as new sources and information continue to modify our understanding of a process that was purposely covered up. Furthermore, numbers for victims who were workers and/or trade

unionists are even more difficult to establish. Several attempts have been made in the case of Argentina, however, the results are still incomplete and do not fully account for the whole. Understanding repressive policies, the forms they took and their impact in each of the countries, is therefore a major challenge. It is also vital to develop an understanding of ways of life, forms of organisation, salaries and the presence of male and female workers in the workplace in the different countries, as well as union structures, their institutional dynamics, membership, scope and presence in the workplace. These aspects then need to be analysed in the context of economic and social structure, and of the economic policy transformations implemented by the dictatorships in their various stages and sub-stages. What we propose here is to open a dialogue between existing analyses of national cases, in order to identify possible points of convergence or counterpoint that may suggest regional trends. We will start by reconsidering the existing historical literature for the five countries, the analytical and conceptual frameworks deployed, and their contributions and limitations, with a view to consolidating a possible agenda for future collaborative work.

## Dictatorships, trade-unions and workers

There is a growing recognition of the value of analysing recent history from the perspective of trade union and labour activism, which makes the authoritarian and disciplinary character of dictatorships a central feature of the regimes. Very significant contributions have been on this issue, making a comparative analysis possible, as can be seen in the work of Paul Drake (1996), which focuses mainly on the Southern Cone, particularly Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, although it also includes also, brief references to cases as Brazil and Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain and Greece). Coming from the field of political science, Drake's work attempts an initial systematic comparison, reaching the conclusion that although there were important variations, overall, the dictatorships shared a commitment to anti-union and anti-labour policies. The author argues that it is necessary to recognise the central role of workers and unions, as confrontation with these sectors was key to the history of these dictatorships (*ibid.*).

In recent years, a group of researchers from five countries, especially from Brazil and Argentina, and joined by specialists from Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, have sought to promote a greater articulation of academic production on the subject in South America. This process took the form of meetings and publications, and the creation, in 2018, of a network to study "Repressive processes, business, workers and trade-unions in Latin America." The work of that network has been central to making the reflections discussed here possible (Winn, 2018;

Basualdo, 2018; Corrêa and Fontes, 2018; Vergara, 2018; Estevez, Sales, Corrêa and Fontes, 2018). The findings of most of these authors were that studies of workers, unions and dictatorships had long been marginalised, in the face of the predominance of approaches focussed on political history, with a strong emphasis on the role of the armed forces and of political and military organisations.

The case of Argentina is revealing in this regard. We can find some very relevant contributions on the anti-union and anti-worker character of the dictatorship (even from the time), and evidence of the persecution of workers and unionists is held in the archives of state investigations such as the CONADEP, and the judicialisation process of the 1980s. Nevertheless, the prevailing view, in the 1980s and 1990s, prioritised analysis of the political dimensions of the regime. To illustrate the difficulty of incorporating the wealth of studies of dictatorship, workers, and unions, into the historiography, it is worth considering an historiographical review conducted 40 years after the coup d'état (Canelo, 2016b), in which there are practically no references to this line of research, despite it having a trajectory of several decades of development. Surprisingly, another text published that same year, judges that attempts to consider economic and social transformations are essentially “economistic” and calls for historians to “reclaim the autonomy of politics from the economy as a fundamental interpretive key,” or even more forcefully “to propose a political interpretation of the dictatorship” (Canelo, 2016a: 11–12).

In the case of Brazil, recent historiographical reviews highlight the difficulty of including workers and their organisations in the history of the dictatorship. In a very useful review, Corrêa and Fontes (2016) argue that despite the fact that workers were “one of the most notorious and expressive social sectors in the political situation prior to the coup,” they have been marginalised in most recent analyses of the post-coup period. The authors state that in the events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the coup, the absence of reference to workers was “notable.” Also noteworthy is the focus by historians on memoirs of the regime, centred above all on the testimonies of left-wing militants from the student movement, and from intellectuals and groups of artists, as well as studies of the armed struggle, the press, economic policy and the repressive apparatus. Workers and union leaders remained invisible for too long in all senses, including in the records of victims of the regime (Corrêa and Fontes, 2016: 130–131; Chaves Nagasava, 2018). This diagnosis is shared by other authors who also highlighted the importance of initiatives such as the National Truth Commission, even with its limitations, to promote research as part of a policy of social memory (Estevez and Assumpção, 2013).

In the case of Chile, not only do political viewpoints dominate the literature, but existing studies on economic change also frequently highlight the positive

achievements of the “economic miracle” attributed to the Pinochet dictatorship. In Ángela Vergara’s view, however, despite the undeniable impact of the dictatorship on intellectual production, a rich and interesting historiography on labour and workers can be found, which over the decades, has included contributions from the field of the sociology of work, studies of urban working communities, and gender studies that offer a feminist perspective (Vergara, 2018). A number of these studies highlight the social costs and the extremely regressive impact that profound changes in labour policies and regulations had on workers and their organisations. An important book in this regard, which combined overviews and case studies (addressing the textile, metalwork, and copper industries as well as agriculture, fisheries, forestry and other sectors), questions the focus on the supposed “Chilean economic miracle,” emphasizing the loss of labour and social rights under the dictatorship, and presenting approaches that combine a class perspective with very interesting ethnic and gender dimensions that open new paths for historical research (Winn, 2004). Recently, another collective book has offered crucial insight into the economic, social and labour transformations that took place during the dictatorship: including studies of the economic policies applied; the role of media and the relationship between the military and business organisations; privatisation of the pension system; changes in labour law, policies and practices; and the role of companies and business leaders in human rights violations, among many other related topics (Bohoslavsky, Fernández and Smart, eds., 2021).

In the case of Uruguay, recent contributions offering an overview of the impact of the dictatorship on workers and their union organisations, have indicated something similar. A recent work by Rodolfo Porrini (2018) is central to providing a review of the historiographic panorama, noting that initial exploratory studies have focused on the actions of clandestine unions and social movements, and on the recomposition that took place in the 1980s. Porrini also points out that social and historical studies of changes to working and living conditions and cultural processes of “hegemony and consensus” among the working class have received little attention, and that there is still limited knowledge about the working classes and their forms of expression during the dictatorship. In this regard he highlights clandestine groups and organisations, cooperatives, sports clubs, and social and cultural bodies, as well as the need to look at geographic location, comparing cities, neighbourhoods and towns in the interior of the country, as well as in rural areas (*ibid.*).

In the case of Paraguay, recent literature has contributed to analysis not only of the political features of the Stroessner dictatorship, but also the structural, socio-economic transformations it entailed, particularly the role of trade union organisations in the extended dictatorship period from 1954 and 1989, as well

as their relations with the State (González Bozzolasco, 2014). These studies have led historians to the concept of corporatism a useful term to characterise the policies deployed by the dictatorship towards the trade union movement. Usually this means “that the State creates some form of labour organisation, usually with official financing, mandatory membership and the setting of strict limits regarding which sectors can organise” (*ibid.*: 68–69). According to these perspectives, this form of union control “leads sectors opposed to the authoritarian regime within unionism, to take one of two paths: use official spaces and engage in internal dispute in sectors friendly to the regime, or organise completely outside those spaces” (*ibid.*: 69).

Although it may occupy a secondary place among the predominant viewpoints and interpretations of these regimes, there is, in all these cases, a rich body of literature (more or less diverse, depending on the country), relating to the three issues of interest: state policies against workers and unions, with a strong focus on repression; contributions on workers’ “resistance” and organisation against the dictatorships; more recent approaches looking at the so-called “social consensus” regarding the dictatorships. We will analyse those contributions in more detail below.

## Dictatorial policies aimed at workers and unions

Recent studies illuminate not only the various impacts of the repressive policies of dictatorships on labour and union organisation, and their living, working and organising conditions, but also important issues such as the heterogeneity of different currents within the labour union movement; the varied impacts, in the different cases, of economic and labour policies on distinct groups; and the existence of different types of relationship between union leaders and the armed forces in each of the countries.

In case of Argentina, a number of studies analyse dictatorial policies affecting workers and trades unions. All coincide in suggesting that there were unprecedented levels of repression, major transformations in labour relations and the structure of workers’ rights, and a massive decline in living and working conditions, along with significant changes to the trade union movement (Abós, 1984; Fernández, 1985; Pozzi, 1988 a and b; Gallitelli and Thompson, 1990; Basualdo, 2010a, among others). Several approaches refer to a series of contributions from the field of economics and economic history, although there are differences in methodology, theoretical, conceptual and analytical frameworks, and sources. Despite their differences, a significant number of the studies coincided in linking the establishment of the dictatorship with decisive transformations in industrial-



isation, and with the substitution of imports that had developed in previous decades. Many of these interpretations coincide in highlighting an economic turnaround of great importance in the mid-1970s, consolidated through changes in economic policy under the leadership of José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz. This includes the implementation of policies such as the Financial Reform of 1977, which, in conjunction with tariffs and increased external debt derived from the *apertura* (the opening up of the economy) in 1979, promoted a regressive restructuring of the industrial sector. Overall, this amounted to a deindustrialisation (that is to say, the role of the industrial sector in GDP decreased), with varying effects on the different branches of industry. This was combined with a process of economic concentration within the framework of an exponential increase in foreign debt, increasingly linked to the process of financialisation (Basualdo, 2006). These changes to patterns of capital accumulation are considered by much of the academic literature to be key to any analysis of the transformations experienced by workers and their organisations during the military dictatorship, including changes in labour relations and the effects of repression. There is broad agreement as to the regressive character of those changes, both in distributive and organisational terms, although emphasis and nuances may differ.

Many of these studies demonstrate that the effects of the repression extended both to those most directly affected, such as trade union leaders, grass-roots delegates and labour activists who saw crackdowns on their personal freedom and even their lives, but also to all of the workers who remained in the factories and workplaces. There are numerous testimonies, documents and studies that reflect, in the context of an increasing concentration of economic and political power among the bosses and elites, and the increasing application of physical and psychological violence in the workplace, a severe reduction in communication and social interaction that dramatically affected basic social ties at a time when surveillance and social controls were increasing (Basualdo, 2010 among others). Added to this we have what some authors have called “a complex system of prevention”: worker recruitment became provisional, and it was only after receiving an intelligence report from the armed forces that workers were granted relative stability in their jobs (Delich, 1982: 140). The repression aimed to eliminate the most active workers’ representatives, “beheading” the rank and file in order to make brutally clear what the consequences of political and union militancy, as well solidarity at an international level and between relevant sectors, would be (Basualdo, 2010 a and c; AEyT de FLACSO, PVJ, SDH and CELS, 2015; Basualdo and Jasinski, 2016).

In addition to these forms of repression, the regime also intervened in a large number of unions and workers’ federations, which began with appointing mili-

tary officials to the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT). Likewise, the military dictatorship passed a set of regulations aimed at legalising repressive activity and state intervention in the workplace. From the very beginning of the dictatorship, a freeze was placed on all types of trade-union activity, as well as a prohibition on all forms of workplace organisation and protest. Legislation was closely related to these measures, so, as workers found or created non-prohibited ways to organise or demonstrate, these were incorporated into further regulations to prohibit them (Pozzi, 1988a and b, Basualdo, 2010b).

In the case of Brazil, contributions such as those of Marco Aurelio Santana (2008 and 2014) provide useful syntheses of the accumulated evidence regarding the impact of the dictatorship on workers and unions in Brazil. Santana highlights that the 1950s mark an extremely important period for Brazilian workers, as the union movement, led by the alliance of militant communist and workers' activists, achieved great advances in mobilisation and organisation, resulting in the mass participation of workers at the heart of national political life. At the same time, he highlights how "following more than a decade of this intense growth and activity, the entire organisational structure was severely impacted by the 1964 civil-military coup, one of the central justifications for which was precisely to prevent the installation of a 'syndicalist republic' in the country" (Santana, 2008: 279–280). Activities were derailed by the imprisonment of leaders, persecution of militants, and disruption of the work of unions in factories. It would take a long time to recover. In terms of the labour movement, what was left, as is often the case in periods like these, was the small and silent work that went on in the workplace. It was necessary to rebuild forces in order to confront the dictatorship (Santana, 2008: 279–280).

In terms of the specific impacts of the dictatorship on workers, unions, and labour relations, Santana highlights how, after the military coup, interventions perpetrated by Castelo Branco (1964–1967) had a significant impact, in various ways, on the life of the unions, affecting the more progressive sectors most severely. He argues that in addition to a direct attack on trade union organisation, which aimed at immediate discipline, the dictatorship also sought to enact legislation that would implement long-term changes (Santana, 2008: 281). He analyses the dictatorship's approval of a series of measures to reinforce control over the trade union movement. Taking up elements already included in the *Consolidación de la Ley del Trabajo* (Labour Law), strict rules were set for the occupation of roles within the unions, with candidates subject to the approval of the Ministry of Labour and the political police. The use of and access to state welfare resources was drastically limited through their centralisation in the *Instituto Nacional de Previsión Social*, whose management would no longer be carried out with the participation of the workers, as the old pensions institute had been,

being subject instead to direct management by the government. Regarding the mobilisations, Santana highlights how measures claiming to regulate the right to strike actually resulted in the prohibition of political and secondary striking, limiting the right to strike to demands for the payment of unpaid wages. In this first phase, the military dictatorship introduced the *Fondo de Garantía por Tiempo de Servicio*, which put an end to job security, encouraging bosses to deploy a high turnover of labour, which made more combative union activity in the workplace more difficult (Santana 2008, 281–283).

This analysis was enriched and expanded in a later book specifically focused on the Ministry of Labour during the Castelo Branco years of the dictatorship. Based on extensive archival materials and a wide range of other sources, this book showed that while there were different views about how best to deal with workers and their organisations, the main aim was to dramatically reconfigure labour and social rights, and to challenge the increasing role of labour struggles in economic, social and political spheres (Chaves Nagasava, 2018). Another quite significant recent book analysed the participation of workers and trade-unions in Sao Paulo's labour courts before the 1964 military coup, arguing that the "rights issue," imbedded in public institutions, was at the heart of the 1964 coup, and considering the coup a reaction to the advances of rights and the broader participation of diverse social actors within a democratic institutional framework. The analysis, based on an incredibly rich and complex empirical basis, illuminates very clearly the importance of labour issues in understanding the aims of the dictatorship (Teixeira da Silva, 2019).

In the case of Chile, the Pinochet dictatorship suspended the constitution and with it, all civil liberties and political rights (Winn, 2004). The parties that had supported Allende were banned, a measure that was later extended even to the parties that had previously been his opponents. Electoral processes were suspended, even in social organisations such as youth clubs, and especially in the unions. Military personnel were put in charge of schools and universities, whose teaching and library staff were fiercely purged. The public burning of 'subversive' books became a visible symbol of the new lack of freedom in Chile, inviting comparisons with Nazi Germany (*ibid.*).

These studies highlight how within its first few weeks in power, the Pinochet dictatorship had demonstrated itself to be a serial violator of human rights. Many of the victims were trade unionists, activists and/or workers, whom Pinochet considered primary targets of his 'internal war' between 1973 and 1978, based on the high degree of power, organisation, and the important political role they played as the social base of the left. They were considered dangerous enemies that had to be neutralised during the coup, making them key targets for repression. On the same day of the coup, the headquarters of the *Central Unica*

*de Trabajadores* (CUT) was one of the first buildings taken by the armed forces. During the three days and nights of siege that followed the coup, military operations with tanks, helicopters and machine guns were deployed against the country's main industrial areas. The CUT was banned, its property confiscated, and its representatives publicly labelled as "subversives" with warrants issued for their capture (*ibid.*)

At the same time, Santana stresses that the presence of the armed forces grew in many workplaces and factories. Military intelligence interrogated workers one by one, pressuring them to report on militants and activists, particularly union leaders. Many were captured and disappeared, some were tortured, or forced into exile. Others were displaced within the country, with many then participating in the underground resistance elsewhere. The repression continued until 1978, based on Decree Law number 198 which allowed the government to remove union leaders at will, and the Pinochet regime promoted the ascent of more conservative sectors in lieu of union democracy. In a context where collective bargaining, strikes and union elections were all prohibited, military decrees banned many of the unions outright, decimating the CUT and the ranks of workers that could be mobilised. In connection with these repressive policies to govern labour, the dictatorship re-established the primacy of the free market, a freedom that did not apply in any way to labour rights or demands over wages. Under government control, real wages fell sharply between 1973 and 1975, and workers and their organisations lost significant power during this period (*ibid.*).

In the case of Paraguay, researchers have analysed the policies of the dictatorship towards the union movement according to their relative predominance at each stage. They consider the first years of the dictatorship, between 1954 and 1958, to have seen a predominance of repression in which all kinds of policies were deployed to limit and contain union activity. This was followed by a long period, between 1958 and 1985, dominated by policies of co-option. A significant part of "the vestiges of trade unionism that had survived the great repression, re-articulated their relationship with the government, the *Partido Colorado* and the state apparatus" (González Bozzolasco, 2014: 68). Finally, they highlight a period of 'resistance' against these policies, in the last years of Stronism between 1985 and 1989, during which "the model of co-option promulgated and consolidated by the regime begins to crack, together with the apparatus that promoted and sustained it" (*ibid.*: 68).

Finally, in the case of Uruguay, Rodolfo Porrini makes a very valuable contribution stating that, following the coup d'état of 1973, there was an ambitious attempt to dominate and destroy the trade union movement, while at the same time seeking to co-opt their social bases, the broad, mobilised and mostly urban poor and working classes. He also notes that the dictatorial regime sought, at dif-

ferent times, to promote or build a trade unionism allied to its own ideas and purposes. Meanwhile it sought social control through various forms of repression of the political and social opposition. This was combined with specific policies aimed at the world of labour, guilds and unions that were expressions of the dictatorship's new form of domination, and the new framework of social relations it imposed (Porrini, 2018).

As with Argentina, Porrini argues that a significant concentration of income occurred in Uruguay during the dictatorship. If wages and pensions represented 45.8 percent of national income from 1968 to 1971, by 1978 they represented just 33.1 percent. Wage earners throughout the country saw their real income drop between 8 and 20 percent (Notaro, 1984: 77–78 cited in Porrini, 2018). An alternate expression of this phenomenon is the overall reduction in real wages. Taking wages in 1957 as a benchmark, real wages were down to 68.4 percent by 1974 and had fallen to just 35.2 percent by 1984 (Nahum et al., 2011: 84 cited in Porrini, 2018). Another aspect to consider, according to Porrini, is the practice of repressing political and social opponents, along with wider attempts to control other areas of Uruguayan society. The activities of the “traditional” *Colorado* and *Nacional* parties were suspended, as was the Christian Democratic Party. Other political parties and organisations were outlawed, and in October 1973, the executive power intervened in the *Universidad de la República* and banned the *Convención Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT).

According to Porrini, during the early days of the dictatorship, three main policy axes were applied to the world of labour and unions. In the first place, an attempt was made to silence conflict, and to this end there was a policy of intense repression with workers being sacked, imprisoned or transferred, and public officials dismissed. In August 1973, the CNT reported almost 1,500 dismissals, and the AEBU (the Uruguayan Association of Bankers) reported the dismissal of 42 workers in its own sector and the punishment of around 1,400 workers across the board. The regime also attempted to reformulate labour relations based on a series of decrees intended to apply to all workers, restricting and setting limits on union activity. Finally, the dictatorship set out to create a new organisation in accordance with its own vision of what union activity should be. The interpretations state, therefore, that the dictatorship implemented a combination of “prohibition and permissiveness,” alternating its line according to the moment, and also to the responses coming from both the trade union *milieu* and from business (Porrini, 2018).

## Workers' and trade union "resistance" to dictatorships

In all five cases, the concept of workers' "resistance" is used to describe forms of workers' action and organisation during the dictatorship. In the case of Argentina, the explicit or implicit debate on 'resistance' marked the development of research in this field from very early on. The evaluation and analysis of the reactions of the working class to dictatorial policies and processes of structural change has led to debates among historians. Francisco Delich was one of the first authors to refer to the immobility of the working class, a question that was much disputed by later historians. Pablo Pozzi critiqued this view in a book and an article published in the late 1980s (1988 a and b), in which he argued that, on the contrary, there was a wide range of resistance and oppositional activity. Pozzi not only questioned Delich's views on the absence of "classic," frontal conflict from the unions (in terms of historical forms of Argentinian workers' struggle), particularly citing the general strike of 1979, but he also emphasised the importance of "underground" acts of resistance, to which we will refer in more detail below. Pozzi's work has the merit of drawing attention to the existence of 'underground' practices at a plant level, which had been underestimated or simply omitted by most previous work on the subject. These covert forms of protest, conducted by groups of workers with reduced coordination and impact, included *trabajo a tristeza*, and *trabajo a desgano* (go-slow protests involving reductions in the pace of work), partial stoppages, sabotage, and a multiplicity of initiatives favouring workers' organisation to the detriment of the employer. Pozzi considers that these forms emerged from previous experiences, developed in the context of "resistance" to previous dictatorships since 1955 (Pozzi, 1988a). In summary, Pozzi demonstrates that there were numerous instances of workers' protest from the very first days of the dictatorship, and that they increased at the junctures where the greatest success was possible. Although repression and economic and employment policies had a profoundly negative impact on the working class, important sectors of that class developed forms of organisation and protest. Those forms varied and changed throughout the period according to the existing scope for action at the time. Recent studies have emphasised the importance of carrying out a complex analysis, both in the workplace and in the public sphere, using different methods and measures, and including a diversity of regions of the country. Forms of international resistance were also analysed, both in supranational organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and through international campaigns involving the participation of

trade union confederations from other countries and global trade union organisations (Basualdo 2006b, 2010c, 2013).

In the case of Brazil, it is necessary, according to Larissa Rosa Corrêa and Paulo Fontes (2016), to distinguish between different stages in which very different perspectives prevailed with respect to workers, unions and the dictatorship. They underline that, in an initial stage, “the idea of non-reaction, paralysis and/or passivity of the workers during the coup, severely limited studies of the workers.” While President Joao Goulart had sought to associate himself with the workers until 1964, after the coup “Jango’s decision not to resist the advance of the military troops and his silent flight to Uruguay, was taken as representative of what happened with the workers. They were imprisoned by interpretations that sought to scrutinise their supposed absence (absence of class organisation, of political conscience, of collective spirit, etc.)” (*ibid*: 134). They point out that a large part of the energy of academic production was devoted, at this stage, to trying to answer the question of why the workers had not reacted to the dictatorship. In general terms, initial lines of inquiry looked for the causes of this supposed “lack of resistance” in the history of unionism before the coup, and in the supposedly subordinate role of the left, particularly the Communist Party, in the defeat of 1964. In this context, theories of populism gained ground, arguing that corporatism acted as a populist net to capture workers in the fabric of state domination. From a different theoretical perspective, but also looking for answers in the Vargas period, the term “regulated citizenship” was coined, focussing on the top echelons of the State, generally reinforcing an idea of the absence, inaction and subordination of workers and their organisations, who were subjected to a logic alien to their own (Corrêa and Fontes, 2016).

These authors highlight that the memorialistic literature that emerged with force at the end of the 1970s, as politics opened up, reinforced the invisibility of workers in the resistance to the military dictatorship, particularly between 1964 and 1978. The 1968 strikes of metalworkers were presented, in this interpretative framework, as exceptions that proved the rule. The impact of activist memoirs of the armed struggle helped to consolidate a vision of the workers as the bearers of political disinterest, acquiescence, and sometimes support for the regime. Some lines of interpretation pointed to a growing heterogeneity of the working class as a key factor to understanding the supposedly timid role of workers in the fight against the dictatorship (*ibid*).

Within this framework, a change of vision took shape, from an emphasis on inaction it shifted to a growing recognition of the agency of workers and their organisations. The great strikes that began in São Paulo’s ABC industrial districts in 1978, a movement that would later spread to different regions of the country, also became a symbol of changes to perceptions of the role of the working class

and its relationship with the authoritarian regime. These massive and rebellious acts, and the leading role of the workers in them, were interpreted by some as a ‘watershed’ or turning point that implied both a break with the ‘populist’ past of 1964, and also with what was seen as the more recent subordination and immobility of workers during the dictatorship (*ibid.*).

As a result, this period was understood as “novel,” an idea that prevailed in academic and political literature which spoke of the creation of a “new unionism,” and “new” social movements that replaced the traditional, populist subordination to the State, mobilizing en masse in workplaces and neighbourhoods, and acting independently and autonomously. Corrêa and Fontes emphasise that the enthusiasm and effervescence of the climate of re-democratisation and activism means that the change is often understood to have been abrupt and absolute, however that was later revised by research that sought the origins of those changes in earlier periods and found prior progressive transformations that challenge that premise of the passivity of the working class. An increasingly rich field of studies was established, looking not only at a wide range of industrial activities and urban centres such as Baixada Fluminense, Niterói, Sao Paulo’s ABC and Rio de Janeiro, but also looking at rural workers from different areas of the country, at Brazilian trade unionism’s international relations, and other fields relating to labour law (Pessanha, 2014; Welch, 2014; Corrêa, 2014 and 2017; Gouveia de Oliveira Rovai, 2014; Montenegro, 2014, Nagasava, 2015, Pessanha and Medeiros, 2015, among many others). Despite these and many other valuable contributions, there is a need for greater geographical diversity in these studies, and to deepen the analysis of the forms of police and military repression used against workers both inside and outside the factories, as well as an analysis of transformations in living and working conditions during each of the sub-periods of the dictatorship.

Objective data also needs to be gathered on changes in workers’ rights as well as the views and opinions of the workers about the dictatorship, including those who supported it in some way, for example, appreciating the ‘economic miracle’ and some of the beneficial consequences it had for some of them (Corrêa and Fontes, 2016). Cross referencing recent rich contributions on the world of labour, with those from the field of the economic history, looking at companies, entrepreneurs and the economic transformations that took place (Campos, 2014 among others), seems to be another enormously relevant task.

In the case of Uruguay, it has also been emphasised that “various forms of responses and resistance developed” to confront the dictatorship. Porrini highlights, in particular, attempts by the regime to organise meetings with trade unionists, for example, after a strike on 25 July 1973. That attempt ended in failure when it was denounced by the workers as a ‘pantomime’ that only sought to



whitewash the dismissals and persecutions that took place (Porrini, 2018). Another example is the union response to moves made to regulate union activity. In August 1973, the government issued a decree proposing “union re-affiliation” that implied a regulation of union life, creating obstacles to, and limitations on, the right to strike. The clandestine command of the CNT held a Trade Union Plenary and promoted the re-affiliation of workers to their own unions. In a very short time, they had received a massive response from the country’s wage earners in support of the unions that had previously been part of the dissolved CNT, which, in effect, made the initiative a failure for the regime (Porrini, 2018).

Other attempts also stand out, such as the creation in 1974 of an office in charge of controlling work within the companies: the *Oficina de Asuntos Laborales del Estado Mayor Conjunto* (Office of Labour Affairs of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). It was led by the military and acted fundamentally as a repressive organisation in charge of controlling workers. The Office coordinated with state intelligence agencies whose files have not been found, although some of their activities were recorded in the files of the *Dirección Nacional de Investigación e Inteligencia policial* (National Police Investigation and Intelligence Directorate) (Rico, 2009: 241 cited by Porrini, 2018).

Finally, Porrini highlights that following a very difficult period in a context where political room for manoeuvre was very limited, after the defeated Plebiscite of 1980, it once again became possible to create space for the reorganisation and reactivation of the trade unions and social movements. In a context of a revitalisation of society, an increase in collective action and the emergence of new cultural and union-type associations, the *Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores* (PIT) (Inter-Union Plenary of Workers) was founded in May 1983. From 1983 onwards there was intense participation and mobilisations that resulted in demonstrations against the dictatorship, that brought together workers, university and high school students, cooperative members, human rights activists and activists from the opposition parties, especially from the left and from the more oppositional factions of the “traditional” parties, all of which marked the transition to democracy (Porrini, 2018).

In the case of Chile, recent contributions by Rodrigo Araya Gómez (2015) consider the union movement to have lived through a first stage of survival, marked by strong repression, the prohibition of the CUT, and the persecution of left-wing union leaders, favouring a weakening and splitting of the union movement into union groups that adopted different strategies to confront the dictatorship. He highlights that, in July 1974, the *Comité Exterior* of the CUT was formed, better known as Cexcut, which reported on the difficult situation facing union activity in the country subject to the power of a “fascist military junta,” and called for international solidarity to sustain the struggles of Chilean

workers and the trade union movement during the most complex times of the dictatorship. The task carried out by Cexcut was important because it maintained an active international presence in coordination with the large international centres. Union groups received financial support and some international leaders travelled to Chile to report on the unfavourable conditions facing union activists, enabling the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to observe and critique the Chilean government's labour policy (*ibid.*).

From these perspectives, it is considered that the most critical stage was 1973 to 1974, when survival was the only objective. After that, there followed a period of reactivation of the union movement with some protest actions such as strikes and *viandazos* that were harshly repressed by the regime, resulting in mass dismissals, arrests and demotions.<sup>1</sup> The 1979 "*Plan Laboral*" is seen as another turning point in the trajectory of Chilean trade unionism. It consolidated the privatisation of labour relations by regulating collective bargaining and eliminating the employment tribunals and their provisions on matters of lay-offs, working hours, severance pay for years of service, and union finances (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the regulation itself, which in principle was contrary to the interests of the unions, was sometimes overwhelmed by the actions of the workers themselves (one specific example is the strike at *El Teniente* mining company), which reflected the potential of united action to confront the dictatorship and its business allies (*ibid.*).

In the context of the institutionalisation of the dictatorship, the plebiscite on the 1980 constitution, and the consolidation of the neo-liberal model expressed in the workplace as the implementation of the Labour Plan, union groups attempted an institutional consolidation that enabled them to be more critical of the regime. They proposed unity of action and the development of a common platform of protest on urgent issues facing workers, especially those of an economic nature, which had increased with the onset of the economic crisis in the early 1980s, and the end of the so-called "economic miracle" (*ibid.*). The trade union movement called the first national protest, which brought together various social sectors, and encouraged political parties to challenge the dictatorship. Various union groups were united in a coordinating body, the *Comando Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT), initiating a new era for unionism and wider social movements. This so-called cycle of protests lasted from 11 May 1983, the date of the first protest, until the attack against General Pinochet in September 1986. The

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<sup>1</sup> The *viandazos* were a form of labour protest in which workers refused to eat at the company's canteen, and brought their own lunch, called *vianda*. The first *viandazo* took place in the *El Teniente* mining company in 1977.

failure of that attack marked the collapse of the strategy of social mobilisation to end the dictatorship (*ibid.*).

The attack against Pinochet led to the imposition of a state of siege, and a period of withdrawal for the opposition. However, in the context of the campaign for the re-election of the dictator in the 1988 succession plebiscite, new steps were taken towards organisation and unity. The call to reconstitute the CUT of the *Coordinadora Nacional Sindical* was well received by the vast majority of trade union organisations, and as a result a new central coordination began to function in May 1988. The CUT established a true political program that aspired to transform the neo-liberal model and to replace the authoritarian regime with a democratic system that was “just, based on solidarity, participatory, and deeply humanist,” taking up proposals previously raised by the CNS and the CNT (*ibid.*).

In the case of Paraguay, as mentioned above, the issue of “resistance” has also been addressed with a strong emphasis on the final stage of the dictatorship. The founding of the *Movimiento Intersindical de Trabajadores del Paraguay* (MIT-P) on 1 May 1985, is considered to be a turning point. It is said that one of the first and main tasks of this organisation was to seek international backing that would guarantee some support against the dictatorship. This included the *Organizacion Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores* (ORIT) and the *Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores* (CLAT). However, even in a context of growing democratic openness at a regional level, and with international support and finance, repressive policies persisted.

On the occasion of the celebration of the first anniversary of the MIT-P, the regime unleashed a brutal wave of repression that had repercussions at a national and international level (González Bozzolasco, 2014). Even in this context of very strong repression, the MIT-P proposed to advance towards the promotion of a new central body, to strengthen union actions from the grassroots and, from all these positions, promote the return to a democratic system as an indispensable basis for union action. The overthrow of Stroessner and the beginning of the democratic transition, in February 1989 (in an international context that was increasingly averse to the dictatorship, with economic sanctions in place since 1987), were central to the constitution of a new independent labour union for Paraguay (*ibid.*).

## From an analysis of “resistance” to a focus on social “consent” and “consensus”

In recent years, in critical dialogue with perspectives that emphasise “resistance,” another line of analysis developed that, on the one hand, questioned whether it was correct to assume that any initiative for action and organisation by the workers constituted an act of conscious resistance to the dictatorship; and on the other, highlighted the importance of analysing what they considered to be widespread social support for the dictatorships, framing it as a form of “social consensus” or of “consent.”

One example of this is Daniel Dicósimo’s (2007) research into the history of the workers of two companies in Tandil (Metalúrgica Tandil and the Loma Negra Villa Cacique cement company, both in the Province of Buenos Aires), during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. His research, focused as it was on two specific cases, differs from other previous approaches that sought to account for major trends and conflicts at a national level. This study enables the author to state that, although these cases saw different protests and demands, and took place during the dictatorship, it is not possible to detect a unanimous and clear position within them against the dictatorship itself. On the contrary, the axis of the conflicts was predominantly economic and there was no political content of any magnitude. From his perspective, “the behaviour of the workers better supports an interpretation of a defence of economic class interests than one of political opposition to the National Reorganisation Process” (*ibid.*). Dicósimo tends to separate economic demands from politics, even within a context of extreme repression that included the prohibition and criminalisation of disputes and political agitating, that resulted in disappearances, torture and death. Although he recognises the presence of a policy of repression on the part of the State, and discipline on the part of employers, how those policies intersected is not fully explored in his work, and they appear only in the background:

Although there were clear signs of what the cost of opposition would be, with the arrest in the previous days of six company union delegates, threats and even brief kidnappings [...] the consensus towards the *coup d’etat* seems to have been voluntary in nature: witnesses recall that the plant was fully operational that morning [...] and the comment was “we will be better off now, the mess will end, we will be able to work.” (*ibid.*: 98)

The reference to a “voluntary consensus” seems to suggest the existence of a freedom of choice and expression that in principle seems contrary to the social dynamics of a terrorist state, with military intervention in all areas, and the existence of disappearances, arrests, torture and concentration camps. This per-

spective is rooted in a broader historiographical current, which includes a very influential book that called for an historical revision of the dictatorship (Vezzetti, 2002), arguing that the last Argentinian military dictatorship “put its leaderships, the State and its institutions to the test, and in general, brought out the worst in society”. From this perspective, this “acute episode of political barbarism and the degeneration of the State would not have been possible without the commitment, adherence, and conformity of the many”. He proposes, therefore, that the central task for studies of this period should be to analyse “society’s responsibilities” (*ibid.*: 12–13). In any case, Dicósimo’s case studies contains a warning of the pitfalls of automatically associating the existence of conflict with a position of conscious political opposition to the dictatorship. At the same time, they issue an alert concerning possibly simplified interpretations of a “social consensus” towards the dictatorship.

Recent research explicitly confronts perspectives centred on this supposed ‘social consensus’ that attributes blame very broadly. Instead, a number of studies emphasise that the role of specific subjects be analysed within a framework of strongly asymmetric power relations, paying particular attention to the role of business and business leaders, some of whom had been denounced since the beginning of the process of “Memory, Truth and Justice” in Argentina (Basualdo, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Verbitsky and Bohoslavsky, 2013).

A research project, carried out between 2014 and 2015, made it possible to develop a more complex view than those focused principally or exclusively on the role of the armed forces and the State in the repressive policies of the last Argentinian dictatorship. It analysed the responsibility of a sector of the national and foreign business community in the human rights violations that were committed at the time (AEyT-FLACSO, PVJ, SDH and CELS, 2015). The project focused on case studies of 25 companies located throughout the country, looking at the repressive process unleashed on workers in the workplace, and analysing the different forms of participation by high ranking business officials and owners.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The companies analysed are: Ledesma, Minera El Aguilar, La Veloz del Norte, Grafanor and La Fronterita and Concepción sugar mills in the Northwestern region of Argentina (NOA); Alpargatas, Molinos Río de la Plata, Swift, Propulsora Siderúrgica, Astilleros Río Santiago and Petroquímica Sudamericana, are linked to the industrial area to the south of Buenos Aires that includes the southern area of the city and the suburban areas of La Plata, Berisso and Ensenada; Grafa, Ford, Mercedes Benz, Lozadur and Cattaneo, Astilleros Astarsa and Mestrina, Dálmine-Siderca and Acindar. The transnational company of Italian origin FIAT is used to approach a key territory in the country’s labour history, the province of Córdoba, while the analysis of the company Las Marías provides preliminary evidence relating to the Northeast region of Argentina (NEA). The cases of Loma Negra and La Nueva Provincia, allow an approach to areas of the interior of the province of Buenos Aires.

When analysing the repertoire of repressive business practices, the study found a pattern of direct involvement in repression against workers and labour leaders and detailed a number of specific contributions made by business officials, board members, shareholders or even company owners, who were often in contact with the military. The specific contributions to repressive practices they detected include the provision of infrastructure and resources, including personal information about victims, funding and vehicles used in repression, the presence and/or participation of top business officials in kidnappings and even torture in a few cases and in 5 of the 25 cases, the existence of clandestine detention centres within the plants that were the private property of the firms.

A recent book connected evidence from several countries, making significant progress towards a regional analysis of the role of big business in Cold War dictatorships in Latin America. Providing national overviews and case studies for several countries (including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia and the region of Central America), the book simultaneously puts forward a dialogue incorporating studies of businesses and government in Nazi Germany. Conceived from an interdisciplinary approach, the book shows the need to consider the role of companies and business organisations in the development of dictatorships during the Cold War in Latin America, connecting contributions from many fields, including economic and business history, labour history and human rights analysis as well as the studies on transitional justice (Basualdo, Berghoff and Bucheli, 2021).

The need to address, in broad terms, attitudes towards dictatorships, and to examine the different forms of support they received as well as the strong impact on labour relations, emerges in different ways from the recent literature in all of the national cases. In the case of Brazil, Fontes and Corrêa, while clearly emphasizing the negative overall impact of the dictatorship on labour in terms of increasing repression, labour discipline and loss of rights, at the same time underline the importance of not forgetting those who “looked upon the dictatorial regime with sympathy,” stating that sectors of the workers benefited from the so-called “economic miracle” that created jobs in a context of economic development. Even when economic policy was based on the increasing exploitation of a part of the workforce, with falling wages and a loss of rights, there were other sectors, particularly migrants from rural areas, who benefited from developments in civil engineering, construction and services, so some sectors of the working class shared the vision of sectors of the middle classes at this time of the “Brazil of the future” (Corrêa and Fontes, 2015). At the same time, other studies emphasise the importance of analysing the interactions and links not only between the armed forces and businessmen, but also the relationships both of these had with sectors of the union leadership, known as *pelegos*, who supported

and developed policies that worked against the interests of sectors of the working class (Conselho Projeto Memória da CPM-SP, 2014).

In the case of Chile, the triumph of neoliberalism and its hegemony is taken as a starting point. It could be promoted not only due to the fierce repression already analysed above, but also through the discrediting of “statist” and “protectionist” policies. The core of this “consensus” was maintained throughout the transition to democracy and beyond, and lies behind the attempts to shed light on the cost paid by workers and their organisations (Winn, 2004).

In the case of Paraguay, some recent studies have considered the ‘co-option’ of the sectors of the unions that survived the repression of the early years, by the dictatorship and the governing *Colorado* party (González Bozzolasco, 2014). In the case of Uruguay, there is also a recognised need to explore a wide range of social behaviours “that ranged from net opposition to consensus and acceptance of the regime” (Porrini, 2018). There are also references to broader studies of ‘social consensus’ in Uruguay (Marchesi, 2009).

It can be said, therefore, that the drive to shed light on a diversity of positions and the extent to which the dictatorships achieved social legitimacy is present in all the national case studies. However, the case of Argentina serves as a useful example demonstrating the need for caution when deploying conceptual frameworks that are centred on dynamics of “consensus” in the context of a dictatorship.

## Towards a research agenda from a regional perspective

This brief review offers a concise summary of approaches to the issue of dictatorships, workers and unions in five Latin American countries, and shows that, even now, after decades of development in the social sciences, the integration of economic, social, political and cultural aspects still constitutes an enormous challenge. Nevertheless, it also has enormous potential. It is difficult, given the predominantly political focus of existing research, to adequately take into account the role of workers and trade unions in this story, and to recognise and integrate that dimension into national histories. However, in all cases, recent contributions to the field can be found that provide a starting point for a broader regional view.

The analysis of the evidence on the five dictatorial processes selected, although still at an initial and summary stage, shows the existence of very significant points of contact in the two major fields studied. In the first place, with re-

gard to the analysis of the policies of the dictatorships towards workers and their organisations, in all cases there are three main areas of analysis: economic policy, labour, and repression. Furthermore, in all cases the combination of these three aspects led to an overall retreat of the working class and the trade union movement. Although there are significant differences, not only between the different national cases, but also within them, with various currents and sectors undergoing different structural, and economic evolution in terms of organisation, strategy and understanding of the processes. At the same time, several of these contributions emphasise that repression was a central feature at different stages of the dictatorships, and still requires much more in-depth analysis to allow a more complex understanding of both the repressors and the repressed. They also highlight that repression was far from being the only policy deployed by the dictatorships with respect to the workers and their organisations. On the contrary, much remains to be understood about the operation of various institutions whose objective was the reconfiguration of labour relations, such as the Ministry of Labour, and a large number of additional agencies, that have received little attention to date.

Secondly, in terms of the forms of organisation and action deployed by workers and unions, there are also significant points in common. The concept of “resistance” is frequently used in studies of all the national cases and may be defined as the “action and effect of resisting,” the “capacity to resist,” the “people who, generally clandestinely, opposed the invaders of a territory or a dictatorship in different ways” or a “force that opposes the action of another force.” This concept has the indubitable merit of having shed light on the actions of workers that had hitherto been invisible or underestimated in the histories of the period. However, although very useful to allude to the existence of workers’ movements and challenge the images of passivity, absence or silence on the part of the working class, it may also run the risk of homogenizing and unifying a diverse range of actions by workers and unions, as well as the diversity of motives that underpinned them. The bibliographic review makes clear that there is a need not only to distinguish between the activities of the working class and union movement as specific subjects, but also to be able to analyse with sufficient openness and complexity, the different sectors within them, including those that may have supported the dictatorship as a matter of convenience, conviction, or under duress. In this sense, an analysis of the five national cases reveals the need to take into account different responses (including a possible lack of response) with the greatest breadth and diversity possible, making an effort to understand their logic and dynamics. Preconceived labels and tags, rather than offering accurate characterisations, tend to reinforce previously conceived classifications. It is therefore necessary to deepen the analysis of other key dimensions such as gen-



der, ethnicity, or generational differences, among others. This perspective is not only essential to an understanding of the periods of dictatorship in all their complexity, but would also enable a better understanding of transformations in labour relations, the evolution of indicators of the working class, the uneven evolution of different sectors of the working class, and of different currents within the union movement, some of which consolidated their positions during the transformations of this period, precisely because they served a function in the processes of re-founding the union movement.

Thirdly, a brief review of some emergent studies seems to show a shift from a paradigm emphasising “resistance” to one emphasising “consensus” or “consent,” and highlights the need to reconsider the ways in which these concepts are used. The concept of consensus, which can be defined as “agreement produced by consent between all the members of a group or between several groups” seems very difficult to apply, not only due to the asymmetrical nature of power relations between capital and labour, but also due to deepening restrictions on the possibility for free choice and the implementation of intensely repressive regimes. In this context, it also seems to be much more productive to adopt an analysis aimed at examining the ways the dictatorships legitimated themselves, the different components and subjects in that process, and the points at which they were able to gain support or a lack of adverse reaction from certain social sectors. It is important to define behaviour, in order to be able to empirically support the characterisations of these social attitudes. At the same time, even when explicit or implicit support for the dictatorship can be proven, it seems methodologically questionable to present it in a way that underestimates or displaces the social asymmetries and power imbalances that condition it.

In sum, this review seems to indicate that the issue of dictatorship, workers and unions, requires more profound study, not only locally and nationally, but also from a regional Latin American and an international perspective. This would account for crucial transformations at an international level, and common dimensions that could illuminate central issues in this story. To achieve this, an extension of the chronological framework would be useful to foster a perspective more anchored in major international trends, adequately historicizing the dictatorships within the framework of these cycles. The Argentinian dictatorship of 1976 to 1983 should, from this perspective, be analysed in connection to the other two dictatorships in that country during the Cold War period. That would allow for a much better dialogue with cases such as Paraguay (1954–1989), but also with that of Brazil with which a forced comparison is often established that ignores the different time frames. Avoiding a fragmented perspective allows us, for example, to reassess the classic contrast between the “industrial-

ist” dictatorship and the “economic miracle” in Brazil on the one hand, and Argentina’s deindustrialising dictatorship, 1976 to 1983 (a process that implied a profound reconfiguration of the industrial sector and processes of economic concentration and centralisation) on the other. That contrast can be enriched and nuanced by an understanding that the 1966 to 1973 dictatorship in Argentina also coexisted with a process of deepening of industrialisation, and the development of dynamic industries such as the automotive, metallurgical, steel and chemical industries, during the second *Industrialización por Sustitución de Importaciones* (ISI). Similarly, it is possible to distinguish economic slowdowns and other changes in the later stages of the dictatorship in Brazil. This is a clear example of how an overview that takes into account a longer period of time makes it possible to avoid comparisons or dialogues between factual processes that were marked by different stages and major international trends, thus promoting greater contextualisation and subtlety in our analysis.

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