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# KRAFT

A STORY OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN ARGENTINA



**KRAFT : A STORY OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN ARGENTINA**



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## THE STRUGGLE AT KRAFT-TERRABUSI WORKERS ORGANIZATION, THE 'CLASSIST' LEFT AND THE CRISIS OF TRADE UNION REPRESENTATION

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we will attempt a first analysis of the struggle at Kraft Foods Argentina. Firstly, a reconstruction of the recent history of labour organisation at the company and, secondly, an analysis of the effect of the conflict on the political discourse in Argentina and the relationship between the revitalisation of trade union organisation in the workplace, the class-struggle left and the so-called problem of the representation of the workers by their union leaderships. We also attempt to open a debate about the contradictions and potential contained in the re-emergence of the working class on to the national political scene, tied to the end of the Kirchnerist political cycle.

### KEYWORDS

Workers organization – class-struggle left – workers struggle – unions – union representation

### PRESENTATION

The conflict at the Kraft Foods factory has become the most important industrial workers struggle in Argentina of recent decades. As it unfolded, it became a national political issue, widely reported in the mainstream press and forcing the national government, the CGT leadership, business confederations and even the US embassy to intervene directly.

To briefly chronicle events, the conflict opened on Tuesday August 18th when the company announced the firing of 158 workers, among them 5 shop stewards from the *Comisión Interna*, representatives of the congress of the official trade union, the majority of the *Cuerpo de Delegados* – which had not been recognised by either the official union or the company – and rank and file activists.<sup>2</sup> The National Labour Ministry declared a

1 UBA/CONICET



2 According to the company, the sackings were justified by the conflict at the Kraft Foods plant beginning July 3rd 2009, in the middle of the Swine Flu pandemic, when a group of employees mobilized inside the plant blocking the exits of the building where the administration of the company worked. At that moment, the workers along with their *Comisión Interna* and the shop stewards from the afternoon shift, called for hygienic conditions to guarantee the health of workers and their families. These included the closing of the nursery and leave for mothers so that they could

period of compulsory arbitration but the company refused to recognise this, leading to the workers starting a general strike in the plant and occupying it with the fired workers staying in their posts. This was supported by a plan of struggle which includes permanent assemblies, blocking of the *Panamericana* highway, marches to the Ministry of Labour, road blocks and solidarity demonstrations across the country, festivals and rallies outside the factory.

The conflict intensified with the Buenos Aires Province police militarizing the factory, with the aim of preventing the fired workers leaving or entering. Despite this and the subsequent police repression, the workers would keep entering the factory complex.

In this context, there was an increase in the level of solidarity with the conflict displayed by other actors (human rights groups, workers and students organisations, legislators, personalities from the world of arts and culture, etc.). The *Panamericana* Highway was blocked again – at one point twice in one day - as were Gral Paz Avenue, highway N° 8 in San Miguel and the Pueyrredón bridge, along with permanent surprise blockings of central streets of the Federal Capital by Students Unions in solidarity with the struggle.

In this context of sharpened struggle, the main Argentine business confederations, the Argentina

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look after their children. At that moment the company ignored the request, and as a result production was halted, a measure which achieved, after the intervention of the Ministry of Labour, the decreeing of paid leave during a week and disinfection of the plant. In response to these actions, the company presented a court case against the workers for “illegitimate deprivation of liberty” against the employees who were working in that building. According to the claims of the company in one statement, “the authors of these acts, 156 in total, were identified and fired”, asking the Courts for their “disaffiliation” from the Union of Food Processing Workers (STIA) and the Internal Union Commission/ Comisión Gremial Interna. As was shown through the progress of the conflict and the history of the Terrabusi workers itself, the reprisal by the company was due to a deeper motive, which was to behead the democratic rank and file organization of the workers inside the workplace, as we will see in this study.

Industrial Union (UIA) and Co-Coordinator of Industries of Food Production (COPAL) – led by an ex functionary of the 1976-1983 dictatorship, Jorge Zorreguieta – asked for “order to be restored” and for the workers to be evicted from the plant. At the same time, the US embassy intervened in favour of the company, asking publicly for “normality” to be restored in the factory. For their part, the traditional trade union leaderships, especially Hugo Moyano of the CGT and Rodolfo Dear of STIA (food processing workers union), condemned the measures of struggle taken by the workers for being “ideologized” and having “political demands”. The strike at the Gral. Pacheco plant remained at this level for 37 days, until September 25<sup>th</sup> when the fired workers inside the factory were violently evicted by a repressive police operation by the Buenos Aires Province Police and the police presence inside the plant was strengthened.

After this, the conflict enters a new phase in which, as the measures of struggle on behalf of the workers are maintained (now outside the factory), there begins a process of negotiation with the company in the Ministry of Labour. After a series of judicial resolutions, the shop stewards of the Internal Committee who were evicted and illegally prevented from entering the plant were reinstated by the company – including the shop steward of the night turn Javier Hemosilla, who had a discriminatory cautionary measure hanging over him which had impeded his entry.

At the moment of writing this article, the conflict and the measures of force are still continuing, in as much as negotiations between the company, the workers representatives and the Labour Ministry are still taking place, almost 10 days after they were opened.

What factors made this struggle, in the beginning a factory struggle, transform into what an editorial in the newspaper *La Nación* called a “test case”<sup>3</sup>? The answer to this question involves many factors,

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3 “Kraft, un caso testigo”, *La Nación*, domingo 11 de octubre de 2009. This editorial attempted an initial explanation of why the struggle exceeded the bounds of trade unionism.

among the most important being: a) the specific importance of the US multinational Kraft Foods (the second biggest food processor internationally speaking) and its belonging to one of the most dynamic industrial sectors of the national economy; b) the particularities of the workers organisation in the factory itself which included a Comisión Interna in opposition to the national leadership of the food-processing workers union and a rank and file *Cuerpo de Delegados* in the workplace; c) the strength and extent of the measures of struggle carried out by the workers; d) the participation of diverse sectors of organised students, organisations of the unemployed and workers from other sectors, which amplified the measures of protest through acts of solidarity.

In this article, we will attempt a first analysis of the Kraft case developing, in the first place, a reconstruction of the recent history of workers organisation in the company<sup>4</sup> and, secondly, what we consider to be the fundamental element that this conflict opened up a political and conceptual debate on: the relationship between the revitalization of trade union organisation in the workplace (Comisiones Internas and Cuerpos de Delegados), the “classist” left and the so-called problem of representation of the higher echelons of the trade unions in Argentina.

Our treatment of this element will aim, also, to open up new questions about the contradictions and potentialities implicit in the eruption of the working class of the national political scene, in the context of the end of the ‘Kirchnerist’ cycle.

4 This reconstruction is based on interviews with workers leaders in the conflict and activists at the plant, and on collecting secondary sources, particularly stories in national newspapers, left-wing papers, trade union pamphlets, statements and audiovisual materials.



## KRAFT FOODS : A TEST CASE

*“...things are going well for the rich people in this country; I mean we’ve never been better. There’s class war alright, and it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.”*

Warren Buffet,  
Leading shareholder Kraft Foods<sup>5</sup>

### A Question of Size

With a profit of 60 million pesos in the last 2 years, Kraft Foods Argentina is the fourth producer of alimentary products in the country, behind Arcor, Bagley and Ledesma<sup>6</sup>. The company currently counts with three industrial establishments: one in the locality of Tres Arroyos, Buenos Aires, a flour mill in Villa Mercedes, San Luis, and, most importantly, the old Terrabusi model plant in Gral. Pacheco. Of the 3700 people employed by the company in the country, 2700 work in the Pacheco plant, situated in a strategic industrial zone which borders the Panamericana highway and Alto Paraná, forming the most concentrated industrial belt in the country<sup>7</sup>.

However, Kraft Foods is still better known by the population as “Terrabusi”, name of the traditional Argentinean-owned company which was property of Gilberto Montagna and Carlos Reyes Terrabusi. “In the 1980’s, Gilberto Montagna (. . .) went on to lead the Argentinean Industrial Union (UIA), until in 1993, like much of the Argentinean capitalist class, he sold his company to the multinational Nabisco for \$270m<sup>8</sup>. Nabisco, a multinational of

5 Brooks, D. “Estados Unidos: batalla por los derechos laborales”, *La Jornada*, 22/08/2005.

6 Ranking de la revista Mercado, en [www.mercado.com.ar](http://www.mercado.com.ar)

7 This is not a secondary factor. In the zone around the Terrabussi plant alone, there are concentrated many important units of production like the automobile plants of Ford (2000 workers) and Volkswagen (1500 workers), the food storage plant Rioplatense (1000 workers) and various industrial parks, which together make up a real strategic zone due to their working class concentration and the potential for confluence in the class struggle.

8 Ducrot, V.E. (2009) “Argentina. Soberanía Alimentaria en carne viva: Los gigantes de la comida contra la

North American origin which installed itself in the country in 1981, led a process of capitalist concentration acquiring some of the most emblematic companies of food production in Argentina like Terrabusi, Vizzolini, Mayco and Canale. This process of capitalist concentration in the food processing industry continued later with the landing in Argentina of the giant Kraft Foods in 1990, after its acquisition of Suchard and Alimentos Especiales, the latter in 1992.

Finally, in the year 2000, Kraft Foods Argentina is born, after its global merger with Nabisco. In order to have a parameter of the specific weight which this company has, the group Kraft foods is actually the USA's largest food-processing company and the second on an international scale<sup>9</sup>. Currently the largest shareholder is the Altria Group, before known as Philip Morris.

In the year 2004, Kraft Foods international "planned a series of firings which would affect 10 thousand workers and the closing of 20 factories something which they are managing although not without resistance from the workers of Kraft in various countries, like Spain, Venezuela and Colombia. In the last decade, while the volume of trade enjoyed by the multinational grew, it reduced its workforce from 8 thousand to nearly 4 thousand. Anti-globalization groups have reported that, in order to produce its chocolate, Kraft uses raw materials from the Ivory Coast, where, according to Unicef, "thousands of children are mistreated and exploited in conditions of outright slavery" and it is publicly known that "Kraft's branch in Honduras, which is part of the Chamber of Honduran-American Commerce (Acham) along with Citibank and Wal-Mart, has given "it's support to the new president of Honduras, Roberto Micheletti"<sup>10</sup>.

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democracia", Agencia Periodística de Mercosur, 11/10/2009

9 According to its official website, "Kraft Foods Inc. is one of the largest food and drinks companies in the world. The company is 230 years old, has 159 plants, more than 90,000 employees, during 2007 obtained an overturn of \$37bn and 40 of its brands have more than 100 years in existence. Millions of times a day, in more than 150 countries, consumers choose their favourite Kraft Food brands"; see: [www.kraftfoods.com.ar](http://www.kraftfoods.com.ar)

10 Meyer, A. "Negocios y conflictos protagonizados

### **Comisión Interna, Resistance and the Bosses' Attack**

The arrival of the multinational Nabisco to the head of Terrabusi in 1993 implied, along with the general tendency of the neoliberal decade, the beginning of a process of rationalization of production based on two pillars: firstly, liberalisation (internal and external) of the labour force, of which the main consequence was the subcontracting of part of the productive process; and secondly, the disarticulation of trade union organisation in the workplace, the *Cuerpo de Delegados* of 60 members.

This last factor, that of trade union organization in the workplace, is of vital importance in understanding the current process taking place in the Gral. Pacheco plant, 15 years later. Activists of the Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR), who would later win leadership of the factory, tell about the beginnings of an Internal Committee in opposition to the national leadership of Rodolfo Daer.

"In 1984-85, the union was powerful, it had 20,000 members and important centres like Bagley, Canale, Noel and Terrabusi (which between its two factories concentrated 7,000 colleagues). There was a very important struggle wages in 1986, resisted by the bosses. So there were 300 firings, including many shop stewards and members of the Internal Committee (. . .) the IC was Daer's. And we had a lot of influence because there was a Shop Stewards Body of 60 members"<sup>11</sup>.

The resistance to the implementation of the first flexibilization plans in what was then Terrabusi, found its expression in the change of leadership of the Internal Committee. "In 1989 we formed a support committee to the Frejupo. We kept the organisation and the bulletin going, and we went

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por Kraft en diversos países. Una política empresarial global", Página/12, 05/10/2009.

11 "Terrabusi: Una larga experiencia de confrontación política y recuperación sindical", Política y Teoría Nº 53, 2004.

to fight for the *Cuerpo de Delegados* which we won in '91. Then we moved onto an open struggle for the elections to the Internal Committee. We made a front with a peronist sector which was part of the union. (. . .) Then we suffered our first failure, in 1991 (. . .) The sector with which we were in opposition had kept very close to the Green List<sup>12</sup>. As a result we lost the elections."<sup>13</sup>

It would be two years later when the "hardcore" of those who today constitute the majority of the *Comisión Interna* at Kraft Foods, in an alliance with dissident Peronist sectors, managed to win the leadership of the factory. "In 1993 we went back to fighting for the *Comisión Intera*, we had to build ourselves up again. We assessed ourselves, carried out an anlysis, a discusión over where we'd gone wrong (. . .) The arming of a front made it possible to assemble a force that could win back the *Comisión Interna*. We put clear water between ourselves and the leadership of the union from the point of the demands we put forward and the question of the *Cuerpo de Delegados*. We made a front with a peronist sector in Tigre, dissidents from the union. . ."<sup>14</sup> From then on the leadership of the *Comisión Interna* was in the hands of PCR militants, usually in alliance with a variety of different sectors of peronism.

At that time, 1993, Terrabusi had already passed into the hands of the North American monopoly Nabisco, which as we said earlier, carried out a wide-ranging process of labour flexibilization. "Our colleagues realized that Nabisco wanted to make large profits by increasing even more the rate of exploitation. We should come and produce tons of biscuits – the directives said – and everything else (maintenance, distribution, paperwork, packaging, the despoit, etc.) needed

12 La lista Verde es la lista oficialista del STIA, dirigida por Rodolfo Daer.

13 "Terrabusi: Una larga experiencia de confrontación política y recuperación sindical", op.cit.

14 "Terrabusi: Una larga experiencia de confrontación política y recuperación sindical", op.cit. According to those who took part, the peronist sector at Tigre ended up going back to doing a deal with the Green List of Rodolfo Daer.

to be subcontracted". All of this to reduce labour costs, to reduce pesonnel"<sup>15</sup>.

The year 1995 marked the beginning of a series of defeats at the Gral. Pacheco plant. Before the 1995 elections the *Comisión Interna* is disbanded via fraud and bribes on the part of the bosses. According to the PCR militants who were present: "Before the calling of elections for the IC they offered us money. They broke the *Comisión Interna*, They bought off everyone from the night shift and part of the afternoon shift<sup>16</sup>. From then on, "Firm by firm, agreements were signed, in Canale, in Suchard, Panificación Fargo, apart from the general agreements<sup>17</sup>. This way the process of subcontractin, flexibilization, the raising of productivity, the incorporation of fixed-term contract and, principally, the disbanding of the *Cuerpo de Delegados*, were achieved.

The *Comisión Interna* continued to be in the hands of the same leading nucleus over the following years, although without internal divisions and suffering permanent attacks by the company. One decisive moment would be the tough conflict at the close of the year 2000 and beginning of the year 2001, just at the time when the Kraft Foods Corporation, after buying Nabisco globally, took charge of the management of the factory. In the context of a plan of struggle, a broad sector of activists at Terrabusi participated in a joint

15 "Terrabusi: Una larga experiencia de confrontación política y recuperación sindical", op.cit.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.





blocking of the Panamericana highway alongside the workers of Ford and VW (both located only metres from the Kraft plant). The company took advantage and fired 79 workers, principally from the afternoon shift, which at that point was one of the most organised.

In the middle of this attack, the *Comisión Interna* divided between a sector which promoted the occupation of the headquarters of the food processing workers union of Buenos Aires, and the majority who oppose this policy, instead organising solidarity actions in the vicinity of the plant. Finally, the majority of the workers are fired. This conflict will be remembered in the Gral. Pacheco plant as a tough defeat and will be, at the same time, one which allows for a certain renovation of the list (at this time, the leadership of the union, without the company's presence, relocates more than 40 of its organisation's congress members on the production lines in order to "compete" with the shop stewards). Despite this, the Internal Committee is reelected in 2001 and 2003<sup>18</sup>. 2001 will be the epilogue of a decade (1991-2001) of losses of workers rights at Kraft Foods-Terrabusi.

### The Emergence of a New Activism in Terrabusi

As we have analysed in other articles<sup>19</sup>, the year 2004 marked the start of a new cycle of class struggle in Argentina with the reappearance, on

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18 Since 1993, the results of elections to the *Comisión Interna* in favor of the existing leading nucleus were: 1993: 890 votes as the only list; 1995: 904 votos to 395; 1997: 725 votes to 285 and 219 (three lists); 1999: 944 votes to 572; 2001: 952 votes to 598; 2003: 1064 votes to 445. Statistics provided by militants at the factory. Only positive votes were counted, spoilt ballots were in all cases marginal.

19 See, Meyer, L. y Gutiérrez, G. (2005) "Luchas obreras y recomposición de clase", *Revista Lucha de Clases* N°5, Ediciones IPS, Buenos Aires; Castillo, C. (2007) "Introducción" en *Experiencias Subterráneas. Trabajo, organización gremial e ideas políticas de los trabajadores del subte*. Ediciones IPS, Buenos Aires; Varela, P. (2009) "Repolitización fabril. El retorno de la política de fábrica en la argentina posdevaluación", en Alvez, Giovanni y Figari, Claudia, *La precarización del trabajo en América Latina*, Sao Paulo, Praxis.

the national political scene, of the struggle of the employed workers movement<sup>20</sup>. This reappearance depended on three fundamental conditions in order to emerge: in the first place, economic growth – encouraged by the devaluation – and the subsequent growth of employment. The most dynamic sectors of the economy with regards to job creation were the manufacturing industry and construction. Directly related to this, the second condition of emergence of the so-called "Rank and file trade unionism" is the integration of a new generation into the workplace.

The rank and file trade union activism that we find in different cases from 2004 onwards has young workers under 40 years of age as its main protagonists. Within this broad term "young workers", we can distinguish two groups, the first which ranges from 19/20 years of age until 25/26 and who are youngsters who entered into the labour market post-2002, which is to say, in the conditions of economic growth and job creation which we mentioned above and, therefore, in a condition where they held said expectations in the labour market. The second group which goes from 26 years old to 35/40 are workers who entered the labour market during the 90's, in the middle of the process of imposing flexible labour conditions.

The third element, and a very important one, is a political climate which allowed for a

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20 This new cycle can be divided in three phases: a first phase from 2004 to 2006, opened with the four day metro workers strike in Buenos Aires, which was dominated by conquests related to demands over wages, working conditions and trade union organization. A second phase from 2006 to 2008, dominated by wage negotiations led by the traditional trade union leaderships and some struggles with a tougher characteristic and repression, as in the case of the teachers of the province of Neuquén (with the assassination of Carlos Fuenteabla), the TVB workers, the tyre factory FATE, the floating Casino of San Telmo in Buenos Aires, the textile factory Mafissa, etc. And a third phase, the current one, beginning with the end of 2008, with the first signs of the international economic crisis showing and the firings of subcontracted workers from car factories/car parts producers, along with the Kraft conflict, that of the workers of IVECO and Gestamp in the Province of Córdoba; the factory occupations against the closures of metalworks Paraná Metal and Mahle, the paper mill Massuh and the printing company Indugraf, among others. For a deeper analysis of this process, see M. Maiello and M. Romano, op. Cit.



certain legitimization of workers conflicts: the “encouragement from above” of certain struggles. Both from the national government (with a strong discourse of “redistribution of wealth”) and from the trade union elite, principally the CGT, certain struggles were encouraged discursively, and therefore so where the expectations of workers first regarding an improvement of their wages and, secondly, their working conditions.

As Celia Cotarelo has argued, in this rank and file activism, “we can observe two features which appear with renewed strength in the period: the increasing frequency of workers assemblies in order to take decisions in struggle and an important part of these being organised and led by trade union leaderships – *comisiones internas*, *cuerpos de delegados*, regional trade union branches and some local trade unions and federations – who proposed themselves as an alternative and in opposition to the leaderships of the national trade unions – both those that are part of the CGT and the CTA –, from a position which lays claim to the traditions of anti-bureaucratism and classism<sup>21</sup>.

In the food processing workers union this process expressed itself clearly with the “reclaiming of the *comisiones internas* of the PepsiCo and Cadbury-Stani factories by openly anti-bureaucracy opposition tendencies. There, positions which had been won would later make possible the emergence of an opposition current within the trade union expressed in the Blue and White List created by the Internal Committees of Kraft-Terrabussi, PepsiCo and Cadbury-Stani<sup>22</sup>, which

21 Cotarelo, C. (2007) “Movimiento sindical en Argentina 2004-2007: ¿anarquía sindical?”, p.5. Ponencia presentada en la XI Jornada Interescuelas de Historia, Tucumán, septiembre.

22 The loss of prestige of the Rodolfo Daer bureaucracy in the main industrial plants led to the emergence of a

in the general elections of the union of 2004 would obtain 20% of the total votes and the great majority in the factories. As conservative daily *La Nación* would reflect: “The ex leader of the CGT Rodolfo Daer managed as this edition was going to print, to be re-elected as the leader of the Capital region of the food-processing workers union in the elections carried out yesterday, according to unofficial figures from the electoral committee. The Green List obtained more than 1,100 votes against 800 for the Blue, who proposed Fernando Giménez (who for 19 years was joint-secretary alongside Daer) and some 450 votes for the Blue and White list, led by Ramón Bogado, who directed an Alliance between the ‘*piquetero*’ (unemployed) group the “Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC) and the PTS”<sup>23</sup>.

### Emergence of a New Generation and New Internal Committee

In September 2005 the new elections to the *Comisión Interna* were held. In a way that hadn’t happened for year, three lists presented themselves, adding themselves to the competition

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third electoral ticket in the trade union, claiming to be an “opposition”, led by the then Joint Secretary of the Union, Giménez. As a union organizer at PepsiCo, an activist of the PTS: “This is an event without precedent. Rodolfo Daer had never faced any opposition in the Food Processing Workers Union of the Federal Capital and Greater Buenos Aires (...) We are 173 candidates, of whom 30% are colleagues and have overcome all the legal bureaucratic obstacles. We can count with the support of some 600 workers between candidates and colleagues who have signed in support”; Interview with Leonardo Norriella, “Queremos delegados por sección en todas las fábricas. Se presentó la Celeste y Blanca contra Daer en la alimentación”, Bs. As., *La Verdad Obrera* N° 144, 30/07/2004.

23 “Daer, reelegido en el gremio de la alimentación”, *La Nación*, 17/09/2004.

between the List responding to the Trade Union leadership and that responding to the *Comisión Interna*: a “yellow” list organized by the company<sup>24</sup>. Nearly 1,700 workers voted. The triumph of List 1 was overwhelming: it obtained 1,124 votes (69%), while List 2 got only 394 votes (23%) and List 3 just 125 (7%)<sup>25</sup>.

But this election was particular in another sense: within List 1 (the list of the leadership of the *Comisión Interna*) there were incorporated young candidates, representatives of the new generation of workers who had entered into the plant after 2002 (posterior to the defeat of the year 2000) and who expressed the new generation and the “change of atmosphere” among the workers in the industrial plant. Within the new sector, from whence would come a new generation of shop stewards and activists, the night turn stood out. It is in this night turn where there would be developed a rank and file trade union activism which would reclaim “old” practices of working class “clandestine” organization (like football championships which could group together 200 workers), as well as practices like assemblies in the workplace (like meetings according to sector from which would emerge leaders who would later compose the *Cuerpo de Delegados*). It is also in this shift where the practice of carrying out assemblies outside the plant (and of the reach of the foremen’s eyes) where the day to day discussions between the *Comisión Interna* and the company would be reported on, and what is more, where news bulletins for the shift would be distributed.

In the words of Oscar Coria, shop steward on the night turn, “the colleagues always highlight the differences between even the assemblies of the different shifts. I attribute this to the fact that even, when we began to carry out assemblies in 2007, we had arrived with dozens and dozens of meetings of meetings outside the factory, where

it became customary to debate and discuss our problems. We did this from the night turn for a long time, where we estimate that more than 200 colleagues had passed through these meetings before we got to the stage of holding assemblies inside the factory itself. When we got to this stage, the colleagues had an experience, a practice of debate, of discussion, which over the course of these years has ended up being an explosion, because there are assemblies in the night turn where there are 10, 15 interventions by different colleagues, and afterwards maybe 10 or 15 others. Any colleague who had a need, could state, discuss it, defend it, and it would end up being voted at the end of the assembly what we would do. There is already a tradition of assemblies which means to debate the ideas of everyone very clearly in order to see which is better.”<sup>26</sup>

These new trade union practices began to incorporate, also, sectors of workers who, after the process of ‘flexibilization’, had been left without left without any trade union representation within the factory: the so-called subcontracted workers who began to propose to the *Comisión Interna* that it should organise an election of shop stewards, and the “repository workers”, (Kraft personnel working outside the industrial plant) and propose resistance to the sackings and the possibility of reincorporation.

As part of this process the “From Below” group will appear, created by militants from the Party of Socialist Workers (PTS), with a base built essentially on the night shift. The organisation would group together as well as workers from Kraft-Terrabussi, shop stewards and activists of other companies in the food processing industry like PepsiCo-Stani and Cadbury, and known from the experience of struggle and anti-bureaucratic self-organization of the workers at Zanon in Neuquén<sup>27</sup>.

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24 Esa lista fue organizada por un ex delegado de la Comisión Interna al que se le acababa de vencer el mandato.

25 “Elecciones en Terrabusi: amplio respaldo de la base obrera a la actual Comisión Interna”, La Verdad Obrera N° 173, 05/10/2005

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26 Entrevista realizada al delegado Oscar Coria, 08/10/2009. Véase: [www.tvpts.tv/spip.php?video=1025](http://www.tvpts.tv/spip.php?video=1025)

27 One of the first publications of the group would be a leaflet supporting the Comisión Interna in the elections; “Like the majority of workers of Terrabusi, we who organize in Unity from Below (Unidad desde Abajo) weren’t born yesterday, and we know that the so-called ‘independent’ List 2, are nothing more than green wolves in sheeps clothing (...) For this reason we call to support the list of the current

## Spontaneity and Organization: The Struggle to Reclaim the Shop Stewards Body by Section

*"We arrived and they wouldn't let us in. So we overran security and went in."*

*Subcontracted Terrabussi worker, 2007*



*"I've been a shop steward for 2 years and there are comrades who have been here for 14 years, so we have to look for the way for the new workers, who have put themselves at the front line of the struggle we've been giving, to express themselves. I believe that we all have to dedicate ourselves to organizing the Shop Stewards Body which is elemental for our organization and strengthening the Internal Committee."*

*Javier "Poke" Hermosilla  
Member of Internal Committee*

If until 2005 Kraft Foods had managed the frequent firing of subcontracted workers, this year marks a turning point, with the first signs of resistance appearing (initially on an individual scale) to the firings and arbitrary behaviour of the bosses.

After a time, in 2007, about a year ago (also in

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Comisión Interna, List 1, which was part of the Blue and White List with colleagues from PepsiCo, Bagley and Stani, and because it has in it comrades who we know and who won't sell themselves"; "Elecciones de Comisión Interna en Terrabusi - La Agrupación Unidad desde Abajo apoya a la Lista 1", volante de la Agrupación Unidad Desde Abajo, 30/9/2005.

May), the company fired 60 agency workers, arguing that the energy crisis affected production, but nobody believed this. The agency colleagues blocked the entrance, they didn't accept the sackings, they jumped the fences and went to the changing rooms. There were grouped some members of the Internal Committee and they held an assembly, and decided to call a strike. The majority were youngsters between 22/25 years old; 50% of the factory (. . .) Also in 2007, in the face of another attack, we blocked the *Panamericana* Highway. More than 60% were subcontracted youngsters. The factory stopped. Almost all the old workers recognized that the youth had changed the atmosphere of the factory, making them more willing to stand up to the company. The assemblies were extended inside and out of the factory, becoming key organizations. The workers democracy joined together permanent and subcontracted workers; youngsters and old; strength and experience are complementary, and it became a potent mix"<sup>28</sup>.

These are the precursors to the process of reclaiming the *Cuerpo de Delegados* at the plant. In March 2008, the elections for this body were held. In the words of Ramón Bogado, coordinator for the Comisión Interna:

"According to a decision by the general assembly we began to choose shop stewards from each sector. We took a whole day so that in each section the candidates would present themselves, encouraging for there to be various in each sector, and the election began the next day. It began with Packaging in the morning shift. The colleagues took to it massively, and 269 voted, the majority women. In this section there were eight candidates for four places. People were very happy because they took it in their hands, and could choose their candidates. "This is how we can all be represented", they would say. It lasted for two to three hours, overseen by the internal committee, with ballot boxes line by line where

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28 Gerardo Campos, Terrabusi: los jóvenes precarizados muestran el camino, *La Verdad Obrera* N° 279, 29/05/2008

the ballot papers were put (. . .) It was like the company hadn't reacted yet. The union appeared and leafleted a resolution from 2005 saying that this was illegal. Because they hadn't called it."<sup>29</sup>

The following fact shows the weight yielded by the new generation of workers who had entered into Terrabusi post 2002 through the elections for the Shop Stewards Body: more than 40% of the shop stewards elected belonged to that group (previously subcontracted) who had jumped over the fences in 2007 to resist the firings. In this way they showed their satisfaction with the election of different activists: "We are very excited, very happy (. . .) This was something which the colleagues had called for. They are already making suggestions; beginning to work collectively". There was very high participation in the election. "there were many candidates (. . .) Where four needed to be elected 12 presented themselves; and where two were needed eight presented themselves."<sup>30</sup>

For their part, the night shift (the smallest in the plant but recognized as the most combative and organized), played an important role in the process of reclaiming of the *Cuerpo de Delegados*. This explains in itself why more than 60% of the sackings of 2009 were for this shift.

### BETWEEN THE CAPITALIST WORLD AND FACTORY DEMOCRACY

#### At the Nucleus of Cellular Domination

*"... A truly chaotic picture of labour relations (...); a particular deterioration of collective negotiation (...); the state of rebellion of the world of labour (...); the reactivation of activism in the workplace (...); the shop stewards who take on a key role, in itself, and the power-base they create (. . .); the state of assembly created in many leading or gifted companies (...); with these phenomena the*

*social peace which reigned in other times has finished."*

*Julián De Diego  
El Cronista, 29/06/09*

The emergence of internal committees and or shop stewards bodies in the workplace which go beyond or directly oppose the leadership of the national trade unions, putting the "social peace" in the companies in danger, has transformed itself in an obligatory theme of analysis and debate amongst business leaders and consultants, as in the case of the lawyer Julián De Diego, assessment lawyer for the Argentine Unión of Industry (UIA) and one of the representatives of Kraft Foods during the negotiations of the current conflict. This is how a recent article in the newspaper *Crítica de la Argentina* put it: "The conflict between the food processor Kraft put on the table a tendency which arose in an isolated form in the last period and which came into its own this year. We are referring to the shop stewards and Internal Committees of factories and activists which work on the margins of the recognized trade unions aligned to the CGT. And who fight for their own demands even when the unions consider formal negotiations closed. This phenomenon doesn't correspond to geographic limits or variations in the economic situation, and it is one of the main worries of the Government and of business."<sup>31</sup>

In the field of social sciences, this phenomenon has been studied in investigations like those carried out by the collective Workers Survey over the experience of the underground workers<sup>32</sup>, in the works of Montes Cató and Ventrici on the same sectors<sup>33</sup>, the investigations of Paula Lenguita on the printing workers<sup>34</sup>, or the investigation which

29 Hoy N° 1207, marzo 2008.

30 La Verdad Obrera N° 269, 13/03/2008

31 Martín, M. "El caso Kraft desnudó el cambio sindical en el país", *Crítica de la Argentina*, 13/0/10/09.

32 Castillo, Christian et al. (2007) *Experiencias Subterráneas. Trabajo, organización gremial e ideas políticas de los trabajadores del subte*. Ediciones IPS, Buenos Aires.

33 See Montes Cató y Ventrici (2007) "Organización del trabajo, flexibilidad y respuesta sindical en el Subterráneo de Buenos Aires", Documento de Trabajo N° 1, Editorial Poder

34 See Lenguita, P. (2009) "Gremialismo de prensa:

we have carried out over the case of FATE, also in the northern zone of the conurbation<sup>35</sup>.

From different perspectives, these studies depict the reactivation of trade union organization in the workplace from 2004 onwards and reintroduce the reflection on this phenomenon which Adolfo Gilly (1985) denominated the “Argentinean Anomaly”, referring to the strength of the rank and file trade union organizations (Internal Committees and Shop Stewards Bodies) and their relative autonomy (and tension) with regards to the traditional leaderships strongly integrated into the state. The particular thing about these workers organizations in the workplace, which has been underlined by authors coming at it from different theoretical-political perspectives like Juan Carlos Torre<sup>36</sup>, Louise Doyon<sup>37</sup>, Daniel James<sup>38</sup>, among others, resides in what Gilly calls, taking aspects of O’Donnell and Anderson’s work, their location in the nucleus of cellular domination, which is to say, in “the arena of production itself, the place where added value is produced and extracted, the point of contact and permanent friction between capital and waged labour in a capitalist society, the process of work, which is the material basis for the self-valorization of capital.”<sup>39</sup>

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el lado oculto de los medios de comunicación”, ponencia presentada en el 1º Congreso Nacional sobre Protesta Social, Acción Colectiva y Movimientos Sociales, Buenos Aires, 30 y 31 de marzo.

35 Véase Varela, P (2009). Mundo obrero en la Argentina actual. La fábrica y el barrio como escenarios de prácticas políticas en el norte industrial del AMBA. Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Buenos Aires.

36 Torre, JC (1974) La democracia sindical en Argentina, en *Desarrollo económico*, Vol. 14, Nº 55 (oct-dec.1974, pp 531-543), Buenos Aires.

37 Véase Doyon, L (1984) “La organización del movimiento obrero peronista 1946-1955” en *Desarrollo económico*, Vol.24, Nº94 (jul-sep., 1984, pp 203-234), Buenos Aires.

38 James, D. (1981), “Racionalización y respuesta de la clase obrera: contexto y limitaciones de la actividad gremial en Argentina”, en *Desarrollo económico*, Vol.21, Nº83 (oct-dec. 1981, pp 312-349), Buenos Aires.

39 Gilly, A. “La anomalía argentina”, *El estado en América Latina. Teoría y Práctica*, Pablo Gonzales Casanova (Coord.), México, DF, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2003 (primera edición 1990), p. 198.

Effectively, when the workers of Kraft condemn the fact that the firings seek to dismantle workers organization the factory (and the activists, shop stewards and leaders of the *Comisión Interna* and the *Cuerpo de Delegados* which sustain it), they prove that the objective of the company is to attack the democratic institutions of the workers who dispute day to day the conditions of exploitation, making themselves increasingly incompatible with the objective of increasing the profitability of the capitalists.

In the same way, there is a second characteristic of rank-and-file factory organization which corresponds to this location in the nucleus of cellular domination, this is: the potential to question who rules in the factory, that which Marx calls “the despotic rule of capital”<sup>40</sup>. When a *Cuerpo de Delegados* or a *Comisión Interna* have an input, for example, in the fixing of the rhythm of work, they are objectively questioning who rules in the workplace even though this may be in a partial and temporary form.

Finally, there exists a third factor, unique to the factory-level trade union organizations, which expressed the relative incompatibility which exists between these and the rule of capital in the workplace, which is the direct relationship which it establishes between the workers (without mediation) and the tendency to operate through collective decision-making and direct democracy, or said in another way, assemblies. Reflecting on this process Gilly says “. . . the *comision interna*, elected in general assemblies, the shop stewards

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40 Marx analyzed the function of rule exercised by capital in the process of capitalist production, affirming that: “(...) if it conforms to its content capitalist rule is dual because this is the character of the process of production which it must rule over – on the one hand a social process of work for the elaboration of a product, on the other, a process of valorization of capital. With the development of co-operation on a greater scale, this despotism develops its peculiar forms (...) high officials (directors, managers) and industrial subofficials (capataces, foremen, overlookers, contre-maîtres) who during the process of production exercise power in the name of capital”; Marx, Karl, *El Capital*, Tomo I, Vol.2, Libro Primero, México, DF, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2004, pp. 403-404.

elected in each sector, the workings of the shop stewards bodies like genuine parliaments of the factory”<sup>41</sup>.

As one fired worker of the night shift very clearly put it: “It’s the assembly which decides, and that is the tradition of the night shift. The fact that the night shift organizes assemblies and that all the comrades of the night shift consider feel themselves to play an active role, that is what this fact leads to. What the company doesn’t want, what the union doesn’t want, and what many other people don’t want is for the workers to play an active role. And what has changed since colleague Hermosilla has been shop steward is that everything is voted in assembly and that there has been a huge effort, by many of us and with him at the head for all workers to play an active role. And for therefore, every point that is discussed, every action that is taken, to build a struggle, is voted by an assembly. Therefore today our weapon is the assembly, and this is what we defend to the end. They even said this to us in the Ministry [of Labour, note by the authors], or the company itself one day said to us: ‘it’s madness that we should discuss one thing in the Ministry, and then for you to go and argue it in the assembly’, ‘no, that’s wrong’, a boss at the company would say to us. And so we would laugh

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41 Gilly, A. La anomalía argentina, Op.cit, p. 200.

and ‘well, no, what is wrong for you, is our biggest gain, our biggest historical conquest.’<sup>42</sup>

Here we see the arising of a crucial question which is at the heart of the Terrabusi case, even though it exceeds this and has gone on to become part of the discussions which opened up in the press and in various spaces within the political debate: that of the *Cuerpo de Delegados* and/or the *Comisión Interna* as a space for the direct politicization of the workers, within which different political currents act, particularly those of the class-struggle left, placing themselves in dispute with the Argentine working class’ identification with the Peronist tradition.

### **The Crisis of Trade Union and Left Wing Representation in the Argentinean Working Class**

*“Both in the principle business chambers and in the CGT itself they admit that after the ruling by the Court an “underground” movement of breakthrough by internal s and chop stewards*

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42 “Trabajador despedido del turno noche, entrevista realizada el 8 de octubre”; See <http://www.tvpts.tv/spip.php?video=1024>



*bodies has been consolidated within which different ideological and social projects coexist and share only one common denominator: a profound questioning of the hegemonic representation of the traditional union. In the case of Kraft, where shop stewards from the union coexisted with militants from various left-wing currents and even evangelists with a great predicament among the workers, is an example which is repeated in other companies in the industrial sector and which is expanding to the service sector in places like the metro and bank workers and branched of production like the oil workers."*

Elizabeth Peger, *El Cronista* newspaper  
(10/10/2009)

As the quote argues, the conflict at Kraft and the past experience of organisation at the factory, shown by the strengthening of the rank and file organisations of the class and decisive influence of sectors of the class-struggle left in the process, provides an example of the double phenomenon which exceeds this case in itself and is repeated in other industrial and service sector companies. On the one hand, the loss of the capacity of the traditional trade union tops to contain trade union struggles; on the other, the emergence (or more precisely, visualisation) of some expressions of the class-struggle left inserted in sectors of the working class.

As a whole, this process is not homogenous but rather presents itself in a combined and unequal form, and with respect to the particular conditions in each company, each branch of production or services, and each union. In fact, as we have tried to show in our reconstruction of the history of workers of Kraft, the loss of prestige and legitimacy of the Peronist trade union leadership of Daer is not a new phenomenon but rather can be traced back to the beginning of the 1990's, (and afterwards extends itself to many of the main principle companies in the food-processing industry) and is closely to the paradigm of "business trade unionism" which Rodolfo Daer represents in our country. Regardless, what allows us to speak of a growing phenomenon (a fact which worries both the traditional trade union leaders and the national government, and the bosses) is what we can call the beginnings of a "vacuum" of trade union representation which involves the trade

union leaderships as a whole, but particularly the *Moyanista* (loyal to Hugo Moyano – translator) CGT, a pillar of the national government<sup>43</sup>.

This "vacuum" can be seen in two time-frames. The first, a long-term one, is related to the process of relative de-unionisation which our country has been through in the past few years, [particularly during the 1990's. If we analyse this in terms of numbers, according to the statistics revealed by the Survey of Labour Indicators<sup>44</sup>, only 37% of registered private workers in the country are unionised<sup>45</sup>. However, if we look at the fact that this information comes from the limited universe of registered workers, the real rate of unionisation is substantially lower. If we look at these facts in a more detailed manner, we find two interesting issues. In the first place, only 56%<sup>46</sup> of the companies in the country count with at least one

43 After the repression of September 25th, a headline in the newspaper *Perfil* read: "The trade unionists linked to the government pierden are losing the ability to contain their members". Elsewhere, in the digital newspaper *La Política Online*, Ignacio Fianza maintained that "A new social actor threatens the Kirchner-Moyano axis" and affirmed that "On the back of this generation, there is emerging a new *piquetero*-student axis which threatens the ability to control social conflict and the public space which Kirchner and Moyano have so far managed. The ascent of a new oppositionist left which surprised those in power"; See <http://lapoliticaonline.com/noticias/val/60413/un-nuevo-actor-social-amenaza-el-eje-kirchner---moyano.html>

44 The EIL is a permanent survey carried out by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, since 1998. The survey is directed a formal private companies of 10 or more workers in all branches of activity except primary. It is updated monthly, and covers five conurbations: Gran Buenos Aires, Gran Rosario, Gran Córdoba, Gran Mendoza and Gran Tucumán (Trajtemberg *et al.*, 2005). The facts used in this article correspond to the year 2005, based on 45.473 companies in the whole country.

45 Trajtemberg, D.; Berhó, F.; Atorresi, P.; Lauphan, W. (2005) "Encuesta de Relaciones Laborales", ponencia presentada en el 7º Congreso Nacional de Estudios del Trabajo, Buenos Aires.

46 Trajtemberg *et al.*, underline the variation of affiliation according to the size of the company and find that 53% of small companies have at least one workers affiliated, while this increases to 83% in the big companies. At the same time, they also differentiate between the rates of affiliation between branches of activity and find that manufacturing is, along with construction, one of the branches with highest percentage of affiliation (47.2%), in comparison with "communal, social and personal services" which has the lowest rate, of some 24.2%. See Trajtemberg *et al.* (2005: 17).



worker affiliated to a union, which means that in nearly half of all companies in the country, not only are there no shop stewards but also the workers aren't affiliated to any union. In the second place, the rate of unionization is notably lower in the Greater Buenos Aires conurbation (11 percentage points) than in the interior of the country, being 34.9% in Greater Buenos Aires, and 46.2% in the interior of the country<sup>47</sup>, which leads us to suppose that the Greater Buenos Aires conurbation concentrates a very high percentage of non-unionised labour. These facts which, without a shadow of a doubt, imply a situation where the non-unionised workers are unprotected, also shows a profound weakness of the trade union leaderships. When the trade union leaderships operate as state mediators they do this with the legal representation of less than half of waged-labourers. Said in another way, more than 50% of the workforce today finds itself outside of the framework of any legal representation even though, potentially, they are also outside of the control of the traditional union leaderships which are integrated into the state.

But if we look at the sector of workers which are unionised, we find another sign of the weakness of trade union representation: that which refers to trade union representation in the workplace. According to the EIL, only 12.4% of companies have at least one shop steward, which is the same as saying that in almost 9/10 companies in Argentina there are no shop stewards in the workplace. If we break down this statistic according to the characteristics of the company we see a tendency whereby the presence of shop stewards corresponds to the size of the company. In the big companies (of 200 workers or more), like Terrabusi, slightly above half have some kind of shop steward representation; in the "medium" sized companies (50-200 workers), only 30% have some kind of shop steward representation; while in the small companies (10-49 workers) a tiny percentage of 7.5% have some kind of shop steward (Trajtemberg *et al.*, 2005).

Whether through their liquidation via transformation into an actor which guarantees

discipline in the factory, whether via their outright liquidation, what is undoubtable is that inside the factory space, there exists a situation of extreme weakness relating to the rank and file organization of the workers. The emergence of the Comisiones Internas and Cuerpos de Delegados in 2008, is a counter-example, it us a process which is the inverse of the tendency in the 1990's.

Now, this weakening of trade union representation and representativeness viewed in the long term, combines with another set of more recent phenomena which create the "vacuum" which we are talking about. In the first place, the process of revitalization of trade union life and the politically central

This process, encouraged "from above" as a political expression of the government of Néstor Kirchner (the signing of the CCT, collective agreements, forming of the Council of Wages, etc.) generated, "at the base", the appearance of struggles led by alternative leaderships or direct oppositionists to the national leaderships of their respective unions, like many of the cases already mentioned, within which we can find the Kraft struggle. But this trade union revitalization which gave a key role to the trade union confederations (it is interesting to observe the amount of candidates who come from the trade unions on the pro-government and opposition tickets in the last legislative election of 2009), was combined with, since the end of 2008 and onwards, with two phenomena of great importance: the brakes put on the economy by the international economic crisis and the defeat of the national government in the legislative elections of June 28<sup>th</sup>, in other words, the end of the Kirchnerist cycle<sup>48</sup>.

This scenario of a combination between a slowing economy (product of the international crisis) and political crisis of the Kirchner's, subject the trade union leaders – particularly the CGT -, to a double tension which, in the case of Kraft, has shown itself impossible to resolve peacefully: from "below", the pressure to conserve what has been gained in the years of economic and trade union revitalization (working conditions, wage increases,

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47 If we measure it by workplace, in Greater Buenos Aires, the number of companies without any affiliated worker is 49,3%, while in the rest of the country it is 28,1%. (Trajtemberg *et al.*, 2005)

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48 For a more detailed analysis, see Castillo, C. y Lizarrague, F. (2009) "Hacia el fin de un ciclo", en *Lucha de Clases. Revista Marxista de Teoría y Política*, Nº 9, junio, Ediciones IPS, Buenos Aires.

basic measures in terms of health and safety); and from “above”, the pressure by the companies in the case of Kraft exercised even by the US embassy) to end that path of workers conflicts, seeking to “produce the same amount with less workers”, and of the national government, pressuring them to contain the scale of social protest. In this way, the “vacuum” of trade union representation which we are speaking of is a product of a longer-term process of weakening of the trade union leadership (and its capacity as a form of contention), which combines with more recent processes (trade union reactivation 2004-2007, slowdown of the real economy and political defeat of the national government).

Now, this vacancy is closely tied to another factor which has been discussed since the Kraft case: the emergence of expressions of the class-struggle left in the working class in general, and particularly in the factories. These expressions of the left which in Kraft became publicly and politically visible through the current conflict) occupy leading positions in spaces where the traditional trade union leaderships are not present or cannot be present: in the workplace itself. In what Gilly calls the space of direct politicization of the workers via assembly-based organization of the worker-collective in the productive space. This presence opens up a set of questions regarding not the trade union but now the political potential of the workers own organizations in the workplace, and particularly of the class-struggle left in the Argentinean workers movement at a time of “vacuum” of the Peronist leadership.



## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To end we would like to signal, in the form of short theses, some elements which emerge as conclusions from our analysis of the Kraft-Terrabusi struggle as a result of the dimensions proposed by the presentation.

1. The Kraft-Terrabusi conflict and the previous experience of workers organization which backs it up, reintroduces the question of the “Argentinean anomaly” and regarding the political potential of this. If the studies of the world of work dedicated to the field of trade unionism in the last few years have fundamentally looked at an analysis of the state-integrated trade union structures and its strategies of adaption during the 90’s, the revitalization of the Internal s and the Shop Stewards Bodies as fundamental organisms of organization and workers struggles makes us look again at a “forgotten” territory: that of the workplace as the nucleus of cellular domination. In this way it also opens up questions about the relationship between the factory environment and the extra-factory environment, which is to say, between what can *a priori* be considered economic struggles and political struggles.

2. The particular characteristics of the Kraft-Terrabusi conflict (the violence of the attack by the company and tenacious response by the workers), like the explicit objectives of the company of liquidating the workers organization and, in particular, the most combative and organized sector of the factory expressed in the “night shift”, are the fundamentals of the tendency towards the development of an increasing incompatibility between the emergence and strengthening of institutions of democratic organization of the workers in the workplace (Internal s and Shop Stewards Bodies) and the freedom to rule of the capitalists to increase their profitability in the context of the economic crisis underway.

3. The revitalization of the role of the rank and file Internal s and the Shop Stewards Bodies through the insertion of militants of the class-struggle left in the trade unions (as is shown by the case of the food-processing industry), has made possible the return of assembly-based methods (workers

democracy) and the re-legitimizing of direct action (like strikes and road blocks), in opposition to the traditional trade union leaderships.

4. These expressions of the classist left (which in Kraft have become publicly and politically visible since the current conflict) occupy leading spaces where the traditional trade union leaderships are not or cannot be present, expressing what we call a “vacuum” of trade union representation in our country. This presence opens up a set of questions on the potentiality, no longer trade unionist but rather political, of the workers organisms themselves in the workplace and, particularly, of the class-struggle left in the workers movement.

5. Finally, but not less importantly, in relation to a debate which hegemonized the academic social sciences in the last decade, the specific process analysed, the same as other processes of workers’ organisation and struggle of the last five years questions the thesis of the progressive disappearance of workers protest, particularly, of the working class in the factories. Furthermore, it opens the necessity of returning to a field of study which has been rendered invisible: that of asking questions and investigation about the specific characteristics which the struggles of the working class assume today, their links to the struggles of the past and their connection with the rich and extensive tradition of non-worker protests which develop over the past decades in Argentina.

## [ THE STRUGGLE OF THE KRAFT WORKERS IN ARGENTINA THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE ARGENTINE WORKERS MOVEMENT AND THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT ]

By Diego Lotito and Jonatan Ros

### I. Introduction

The conflict in the Kraft Foods factory has been the most important industrial conflict in recent decades in Argentina. During the course of the struggle, it became a political issue which demonstrated the emergence of combative sector of the working class in the political scene, forcing the national government, the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), the business chambers and the US Embassy to intervene. At the same time, alongside the conflict of the Metro workers of Buenos Aires, it has become a symbol of an extensive anti-bureaucratic movement which demonstrates the loss of prestige of the bureaucratic trade union leaderships before the masses. This has serious political consequences, because it hits the main foundation of the alliance on which the Kirchner government is based.

This emergence of a sector of the industrial working class takes place in the context of a process which we characterize as the “end of the cycle” of the Kirchner government<sup>1</sup>, which has its roots in the effects of the international capitalist crisis, the political wearing out of the Presidential couple and the first tendencies towards the end of the “pacification” of the masses which the Peronist government was able to achieve based on the economic growth which came after the devaluation of the peso in 2002.

These factors notwithstanding, we currently are going through a conjuncture where the capitalist



corporations, after the fall suffered in 2009, are preparing for a period of economic recovery during 2010 – the forecasts indicate a fall of around 2% of GDP during the year 2009 and a growth of around 4% for 2010. Taking into account this vision, the bosses are looking to return to the levels of production as 2007, but with less being spent on workers’ wages than in the last 12 months; which is to say, raising the “productivity of labour”, intensifying exploitation. These definitions are key, because if the tendencies towards economic recovery remain, a response by the working class to the bosses attacks will be inevitable. The struggle at Kraft Foods has been a symbolic forerunner to this and for this very reason the representatives of the business class asked for an end to the “state of assembly” in the companies<sup>2</sup> and, faced with

<sup>1</sup> See C. Castillo y F. Lizarrague, “Hacia el fin de un ciclo”, en *Lucha de Clases* N° 9, Bs. As., Ediciones IPS, junio 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The employment lawyer Julián de Diego, one of the main spokesmen for the bosses in Argentina, just one day after the legislative elections of June 2009, set out the agenda of businesses’ concerns in the newspaper *El Cronista*, owned by one of the winners of the elections, Francisco De Narvaez. There he maintained that Allí sostenía que “The most serious issue is not strictly economic. Effectively, what has increased is a certain state of rebellion of labour, which is not even explicitly promoted and much less led by the unions and their leaders (...) the aspirations of the rank and file, have led to two levels of representation: a.) the shop stewards who came to be key protagonists, a problem in itself and because of the network of power which they created, and because of the competition between them and ex shop stewards and iwth those who wish to become shop stewards, the natural

the response of the workers of Kraft to the attack, all the bosses ended up making a common cause with the North American multinational to call for “social peace”.

The perspectives of the situation in Argentina pose the possibility that a period will open in which new episodes of the class struggle will take the struggle at Kraft as their example, thereby accumulating the experiences and organization of the workers, before the unleashing of a catastrophic situation for the whole of the economy which would put the working class and its vanguard up against even greater challenges.

5 months after it began, the outcome of the conflict at Kraft can be resumed, firstly, by noting the political defeat of the North American multinational, which failed in its objective of destroying the workers organization inside the plant in order to press onwards with a plan to reorganize production and implement massive layoffs. Launching an attack which went beyond the balance of forces, the defeat of the bosses resulted in even the national government itself coming out weakened from the conflict, as did the trade union bureaucracies of the CGT and the Food Processing Workers Union (STIA). Second, the conflict presented a partial defeat for the demand of the workers for the reinstatement of all the fired workers, including the majority of the members of the *Cuerpo de Delegados*. However, from the point of view of the workers organization within the factory and the development of the subjectivity of the workers, there is a third element which may be the most decisive when it comes to drawing up a balance sheet of the conflict, and this is that the workers of Kraft won a political victory from the struggle, not only by maintaining their *Comisión Interna (CI)*, but also through their conquest, through the course of the hard struggle – which saw the capitulation of the majority of the

previous *Comisión Interna* which was led by the Maoists of the *Partido Comunista Revolucionario (PCR)* – of a new trade union leadership within the plant which represents the democratic, combative and consistent sector of the leadership of the struggle, with a strong presence of the Trotskyists of the Party of Socialist Workers<sup>3</sup> (PTS). This fact, as we will see, demonstrates a great advance in the consciousness of an important sector of the workers.

Based on this assessment, we can say that the conflict at Kraft was a turning point in the incipient increase in workers struggles which has been developing in Argentina, placing an anti-bureaucratic sector of the industrial proletariat in the centre of the political scene and, alongside this, doing the same for the sectors of the left which form an organic part of this, like our organization the PTS. At the same time, the coverage of the struggle in the national press and television for its duration, showed to hundreds of thousands of people not only the growing influence of the far left in the workers movement, but also the difference, previously little known, between reformists (like the PCR) and revolutionaries in the workers movement. Obviously this assessment is not shared by the PCR, which maintains that it was the “old *comisión interna*” led by its activists, which led the struggle until the signing of the Agreement Act<sup>4</sup> of October 16<sup>th</sup>, dividing it from the “new *comisión interna*” which emerged from the last elections and which they have attacked virulently since that moment. The inconvenient thing about this strange reading of events is that it doesn’t explain why the PCR faction within the leadership, the historical leaders within the factory, which they believe led the struggle with a “correct line”<sup>5</sup>, ended up being defeated in the elections to the *Comisión Interna* by the PTS influenced faction. In this article we will argue against this grotesque view of events, showing which was the form of

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leaders etc., who make up the trade union life of each company or establishment; and b.) the state of assembly created in many leading companies with great turnovers, as a result of the questioning of the representativeness of the different levels of the trade union structure, which is not characterized by being very democratic.”; Bs.As., *El Cronista*, 29/06/09.

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3 *Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas*

4 Acta Acuerdo

5 See the PCR balance sheet of the struggle in “Terrabusi: una lucha ejemplar”, Bs. As., *Hoy* N° 1283, 09/09/2009.

leadership which allowed the conflict to develop and how the emergence of a new leadership inside the factory –which became the leadership of the *Comisión Interna* – was the byproduct of a previous struggle lasting years, to mould a combative activism in the factory, especially based around the night shift, and a political orientation (and method of struggle) which allowed the unity of worker-militants, fired workers and the rank and file, along with the support of students, the unemployed and activists, in order to give a truly combative and class-struggle orientation to the most important industrial workers conflict of the last decades in Argentina. We will analyse this process by looking at the intervention of the main actors in the conflict, its key moments and the conclusions to be drawn, as well as looking at the perspectives opened by the situation and the debate between strategies which it provoked within the workers vanguard.

## II. The actors and their forerunners The Kraft-Foods Terrabusi Company

*“...things are going well for the rich in this country, I would say we’ve never been better. There is class war, and it’s my class that’s making war, and we’re winning.”*

Warren Buffet,  
majority shareholder of Kraft Foods<sup>6</sup>

With a 60 million peso profit in the last two years, Kraft Foods Argentina is the fourth producer of alimentary products in the country, after Arcor, Bagley and Ledesma. Currently the company has three industrial plants: one in the town of Tres Arroyos, Buenos Aires; another in Villa Mercedes in the Province of San Luis; and the most important, the old Terrabusi plant in the municipality Gral.Pacheco, also in Buenos Aires Province. Of the 3,700 people employed by the company in Argentina, 2,600 work at the Pacheco

plant, situated in a strategic industrial zone which borders the Panamericana Highway, and is the most concentrated industrial belt in the country. This is not a secondary factor: in the neighbouring area of Kraft alone, are based important industries like the automobile manufacturers Ford (3,000 workers) and Volkswagen (3,000), the food processor Rioplatense (1,000), Dana (1,000 workers) and various industrial parks, which as a whole make up a strategic zone due to the levels of working class concentration and their potential coming together in the class struggle.

Despite the change of name, Kraft Foods is still better known as “Terrabusi”, the name of the traditional, Argentine owned company, property of Gilberto Montagna and Carlos Reyes Terrabusi, who in 1993, like much of the Argentine capitalist class, sold their company to a multinational, in this case Nabisco, for 270 million dollars. Nabisco, a multinational based in the USA, installed itself in Argentina in 1981 and oversaw a process of capitalist concentration, acquiring some emblematic companies of the Argentina food processing industry like Terrabusi, Vizzolini, Mayco, Suchard and Canale.

In the year 2000 Kraft Foods Argentina was born, through the global merger between Kraft and Nabisco, continuing the process of capitalist concentration and flexibilization of labour, in particular increasing the number of subcontracted workers. Kraft Foods is the largest food processing corporation of the USA and the second at a global level. The company is 230 years old, has 159 plants and more than 90,000 employees<sup>7</sup>. After its integration into the Altria Group (Philip Morris), Warren Buffet became leading shareholder, one of the world’s richest men according to Forbes magazine and economic advisor to the US president Barack Obama. Since 2004, the company “planned a process of redundancies which would affect 10,000 workers and close 20 factories (...) in various countries, like Spain, Venezuela and Colombia”<sup>8</sup>. Argentina is part of this plan which

6 Brooks, D., “Estados Unidos: batalla por los derechos laborales”, México DF, *La Jornada*, 22/08/2005.

7 See the official site: <http://www.kraftfoods.com.ar>

8 Meyer, A., “Negocios y conflictos protagonizados

has been resisted by its workers.

During the first half of the year 2009, Kraft Foods International reported profits of “\$1,487 million, which represents an increase of 10.6% on 2008”<sup>9</sup>. In September, Kraft launched a takeover attempt at the British company Cadbury, with an offer which at the time reached \$16,700 million, which at the time was rejected by Cadbury who considered it “derisory”<sup>10</sup>. Finally, after 5 months of negotiation, on February 2<sup>nd</sup> Cadbury’s shareholders accepted a new offer from Kraft, worth £11,700 million (some \$18,500), creating the largest sweet manufacturer in the world. Both companies have subsidiaries in Argentina<sup>11</sup>.

### The STIA and the *Comisión Interna*

The arrival of the multinational company Nabisco to the head of Terrabusi in 1993 meant, in line with the general tendency of the neoliberal decade, the beginning of a process of rationalization of production based on the flexibilization of the workforce, whose main consequences were the subcontracting of part of the productive process and the dismantling of trade union representation in the workplace, in this case, the *Cuerpo de Delegados* of 60 members.

This last factor is vitally important if we are to understand the current struggles. The STIA and the *Comisión Interna* (CI) of the plant were at the beginning of the 1990 in the hands of Rodolfo Daer, who in turn was the General Secretary of the CGT. Daer was one of the main exponents of the so-called “business trade unionism”, which during the terms of Carlos Menem were associated with the imperialist multinational and privatized companies (and their junior partners of the national

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por Kraft en diversos países. Una política empresaria global”, Bs. As., *Página/12*, 05/10/2009.

9 *Agencia EFE*, Madrid, agosto 2009.

10 “Cadbury rechaza oferta de Kraft”, CNN Expansión, 11/09/2009, en <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/>.

11 “Un nuevo gigante: Kraft Foods cerró la compra de Cadbury por 18.500 M/u\$s”, *Bloomberg*, 04/02/2010.



capitalist class), guaranteeing the application of reforms which deregulated the labour market and imposing the division of the workers ranks between permanent staff, subcontracted, tertiary workers, “cash in hand”, etc.

In Terrabusi the resistance to these flexibilization plans was expressed in the changes in leadership of the CI. In 1993, militants of the PCR<sup>12</sup>, led by Ramón Bogado, won the leadership of the plant in alliance with Peronist sectors<sup>13</sup>. From then on the CI of the factory would remain in the hands of the PCR. However, despite having a left-wing trade union leadership, during the 1990’s – and especially since 1995 -, Kraft workers suffered a series of defeats, shown by the advances of labour flexibilization, the liquidation of the *Cuerpo de Delegados*, the imposition of polyvalence, tertiarization and the implementation of fixed term contracts. In 2000, the arrival of Kraft Foods at the leadership of the factory after its merger with Nabisco, was welcomed with a plan of struggle which culminated in the firing of 79 workers, which was a heavy defeat for militancy in the factory. This tendency only began to be reverted since 2004.

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12 The PCR is the most famous Maoist current in Argentina, born from a rupture with the Communist Party in 1968. For a critical overview of the PCR see “El Partido Comunista Revolucionario en los ‘70”, en R. Werner y F. Aguirre, *Insurgencia Obrera en la Argentina 1969-1976*, Cap. XIX, Bs.As., Ediciones IPS, 2009, p.381.

13 PCR Alimentation Industry Committee; “Terrabusi: Una larga experiencia de confrontación política y recuperación sindical”, *Política y Teoría* N° 53, Bs. As., 2004.

## The Emergence of a New Trade Union Activism

As we have analyzed in other articles<sup>14</sup>, the year 2004 marked the beginning of a new cycle of the class struggle in Argentina. After the economic catastrophe of 2001-2002 which gave rise to mass participation in the unemployed movements and the experiences of factory occupations (with the textile factory Brukman and the ceramics factory Zanon as the most famous), with the reappearance of the working employed working class in various conflicts, we can see the emergence of a phenomenon which came to be known as “rank and file trade unionism”<sup>15</sup>. This reappearance depended on three factors: 1.) the growth of the economy and employment (mainly low paid and with little or no rights and protection), encouraged by the devaluation; 2.) the entering of a new generation in the workplaces (the trade union militancy which has erupted since 2004 had workers under 35 years old as its main actors); 3.) a certain encouragement “from above” of the first struggles on behalf of the Kirchner government and the trade union leaders (CGT), who used them to “convince” the bosses chambers to negotiate wages in order to guarantee “social peace”.

14 L. Meyer & G. Gutiérrez, “Luchas obreras y recomposición de clase”, *Revista Lucha de Clases* N°5, Bs.As., Ediciones IPS, 2005; C. Castillo, “Introducción” en *Experiencias Subterráneas*, Bs.As., Ediciones IPS, 2007.

15 This new cycle can be divided in three phases: a first phase from 2004 to 2006, opened with the four day metro workers strike in Buenos Aires, which was dominated by conquests related to demands over wages, working conditions and trade union organization. A second phase from 2006 to 2008, dominated by wage negotiations led by the traditional trade union leaderships and some struggles with a tougher characteristic and repression, as in the case of the teachers of the province of Neuquén (with the assassination of Carlos Fuentealba), the TVB workers, the tyre factory FATE, the floating Casino of San Telmo in Buenos Aires, the textile factory Mafissa, etc. And a third phase, the current one, beginning with the end of 2008, with the first signs of the international economic crisis showing and the firings of subcontracted workers from car factories/car parts producers, along with the Kraft conflict, that of the workers of IVECO and Gestamp in the Province of Córdoba; the factory occupations against the closures of metalworks Paraná Metal and Mahle, the paper mill Massuh and the printing company Indugraf, among others. For a deeper analysis of this process, see M. Maiello and M. Romano, op. Cit.



In the *STIA* this process was reflected clearly with the “reclaiming” of the *comisiones internas* of multinationals like PepsiCo and Cadbury-Stani by openly anti-bureaucratic shop stewards and trade union currents, leading to the building of an organized opposition to the bureaucracy of Rodolfo Daer in the form of the Celeste y Blanca Lista, created by the PCR and PTS based in Kraft-Terrabusi, PepsiCo and Cadbury-Stani<sup>16</sup>. In the general elections of the union carried out in 2004, this List would win 20% of the total votes and the great majority in the main factories. As *La Nación* would say: “The ex leader of the official CGT Rodolfo Daer was on course when we went to press to be reelected as leader of the Capital region of the food processing workers union in yesterday’s elections, according to unofficial figures released by the electoral committee. The Green List, representing the existing leadership, was to obtain more than 1,100 votes against 800 for the Blue List, put forward by Fernando Giménez (who was for 19 years the joint secretary with Daer) and some 450 votes for the Sky Blue List, led by Ramón Bogado, who led an alliance between the Combative Class Current<sup>17</sup> and the

16 The loss of prestige of the Rodolfo Daer bureaucracy in the main industrial plants led to the emergence of a third electoral ticket in the trade union, claiming to be an “opposition”, led by the then Joint Secretary of the Union, Giménez. As a union organizer at PepsiCo, an activist of the PTS: “This is an event without precedent. Rodolfo Daer had never faced any opposition in the Food Processing Workers Union of the Federal Capital and Greater Buenos Aires (...) We are 173 candidates, of whom 30% are colleagues and have overcome all the legal bureaucratic obstacles. We can count with the support of some 600 workers between candidates and colleagues who have signed in support”; Interview with Leonardo Norriella, “Queremos delegados por sección en todas las fábricas. Se presentó la Celeste y Blanca contra Daer en la alimentación”, Bs. As., *La Verdad Obrera* N° 144, 30/07/2004.

17 *Corriente Clasista y Combativa*



Party of Socialist Workers<sup>18</sup>”.

### **Arrival of a New Generation, a New *Comisión Interna* and the Reclaiming of the *Cuerpo de Delegados* by sector<sup>19</sup>**

In September 2005 new elections to the CI in Kraft were held. List 1 (then the leadership) composed mainly of PCR activists and with a lot of weight in the morning shift – were Ramón Bogado, the historic leader of the list, worked – and to a lesser extent the afternoon turn, was reelected with 69% of the votes. However, Javier Herмосilla was also a candidate on the list, a representative of the night shift and part of a new generation of workers. Within this new generation of workers, which would give rise to shop stewards and activists, the night shift would stand out. In this shift a rank and file activism would be developed which would reclaim “old” clandestine organizational methods, as well as assembly based decision-making in the workplace and outside the plant, incorporating also sectors of workers without trade union representation, like the subcontracted logistical workers. As part of this process, the “From Below” trade union current would appear, created by activists from the Party of Socialist Workers (PTS) and independents, based mainly on the night turn. Combative shop stewards and activists from other food processing companies as well as Kraft, like PepsiCo and Cadbury-Stani, and who used the experience of struggle and organization of the workers of Zanon as their point of reference, would also form part of this group.

A key element of this important process happening in the rank and file, was the resistance by workers to the routine firing of subcontracted workers. As a shop steward explained: “in 2007, as a result

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18 “Daer, reelegido en el gremio de la alimentación”, Bs. As., *La Nación*, 17/09/2004.

19 For a more detailed description of this process see P. Varela y D. Lotito, “La Lucha de Kraft-Terrabusi. Comisiones Internas, izquierda clasista y ‘vacancia’ de representación sindical”, en *Revista Conflicto Social* N° 2, Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Bs.As., UBA, 2009.

of our reclaiming of old methods of workers self-organization, mainly in the night shift, what was going to be a simple meeting of militants outside the factory to discuss how to get a 20% pay rise and the permanent contracting of our temp colleagues, became an assembly of 250 workers – between permanent, subcontracted and agency workers – which resolved to block the *Panamericana* highway in order to demand the permanent contracting of our colleagues employed by the agency and fighting against the miserable wage rise which the government and CGT had agreed at that time. This was the first assembly outside the factory which had happened in Terrabusi in decades. Both Herмосilla and Bogado were there (...) One week after this picket, the bosses took their revenge and fired 60 agency workers in each shift, claiming that the national energy crisis which Argentina was suffering at the time and the restrictions on gas usage by the government, had caused production to fall. This fallacious argument received an historic response by the workers, when one sector of these 180 fired workers – led by agency workers from the night shift – went to the factory and jumped the fence, stood face to face with the *Comisión Interna* and called on them to call a strike of the whole plant, which was called and observed by all the permanent workers, demonstrating that the differentiation between permanent and temporary staff was becoming ever more diminished<sup>20</sup>.

That explains the immediate background to the reclaiming of the *Cuerpo de Delegados* by sector in March 2008, in which the new generation of workers played a key role: more than 40% of shop stewards elected were part of that group of young workers (previously temps) who had resisted the firing in 2007<sup>21</sup>. The night shift – the smallest in the plant but recognized as the most combative and organized – played a key role in this process. This explains why more than 60% of those fired in the 2009 conflict were from that shift.

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20 Entrevista a Camilo Mones, delegado despedido del turno tarde y dirigente del PTS, 07/01/2010.

21 H. Echeverre, “Nuevo Cuerpo de Delegados en Terrabusi”, Bs. As., *La Verdad Obrera* N° 269, 13/03/2008.



### III. The conflict

*“Every struggle hides the seed of revolution”*

*Jesco von Puttkamer,  
Prussian Minister*

#### The Immediate Precedent: the rebellion over swine flu

On July 3rd 2009 workers stopped production at the Kraft Foods plant demanding better hygienic conditions – like the closing of the crèche and leave for mothers with children of school age – in the face of the Swine Flu epidemic which took place in Argentina and particularly affected a plant where more than 60% of the personnel are women, many of them with children.

In response to the workers demands, the company insisted that it was not going to take any measures until “someone dies, as happened in Mexico”. In response to this disdainful and domineering attitude, the workers decided by assembly to stop production and mobilize workers, representatives of the union, the *Comisión Interna* (CI) and shop stewards of the afternoon turn to march to the offices of the company bosses. This caused the intervention of the Ministry of Labour, which decreed two days leave and the disinfection of the plant over the weekend. The company however refused to carry out this basic measure, causing production to be paralyzed again, this time for a whole week.

A month and a half later, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, the company fired 158 workers and began legal action against the majority of the leaders of the events of July 3<sup>rd</sup> and all the sacked workers. Among these were five shop stewards from the CI, members of the STIA congress, the majority of the *Cuerpo de Delegados* and tens of worker-militants. The company was attacking all the worker tendencies in the plant, including the trade union bureaucracy of the CGT represented by the congress members of the Green List<sup>22</sup>. However, the company would soon see that its actions didn’t correspond to the balance of forces and then “limited” its objective to beheading the workers rank and file organization, destroying the *Comisión Interna*, the *Cuerpo de Delegados*, and sacking the most conscious worker militants. That this was an attack on worker organization was made more than clear by the fact that, while the company’s public declarations insisted that the sackings were taking place because of the supposed “kidnapping” of bosses and administration during the march to the Headquarters during the afternoon shift, workers from all the shifts were being fired.

#### 1) The Bosses Attack, the Workers Response, and the Leadership of the Conflict.

At 2pm on Tuesday August 18<sup>th</sup>, the company denied entry to many tens of workers from the afternoon shift. These however got past security and entered the plant, and production stopped. The same happened on the night shift, at 10pm – here there were more than 80 sackings. After midnight, the Ministry of Labour declared

22 *Lista Verde*

“obligatory conciliation”, but the company only momentarily observed this, giving the fired workers tasks until 4am, at which point they were ordered to leave the production lines. From the beginning, then, the imperialist corporation was showing the intransigence it would maintain throughout the whole conflict. This attitude would quickly frustrate the expectations that a sector of the workers held in the Ministry of Labour.

The next day, the company began proceedings in the Labour Tribunals of the municipality of San Isidro to take away the union rights of the majority of the *Comisión Interna* and one *STIA* congress member. Before the unilateral breaking of the obligatory conciliation by the company, the majority of the *Comisión Interna*, led by Ramón Bogado of the *PCR*, allowed the plant to keep working, arguing that it was necessary to wait for the decision of the Ministry of Labour, even though the fired workers remained inside the plant whilst not working. This situation, which would remain the case throughout the episode, established a division between the fired workers and the majority of the plant.

**It was at this time, at the very beginning of the conflict, where we saw the first confrontation within the *Cuerpo de Delegados* and the *Comisión Interna* over how to respond to the intransigence of the bosses. As will be seen, internal confrontation and discussion over the course of the struggle which would take place before every decisive moment, through which a system of leadership would emerge with regards to said moment.**

The majority of the *CI* refused to call a roadblock of the *Panamericana* highway. At this point, the minority within the *CI*, led by Javier Hermosilla of the “From Below” tendency and the *PTS*, argued to redouble the strength of the measures being taken: faced with the breaking of the obligatory conciliation by the company the only response was to take tougher measures. **This would be the case when on returning to work at 10pm, the night shift decided in a mass assembly to return to strike action and stop production in order to demand the return of all the fired workers, call**

**on *STIA* to call a general strike, and carry out the first blocking of the *Panamericana***<sup>23</sup>. Except for a brief interval, the total stoppage of the factory would continue from this day until September 25<sup>th</sup>, the date on which the police would evict the plant. This then was the true start of the struggle.

### **2) The struggle to maintain unity between the fired workers and the majority of workers in the factory**

The refusal by the bosses to comply with the “obligatory conciliation” caused the Ministry of Labour to call a new meeting for 24/08 where it again ordered the company to allow the fired workers in the next day and to delegate them work. The company allowed the workers into the factory but kept them secluded from the rest of the workers in a room. **This unleashed a new discussion inside the *Comisión Interna* as the sector led by Bogado would insist that they had “won the first round”, and the strike was called off**<sup>24</sup>. **This line disarmed the workers in the face of the bosses’ maneuver and reestablished the division between the fired workers and the rest of the plant.** The night shift understood this and condemned the maneuver by the company: “Terrabusi has its own Guantanamo Bay”<sup>25</sup>, proposing to “not work until everyone is in their place on the production lines”. The assemblies of each shift declared themselves in agreement with this, as it would reunite the fired and non-fired workers and strengthen the strike.

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23 It would be the blocking of both sides of the *Panamericana* Highway, the main point of access to the City of Buenos Aires from the north, during rush hour, which would bring the conflict in Kraft to light. On Friday 21 there was another march of 2,000 people to the *Panamericana* and a rally, which was covered by all the press.

24 In the newspaper *Hoy* of the *PCR*, Ramón Bogado maintains that “as we go to press, Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> at midday, the fired workers have been able to enter the plant, without taking up their tasks in their positions of work. We won a very important round, in what is a very tough battle”; see “Para triunfar hay que unir a todos los compañeros”, Bs.As., *Hoy* N° 1281, 26/08/2009.

25 “Terrabusi tiene su propio Guantánamo”, leaflet of Kraft workers, 26/08/2009.

In this way the conflict toughened and on the 26th the *STIA* called a march to the Ministry of Labour in Buenos Aires, but without calling their union out on strike despite the demands of the Kraft, Stani and Pespico workers, who marched anyway demanding a general strike. **In the early stages of the conflict, even the trade union bureaucracy of Rodolfo Daer at the STIA and Hugo Moyano of the CGT took a stance, calling the attack by Kraft a “genuine provocation” and condemning the fact that that this foreign company didn’t respect “national sovereignty”<sup>26</sup>. However, this support would quickly evaporate.** After the march to the Ministry of Labour, the leadership of the union ended its participation in the struggle, even calling a Plenary of Shop Stewards loyal to the union leadership to instruct them to refuse to vote for any measures of support. The new meeting with the Ministry of Labour didn’t bring any changes and the company maintained its position.

In this context, **unlike other struggles where the “obligatory conciliation” periods implied an obstacle to development of the workers struggle, in Kraft the struggle continued and deepened, based on the strength of the activists, the fired workers and the great majority of non-fired workers who maintained the strike in the plant. However as we have seen, this didn’t happen without a tough struggle in the heart of the workers leadership within the factory.** This was shown once again when, after days of struggle, the workers decided to “2rest” for some days from the strongest measures of struggle, like the permanent state assembly for each whole shift. This decision was to be ended on Tuesday September 1<sup>st</sup> at 6am. However, the majority of the *Comisión Interna* proposed argued that there was a “ceasefire” and to extend it, at the same time that the bosses were, with foresight, putting up wire fencing at the entrance to the factory strengthening security and sacking a well-known activist and militant of the *PCR*. In this context, extending the ceasefire was a senseless measure.

Despite the vacillations of the *PCR* and the

intimidation by the bosses, leaders and security against the workers, the minority of the *Comisión Interna* and shop stewards of the night and afternoon shifts gave a public fight to restart the strike, against the majority of the *Comisión Interna* which insisted that it was necessary to continue the ceasefire for longer. The fact is that in a conflict, a ceasefire can’t be more than a circumstantial tactic, sometimes inevitable and even necessary, but determined by space and time. If we forget this, if a ceasefire becomes something permanent or undefined, then it stops being a ceasefire and becomes a capitulation.

Eventually the majority of the *Comisión Interna* had to accept this line and on Tuesday at 6am production was stopped again. Here it began to show that even though the PTS and the From Below tendency (as a minority in the *Comisión Interna*) were at the beginning of the conflict only a small fraction of the leadership of the factory (1 of the 11 members of the *Comisión Interna*), **the combination of the deep and patient work done before – mainly in the night shift – and the tenacity of the political intervention, made it possible for their arguments to win influence and the support of the majority in crucial moments, proposing the boldest measures and changing the course of the conflict so that this would advance.**

On Wednesday 02/09 the workers blocked the *Panamericana* Highway again and this would once more give their struggle prominence in the mainstream media.



26 “Para la CGT, despidos en Terrabusi son una provocación”, Bs.As., *El Sindical*, 19/08/09.

### 3) **The First Acts of Repression, the Danger of Adventurism, and Workers Spontaneity**

Due to the strength of the conflict, the company and provincial security forces now responded with the first openly repressive actions. On Friday 4<sup>th</sup>, with the collaboration of the public prosecutor's office of El Talar (a neighbouring district of Gral. Pacheco) and the police, the company began a lockout against the workers of the morning shift, ordering for the plant to be emptied and giving "leave" until Monday, with the intention of scaring the workers and isolating the sacked workers within the factory in order to prepare an eviction.

Shamefully, the *Comisión Interna* shop stewards of the morning shift, who all were part of the PCR led tendency, even though they knew about the situation, did not call an assembly on how to respond. Due to this, all of the workers from that shift left when the order was given to empty the factory and the *Comisión Interna* tried in vain to stop them. However, in these conditions and with the factory empty, they insisted that it was necessary to stay inside with a small group of fired workers, while the majority of the shop stewards and the minority of the *Comisión Interna* argued that it was necessary for part of the leadership to leave the factory in case of an eviction and the arrest of the leaders, in order to be able to continue the struggle the next day. The majority of militants in the factory, above all in the afternoon shift which on arriving to work that day found themselves locked out, called from the outside for the group of fired workers to leave. At this point, there were more than 30 workers in an enormous complex. A large assembly at the entrance resolved that these colleagues should leave and return on Monday when the period of leave would finish and all the workers would be back at the plant.

**This situation led to two key discussions, which due to their potential consequences were relevant throughout the whole conflict: on the one hand, how to respond to an attempt to evict the plant.** For the minority of the *Comisión Interna* and the majority of the shop stewards and militants, the most effective course of action was keep one sector of the shop stewards within the

plant, while another sector would stay outside in case of an eviction, repression and arrests, so that they could continue with the struggle. **Viewed in retrospect, the irresponsible adventurism of the PCR put the struggle itself at risk, as if their line had been followed, the leadership of the struggle would have been beheaded and this would very likely have been the end<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, the discussion of what relationship to establish between the fired workers and the mass of non-fired workers who had throughout the whole struggle shown great signs of spontaneous will to struggle, also became central.** This was shown to be the case, not only with the lockout, but also when after this maneuver, on Monday 07/09 when the plant was filled with police and security and the company tried to stop the fired workers from entering, these managed to get in and taunt the police, who would try to lock them in the canteen. In this episode, hundreds of workers from the morning shift came out to defend them and a large spontaneous actions prevented them from being arrested. **In opposition to the adventurist maneuvers by the majority of the *Comisión Interna*, the rank and file of the factory showed for good that it was possible (and necessary) to insist on the unity between the fired and non-fired workers<sup>28</sup>.**

### 4) **Obligatory conciliation, capitalist laws and workers unity**

On Tuesday 08/09 the obligatory conciliation decreed by the Ministry of Labour and never observed by the company, came to an end. While the strike continued, human rights organizations held an audience with the public prosecutor's office which had ordered the workers to leave by the 7<sup>th</sup> and presented a protest headed by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel,

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27 This irresponsible and adventurist policy of the PCR was sadly supported by the Partido Obrero and the Nuevo MAS in their press, who reproduced the same calumnies as the PCR against the PTS. Neither the PO nor the Nuevo MAS had any influence or responsibility in the struggle.

28 While these events were happening, another group of fired workers were repressed leaving outside the first injured workers, amongst them Javier Hermosilla of the CI

and a group of workers and their families marched to the Presidential residence Olivos to call on the president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to act. Finally the Ministry of Labour stated that there had not been an extension in the obligatory conciliation. Despite all this, the workers continued their struggle and the halt of production continued.

A commentator for the PTS weekly newspaper *La Verdad Obrera (Workers Truth)* analyzed it thus: *“The Ministry of Labour, which extends the great majority of obligatory conciliations when no agreement is reached, won’t do so this time, in order to favour the avaricious bosses. Despite this, the fired workers remain inside the plant and a large assembly of the night shift and the fired workers voted to continue the struggle. It was agreed this time that a group of shop stewards from each shift should be outside in order to organize the struggle in the case of repression and arrests. The paralysis of the plant continues and the workers have voted for more road blockades”*<sup>29</sup>.

This proved to be very important, because it was the time in which the majority of workers of Kraft challenged capitalist legality itself and, despite no obligatory conciliation having been decreed, they resolved to keep the strike going and to defend the right of the fired workers to remain inside the plant<sup>30</sup>. In this way the unity of the workers in the factory was strengthened. On the morning on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup>, all the morning shift went inside the factory and agreed to keep a “permanent state of assembly” – which is to say the stoppage of all activity – in order to demand the reincorporation of the fired workers, despite the permanent discouragement of the leaders,

29 “Terrabusi: no a la represión ni a caer en engaños”, Bs. As., *La Verdad Obrera* N° 342, 10/09/2009.

30 In general, in the majority of workers conflicts due to sackings, “obligatory conciliation” is decreed and lifted with the fired workers outside of the workplace. But even in a case where the bosses were being defied with regards to this point, as in the case of FATE, even though during the first part of the obligatory conciliation the workers remained inside the plant except for some hours near the end, the rest of the workers always kept working. On the contrary, Kraft showed the possibility of unity of the fired and non-fired workers, a great example of struggle.

who threatened that this would only mean that the company would not pay the two weeks owed, while it would not get anybody back working. This same day, the Public Prosecutor Laura Capra, who had ordered the eviction the previous Friday, would return to the factory, but would be forced to leave in the face of widespread rejection of her presence on the part of the workers. From then on, the bosses, the government the press and the business chambers would speak not only of the strike, but of the “occupation” of Kraft.

### 3) The Intervention of the Business chambers and the Imperialists in response to Potential of the Struggle

One month after the start of the conflict, the struggle at Kraft began to win popular support. None of the different factions in power in Argentina were expecting such a long or tenacious resistance. On the morning of Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> the country awoke to news of a new blockade of *Panamericana* Highway by the workers of the night shift. A few hours later, the route was blocked again, this time by the workers from the morning shift. These actions, at the same time as strengthening the workers struggle and its strength in its own forces, weakened the company and the TU bureaucracy. For this reason, when a group of strike breakers from the union tried, along with the bosses, to put some production lines to work, they were defeated, although these pressures on the inside continued for weeks.

This was when a new chapter, that of the intervention of the business chambers – the “trade unions of the bourgeoisie” – came out in defence of their class, calling for the eviction of the workers. This was explained by the COPAL (Coordinator of Food Products Industries)<sup>31</sup>, the Chamber of which the multinational Kraft Foods is a member and which was then presided over by Jorge Zorreguieta, ex Secretary of Agriculture under the last military dictatorship. In its statement it referred to the legitimate right to

31 *Coordinadora de las industrias de Productos Alimenticios*

strike and of trade union freedom as “illegal behavior, which violates the rule of law and constitutes a danger for the workers themselves, the companies and society as a whole” and called to “put an end to the state of illegitimate occupation so that work and production can be restored in said plant”<sup>32</sup>. Seconding the words of COPAL, the “national business class” represented by the Argentine Industrial Union (UIA) came out to defend the foreign monopoly company and in a statement signed by the president Héctor Méndez condemned “the openly illegal methods used by a group of workers (...which...) affect judicial security and the necessary climate for investment. Days later the Rural Society<sup>33</sup> also joined the crusade, with its President Hugo Biolcati stating his concern about “the explosion of this kind of conflict in which some *Comisiones Internas* seem to be more powerful than the CGT itself”<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, the US embassy itself intervened into the conflict, expressing its support for “full application of labour rights and protection, as well as respect for property rights and the decisions of the judicial system”, while it pronounced itself in favour of an “enduring solution” to the conflict which would not put at risk the wishes of the US administration to “promote US investment in Argentina”<sup>35</sup>.

In opposition to this intervention, **on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> more than 2,000 students, workers and activists for unemployed, social and left-wing organizations, led by the workers of Kraft, marched to the US embassy** in order to demand the reincorporation of all the fired workers. In this way, **the big companies and US imperialism sealed their alliance - based on common interests -, against the Kraft workers, calling on the national government of the Kirchner’s and the**

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32 “Los industriales de la alimentación, en alerta por la toma en la ex Terrabusi”, Bs.As., *Clarín*, 14/09/2009.

33 *Sociedad Rural* – organization representing Argentina’s large landowners

34 “Los industriales de la alimentación, en alerta por la toma en la ex Terrabusi”, Bs.As., *Clarín*, 14/09/2009.

35 M. Martín, “Presión de Estados Unidos por la empresa Kraft”, Bs.As., *Crítica*, 29/09/2009.



**provincial government of Daniel Scioli to repress the workers; the latter would in fact put his police officers at the service of the multinational company to militarize the plant.**

Kraft had asked the courts to prohibit the entry of members of the *CI* to the plant. This request was rejected by the Tribunals of the San Isidro Municipality who intervened into the case, except for the Labor Tribunal No.3 of San Isidro, which on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Spetmeber decreed a precautionary measure prohibiting Javier Hermosilla from entering the plant for actions he supposedly took during the conflict. This was a scandalous measure, which was not backed up by any serious proof, but was in line with the objective of the company of beheading the leadership of the workers, a task which López Matheu, a spokesman for the company and expert in “liquidating” workers organizations in monopoly companies, was charged with<sup>36</sup>.

After the Court N° 1 of San Isidro district rejected the request for an eviction by the company and the Public Prosecutor Laura Capra, the company appealed on Friday 18<sup>th</sup>, which the Chamber of Appeals of San Isidro would also reject. However, the declarations by the bosses’ chambers, the US embassy and the government itself, prepared the climate for the eviction of the plant, occupied by fired workers and with a total stoppage of production, as part of an offensive against the

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36 A director of the media conglomerate the Clarín Group, Pedro López Matheu was charged with the liquidation of the *comisiones internas* of the newspaper producers and their printing plant, calling for repression in the years 2000 and 2004.

new workers movement and its rank and file organizations which were coming to light with this conflict. The fact is that the eruption of a strike like that of Kraft onto the national scene, was the most important change in the political situation at the time. The strike of 2,600 workers became an example for the whole of the working class. **From one of the most concentrated industrial zones of the strategically key Buenos Aires conurbation, the workers of Kraft reclaimed the method of the mass-supported strike, combined with the blockade of the *Panamericana* Highway, in order to overcome geographic limitations and impact on the whole population, undergoing an experience which tomorrow millions will follow. Supporting them were the students and unemployed who blocked the streets of and access points to Buenos Aires City in solidarity. This was what terrified the bourgeoisie, who responded asking for repression**

#### **6.) The Intransigence of the Bosses, the Role of the Government and the Trade Unión Bureaucracy**

The same day that the Chamber of Appeals of San Isidro rejected the request for an eviction of the factory, Kraft announced that it would not be paying wages. In a letter it explained that the company believed that the workers had “collaborated with the company” but that all the same it would not be paying them. In order to do this, it called on them to “take action” and help to “get the fired workers out of the plant”, in a violation of their most basic and elemental rights. Unable to find “scabs” amongst the ever more delegitimized trade union bureaucracy in the factory the bosses undertook a shameless and miserable piece of blackmail, orchestrated with complete impunity and divulged to thousands of people in a public letter.

At this point, the workers of the night shift, in assembly, published a bulletin in which they condemned the policy of the bosses as “An abhorrent and illegal proposal”, and they responded accordingly: on Monday 14/09, 250 workers from the night shift began a road blockade which would afterwards be taken up by colleagues from other shifts; this was the seventh blocking of the

*Panamericana* Highway and it lasted eight hours. In this way the conflict again moved to another level. This new action by the workers forced the Ministry of Labour to demand the company to pay the owed wages, but the company preferred to pay more money in fines than it owed in wages, with the objective of breaking the strike by starving out the workers. **But in the end the company didn't even pay its fines and the government didn't take any measure to enforce its own orders. Once again the institutions of capitalist democracy showed, as Lenin used to say, that they are the best cover up for the dictatorship of the bosses.**

In response to this situation the workers organized another road block, which for the first time was attended by hundreds of workers of the morning shift to march along the *Panamericana*. The demands for the reincorporation of the fired workers and the payment of wages were brought together in a common action, and a measure which the company had taken to divide the workers, threatened to become its opposite, radicalizing a sector of the rank and file which for the first time came out to block the Highway. **From this moment on, the only option left for the government to “resolve” the conflict was to resort to repression. The trade union bureaucracy was one of the key actors charged with preparing the climate for an eviction.**

The CGT and the STIA, which at the beginning of the conflict had condemned the company, later became firm opponents of the workers' struggle. Hugo Moyano referred to the conflict with a phrase which would become famous: “You wanted freedom of trade union affiliation? There you have it.” The boss of the CGT warned that “if the government or the Courts keep on encouraging (as the Supreme Court already had), the formation of unions independent from the CGT, there will be cases like that of Kraft”<sup>37</sup>. Some days later this line of attack against the struggle and its leaders would deepen, with Moyano condemning those “sectors of workers who become politicized, then

37 C. BURGUEÑO, “Moyano advierte al Gobierno: ‘Habrà más conflictos Kraft’”, Bs.As., *Ámbito Financiero*, 11/09/2009.



ultra-left wing sectors get involved and lead the workers into a situation like this<sup>38</sup>, in this way collaborating with the operation which was being prepared to undertake the eviction of the plant, which would take place three days later.

The repression was not only a response to the “concern” of the bosses and encouraged by the business chambers, but also the trade union bureaucracy which acted as to ensure “social peace”.

The From Below tendency condemned these statements, declaring that “Moyano was in the 1990’s – as leader of the Argentine Workers Movement<sup>39</sup> (MTA) - a fervent opposition to the CGT which in those years was led by Rodolfo Dear (...) Today he does the dirty work of trying to isolate workers who struggle for their jobs<sup>40</sup>. For its part, the Confederation of Argentine Workers<sup>41</sup> (CTA), which for years has been calling for “freedom of trade union affiliation” and the granting of trade union rights to its confederation, didn’t undertake a single solidarity action as a workers organization in response to the offensive by Kraft and a strike in one of the largest factories in the country, limiting its involvement to inviting Bogado and Hermosilla to speak at one of their rallies.

**7.) The impact of the strike on the student movement, and how the solidarity of the students and unemployed workers terrified the bourgeoisie as a warning of a potential class alliance.**

The conflict at Kraft Foods received solidarity from famous personalities, workers organizations, political groups and, above all, the student movement. The latter emerged as a political



actor, providing an effective method of solidarity action, blocking roads across the country with the support of various student unions, creating a climate of “transport chaos” – as the press called it – and bringing the conflict to public attention. Out of these actions, some of the most noted would be the blocking of various central intersections in Buenos Aires carried out by the students unions of Literature and Philosophy (led by the PTS and independents) along with other left-wing currents<sup>42</sup>. This process however wasn’t homogenous. If in Buenos Aires the solidarity actions were essentially driven by the activism of students unions led by the left (which accounts for their relatively small size even if they were very effective politically), in the Universities of Northern Greater Buenos Aires – geographically closer to the Kraft Foods plant -, as in the University of General Sarmiento (UNGS) and University of Luján (UNLu) – both located in the highly populated San Miguel municipality -, the impact of the struggle in the students movement was much broader and deeper.

38 “Kraft: Moyano criticó a ‘los sectores de izquierda que llevan a estas luchas fratricidas’”, Bs.As., *Télam*, 22/09/2009.

39 *Movimiento de los Trabajadores Argentinos*

40 Agrupación Desde Abajo, “Hugo Moyano le da una mano a Rodolfo Daer”, Bs. As., *La Verdad Obrera* N° 344, 24/09/2009.

41 *Central de Trabajadores Argentinos*

42 Both the PO (leader of the Buenos Aires University Federation –FUBA) and the PCR, despite having a more important leadership role in the student unions of the University of Buenos Aires, did not participate seriously in these measures. In fact, the Vice Presidency of the students union of Philosophy and Literature, led by the PTS, had an infinitely greater role in the struggle than the FUBA itself.

Under the impact of the appearance of the working class on the national political scene with its own demands and methods of struggle – such as the long-term general strike in the plant and the road blockades -, the students movement in the area took part in initial actions of worker-student unity and active solidarity, as had not been seen for years. Hundreds of students and teachers, responding to the calls directly made from the student organization En Clave Roja (PTS and independents), halted classes, took part in assemblies, donated money for the strike fund, blocked roads and in some cases rallied at the factory gates. Likewise, the day of the repression and eviction of the factory, hundreds of students from those universities fought against these measures, with some being imprisoned. Other widely reported solidarity actions were the bold attack on the US ambassador Vilma Martínez in the city of Mendoza by students and activists – mainly driven by En Clave Roja and the PTS from the University of Cuyo. The ambassador, who had recently arrived in the country, was getting ready to give a speech at the conference “Looking to the future: Argentine-North American relations under the Obama administration, but this had to be suspended because of the protest by the students in condemnation of US imperialism which stopped her from talking<sup>43</sup>.

The actions by unemployed workers were also very relevant throughout the conflict. In the heat of struggle, different unemployed organizations came out to the streets once more, organizing road blocks in solidarity – like the blocking by the Combative Classist Current (CCC) of the *Pueyrredón* Bridge (in the municipality of Avellaneda in Greater Buenos Aires, a key bridge which connects to the capital), among others -, as well as taking part in the blockades of the *Panamericana* Highway and the rallies in Buenos Aires and other cities, where they also raised their own demands, like those of greater power over the administration of housing

43 “Agrupaciones de izquierda frustraron una charla de la embajadora de EEUU”, Mendoza, Los A39 It is worth remembering that these actions were realized against the orientation of the PCR and the majority of the *Comisión Interna* always to keep the struggle confined within the limits of the factory.

grants by the government, which in their great majority were given to the Mayors of the greater Buenos Aires conurbation and of different cities.

In this way, this initial process of solidarity of students and unemployed workers with the workers movement, not only implied a significant collaboration with the Kraft conflict, helping to make it a national issue and to pressure the government and the bosses themselves, but also in itself has a profoundly revolutionary potential, by showing the potential of workers struggles to make an impact on the consciousness of thousand of allies, like students and unemployed workers. Finally, this process of confluence in struggle of workers, the unemployed and students, may be a prelude to future political phenomena, like the possible emergence of a student movement which understands itself as a political actor in the class struggle alongside workers, confronting the status quo in the universities and questioning the contemporary university structure as a class based institution<sup>44</sup>.

### 8) The Repression and Eviction of the Plant

After five weeks of strike, on Friday 25/09 the company, along with the courts and the government, put into practice their repressive plans. They reinforced the police presence at the plant with hundreds of police. From 3am a new lockout was declared by the company and they gave leave to the bosses, preventing the morning shift from entering. The night shift resolved in assembly to leave, staying outside in solidarity with the fired workers who stayed inside. But this was not done in a disorganized way, rather scientifically. They counted and analyzed their forces and divided themselves in sectors, between fired and non-fired workers, between those who faced trial and those who didn't, between those who had more of a leadership role and those who

44 Such was the degree of rebellion that in the last few days of the strike, the workers of the night shift would watch films about the occupied factory Zanon, of TVPTS and documentaries by the Marxist film director Raimundo Gleyzer on the television screens of the canteen. The possibility of putting the plant to produce was even discussed.

had more of a rank and file role. This was the only responsible and intelligent way to act at that time.

At the same time, the national and provincial Ministries of Labour called a meeting – to which the *Comisión Interna* was not invited -, after which, acting like spokespeople for the company, they read their statement to the press, which was to call for the unconditional surrender of the workers. This press release was in fact a unilateral statement by the company where the only promise was the keep the non-fired workers in their jobs, a condition which the government asked of them in exchange for ordering the eviction. At exactly the same time, more than 300 police were ordered to evict the plant. The government sought for the police to proceed in the most “surgical” way possible to arrest the fired workers, without carrying out a brutal repression which would cost them dearly politically and which, knowing the wild Buenos Aires police force, could mean protesters suffering bullet wounds or deaths – in order to dispel this threat the Secretary of Human Rights of the Province of Buenos Aires, Sara Covacho, verified in person that the police would not be armed with lead bullets. This was unprecedented: a public figure identified with the defense of human rights trying to guarantee a “democratic” repression.

But despite those best efforts, the “surgical” operation was complicated by the workers and activists resistance who from outside fought off the repressive forces with sticks and stones. This forced the, to bring in the mounted police, who, charging on horse at the protestors gave us a symbolic image which inevitably would become associated with the repression of the “revolutionary days” of 2001 which culminated in the fall of ex President De la Rúa. These images were widely circulated by the press, generating great public condemnation and a high political cost for the government.

At the same time, in Buenos Aires hundreds of students and activists protested outside the Argentine Industrial Union (UIA) and blocked Buenos Aires’s central avenue the *9 de Julio* for hours and later, having reached some thousands, marched to the presidential residence in the *Plaza de Mayo*. Similar protests took place in cities

across the country. The day ended with 65 arrests, amongst fired workers, non-fired workers and activists. The arrested were incredibly kept inside the Kraft plant, which by now looked like a military barracks after a battle.

Resisting the repression was necessary to make the government and company pay the highest political cost possible. This was exactly what the PTS called for along with the fired and also many non-fired workers, the From Below trade union tendency and tens of activists who were at the vanguard of the struggle, as could be seen on television. **Many non-fired workers got themselves arrested with these actions and as a result were suspended by the company. In total 36 workers were suspended, of whom some were fired after the signing of the Act and are still struggling for their reincorporation.** On Monday September 28<sup>th</sup> there would be a very important march in the Plaza de Mayo, where thousands of workers and students would participate, while the centre-left came out to support the Kraft workers and condemn the repression. This same day there would be a national round of protests and there were road blocks at various access points to Buenos Aires and other parts of Buenos Aires province, like the Rosario-Buenos Aires Highway, as well is in many other provinces. For their part, the students unions across the country also blocked roads in solidarity with the struggle.

### 9) 38 Days of Strike: the “Rank and File” of the Conflict

For nearly all of the days between August 18<sup>th</sup> and September 25<sup>th</sup> when the police evicted the plant, the 2,600 Kraft workers completely paralyzed production at the factory. It was the strength of the rank and file which allowed this. The mass of the workers at the plant, in their majority women, responded to each provocation and act of intimidation by the bosses by intensifying the strike. The same sector of women workers who played a key role in the struggle over swine flu, many of them having worked in the factory for more than 20, and some even 30 years, acted as the foundation and motor of the strike.

During the 38 days of strike, the workers had to confront their co-ordinators, their managers, the solicitors and clerks of the company, the trade union bureaucrats and the police, who camped in the factory as if it were a barracks. Despite all this, the pressure, the threats, the illegal filming; despite the telephone calls to intimidate and divide their families, despite all the attempts to break the strike, the 2,600 Kraft workers stayed firm in the permanent “war of attrition” with the company, and became part of a historic strike.

Even after the end of obligatory conciliation had been announced, and conscious that it was “illegal” for the fired workers to remain in the plant, the strike continued and the rank and file stayed untied and in solidarity with the fired workers.

Where did they get this strength from? It came from years of contained anger against the bosses and the trade union bureaucracy, years of “staying quiet”, of suffering exhausting production rates and work-related illnesses – in particular the women workers who do the worst jobs -; years of betrayals and miserly wages. This accumulated suffering gave them the strength for a 38 day strike, as did the policy followed by the bosses themselves. Their arrogance and permanent provocations, helped to radicalize a rank and file which was tired of putting up with infringements on their rights, as in the case of refusing to pay their wages and calling on them to “evict from the factory” their fired colleagues in order to get paid. But they also drew upon an historic experience of the rank and file in the factory, which was accumulated through conflicts like that of the year 2000 – which culminated in a heavy defeat -, in 2007 to incorporate the temp workers, and the recent rebellion over the swine flu epidemic.

However, these elements on their own are not the whole story: we also have to point out the fundamental importance of the militants in the factory, a new generation of young workers, impertinent and full of energy, who combativeness affected the whole factory<sup>45</sup>. Due to this, in order

to end the strike, it was necessary to carry out a repressive operation of 300 police and to arrest 65 people, between them more than 30 workers at the plant. But even this didn't break the strike.

### 10) Political Realignment: the Crisis in the Government and the Trade Unión Bureaucracy

After 40 days of struggle, the repression and the eviction, the imperialist bosses kept a heavy police presence in the plant and stepped up production dramatically, increasing the intensity of the exploitation of the workers. However, even though the historic strike of 38 days had been put to an end, the conflict didn't end and its consequences went beyond the limits of the factory, causing a series of political repositionings.

The popular support won by the workers of Kraft grew as the prestige of Kraft suffered greatly. The workers were invited to television channels and solidarity with them spread. Every audience with the authorities or protest by the Kraft workers began to be covered live by the mass media. The repression ended the strike in the factory, but at the same time it transformed the Kraft struggle into a political conflict where the workers had become the centre of the national political scene, with the support of broad sectors of the masses.

**At the same time, the repression showed up the pro-boss character of the government, as a result of which the latter had to realign itself, forcing the company to reopen negotiations, with the objective of wearing out and ending the conflict. As part of these negotiations, the company agreed to reincorporate 30 workers.**

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representative of the *Comisión Interna* (Ramón Bogado, Jorge Penayo, María Rosario, Alfonso Arcadio y Javier Hermosilla) were prohibited from entering the plant, a completely illegal act according to article 48 of the Law of Trade Union Association (*Ley de Asociaciones Sindicales*) emphatically maintains that “could not be suspended, have their working conditions modified, or be fired during the time that their mandate lasts. Ley N° 23.551 de Asociaciones Sindicales, see: <http://www.infoleg.gov.ar/infoleginternet/anexos/20000-24999/20993/texact.htm>

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45 Since the eviction, the five shop stewards most



Such was the degree of rebellion in the later days of the strike, that in the night shift the workers used to watch films about the occupied ceramics factory Zanon, videos from the PTS web channel TVPTS, and documentaries by the Marxist film director Raimundo Gleyzer, on the canteen television sets. They even discussed putting the plant to work themselves.

For its part, after the repression, the trade union bureaucracy also had to retreat (“sorry if I offended anyone”, said Moyano in reference to his statements days before the eviction) and found itself forced to receive members of the *Comisión Interna*, showing how the attempt to “normalize” the factory had failed. As a result the CGT changed its tactic in line with that of the national government and National Ministry of Labour, which after the repression sought to “contain” and wear down the struggle.

The main example of this change of orientation, was the judicial resolution by the National Ministry of Labour which on October 6<sup>th</sup> ordered the company to reincorporate the shop stewards of the *Comisión Interna* – who the company had been refusing entry to since the eviction - and which permitted them entry to the plant “with the help of the public forces if necessary”.

Kraft didn’t comply with the order and the Ministry then went to the Tribunals of San Isidro Municipality, which ordered the company to allow, firstly Ramón Bogado and then the rest of the CI, entry to the plant, with the exception once again of Javier Hermosilla. In his case, Tribunal No.3 rejected the request of the Ministry and called an audience for October 13<sup>th</sup> where it ordered the provisional lifting of the measure against Hermosilla, and for him to be allowed into the

plant, but only accompanied by inspectors from the Ministry of Labour of the Province of Buenos Aires which would supervise his entry, exit and compliance with his work responsibilities. Finally, on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, Tribunal No.3 lifted definitively the cautionary measure against Hermosilla. In this way, despite the repression, the conflict at Kraft had entered a new era.

#### 11) The Negotiations with the Ministry and the Signing of the “Act of Agreement”

The persistence of the conflict forced the courts to order the reincorporation of Bogado and the rest of the members of the *Comisión Interna* and, finally, Hermosilla himself. This was understood by the workers as a victory. In this context, after days of fruitless negotiation whose results were given prominent space in the press alongside the continuous marches and road blockades, on Tuesday 14/10 the Ministry of Labour made a proposal that the majority of the *Comisión Interna*, except Hermosilla, was prepared to sign. This was for the reincorporation of 40 more workers, but keeping 53 fired, without naming those who would be reinstated. At the same time it imposed a 2 month period of “social peace”, which prohibited actions which prevented production or the movement of vehicles.

After a strong discussion in which both the *Comisión Interna* and the fired workers participated – the latter were outside the Ministry of Labour and rejected the terms and conditions of the Act of agreement -, the majority of the *Comisión Interna* agreed to let an assembly of the fired workers decide. The assembly rejected the Agreement if **the 40 reinstatements didn’t apply exclusively to those workers fired at the beginning of the conflict and all the workers suspended after the**

repression of September 25<sup>th</sup> were not reinstated fully to their positions. In this way, the total number of workers fired would have been 25 – different to the 53 who were eventually fired.

The activists of the PTS and From Below Tendency proposed that the Act of agreement should be rejected, because it contained a clause about “social peace” which meant the end of the struggle, **when workers had been left outside of the factory and the strength to continue the struggle existed.** In the factory there would then be “assemblies” to discuss the Agreement, but these were carried out with coordinators present and where the majority of the *Comisión Interna* promised to sign whatever was resolved in the assemblies of the fired workers. Ramón Bogado then told the press that he would only sign an agreement if “the fired workers and not the suspended workers” were reinstated<sup>46</sup>.

The key day would be Friday 16<sup>th</sup>. The Tribunal which had prohibited the entry of Hermostilla to the plant, definitively lifted the measure, meaning the justification for firing him collapsed (as a shop steward he could not be fired without such a measure). With this, the political argument justifying the firing of the rest of the suspended or fired workers also fell through. This was a turn in the situation which made it possible to completely

defeat the company’s offensive, with the latter finding itself ever more isolated. However, in a meeting the same day, the Act of Agreement was signed by three PCR organizers, against the decision of the assembly and its own promises. Javier Hermostilla refused to sign and, at the time, so did Ramón Bogado, in order not to face the condemnation of the fired workers and the rank and file. Days later he would give a “self-criticism” for not having signed, explaining the role of his party in his change of position and beginning a campaign of lies against Hermostilla which lasts until today.

Seen retrospectively, the definitive return of Hermostilla to the plant dictated by the Courts on the same day on which the Act of Agreements was proposed and eventually signed by the leaders of the PCR, was a “concession” whose objective was, despite the opposition of the fired workers and Hermostilla himself, to achieve the signing of the agreement (as even for the PCR it would be difficult to justify signing and agreement with a member of the *Comisión Interna* remaining suspended), in order to then restart the campaign of persecution, with a new cautionary measure against Hermostilla; which the company requested in November and which remains open.

What the Ministry and the company hadn’t taken into account in their calculations, and what they likely considered impossible, was that a few weeks later the slate headed by Hermostilla would win the

46 “Tras marchar a Plaza de Mayo, trabajadores confían en lograr un acuerdo”, Bs.As., *La Nación*, 15/10/2009.



elections to the *Comisión Interna* and, therefore, the balance of forces inside the factory would be turned around.

With regards to the Act of Agreement, it soon became clear that this was unfavourable to the workers<sup>47</sup>: it left 53 workers fired, when there was a favourable situation for struggle. The next day, the daily newspaper *Página/12* published a statement by the From Below Tendency which stated that “the agreement signed by three members of the CI is a violation of the mandate of the assembly of fired workers, which rejected it”<sup>48</sup>.

The PCR gave its own version of events: “On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>, the agreement was defined, and it was agreed that it would be discussed in assemblies of the morning and afternoon shifts until Friday, which approved it with a great majority. It was decided that we should try to give fired workers priority of reinstatement over suspended workers. On Friday, the bosses carried out a new act of provocation by presenting a list which proposed to reinstate mainly suspended workers. (...) But the majority of the CI rejected this maneuver by the bosses and signed the Act: these were María Rosario, Jorge Penayo and Alfonso Arcadio. Comrade Bogado, mistakenly didn't sign; something which he then criticized himself for in the assemblies of the factory”<sup>49</sup>. Which is to say, they present the betrayal of the mandate of the assembly of fired workers as an intelligent maneuver against the bosses, while they attack Hermosilla and the PTS for “campaigning against the signing of the Agreement”<sup>50</sup>. How ironic to see a left wing group present the acceptance of an

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47 With the meeting in the Ministry of Labour just begun the details of the Act became known: of the proposed workers to be reincorporated only 12 of them had been fired; the rest (28) had been suspended. On top of this, “social peace” was to be imposed for 2 months and the company had extended for 15 days more the existing suspensions on workers.

48 “Es nula”, Bs.As., *Página/12*, 17/10/2009

49 Report of the Central Committee of the PCR, “La heroica lucha de Kraft marcó un camino para enfrentar la crisis”, enero 2009.

50 Ídem.

attack by the bosses as a maneuver against said attack!

In their whole justification nothing is said about the bureaucratic method of signing an agreement before the calling of assemblies, which in this case was also a violation of the decision of the assembly of fired workers and the public promises made by the PCR leaders. Likewise, with regards to the idea that signing an agreement was the most beneficial course of action, we can quote Farrel Dobbs, Trotskyist activist and actor in the heroic struggle of the Minneapolis teamsters of 1934, who said that “for trade union negotiators, it is an error under any circumstance to deal with bosses or mediators as if they themselves had the authority to reach an agreement (...) every time a possible agreement is reached, the negotiators should always say that they are going to present the issue to the union to decide”<sup>51</sup>.

The PCR was a long way from this way of acting, even though it cynically claims in its assessment of the struggle that “the combative comrades of the CI (...) along with the lawyers (of the CI), were very tough negotiators”<sup>52</sup>. It is worthwhile noting the way in which the North American Trotskyists in the strikes in Minneapolis confronted the government mediators. As James Cannon, one of the leaders, wrote, “one of the most pathetic things about that time was seeing how, in strike after strike, the workers worker manipulated and cut to pieces and had their strikes broken by the supposed “friends of the workers” disguised as federal mediators (...) one of their favourite tricks of the federal mediators was to meet with strike leader, play on their vanity, and induce them to agree to certain compromises which they weren't authorized to. The federal mediators convinced these leaders that they were ‘big players’ who should take a ‘responsible attitude’. The mediators know that the concessions made by the leaders in a negotiation can rarely be annulled. It doesn't matter how much the workers oppose this,

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51 F. Dobbs, *Rebelión Teamster*, Canadá, Pathfinder Press, 2004, p.135.

52 Report of the Central Committee of the PCR; op. Cit.

the fact that these leaders will have publically committed to a position in name of the union will demoralize their ranks (...) our people did not go into the negotiations as 'big players' at all. They made it clear that their authority was extremely limited, that they were the most reasonable and moderate wing of the union, and that if they strayed from the line they would be replaced in the negotiation committee by others. The strike was a long and hard fight, and we used to have fun planning the union committee meetings with the negotiators. We used to belittle them and all their astute lies and tricks, and their hypocritical imitation of comradeship and friendship towards the workers. They were no more than agents of the government, which is an agent of the propertied classes as a whole. This was perfectly clear for a Marxist, and we took it almost as an insult that they thought they could trick us with the methods they employ against novices"<sup>53</sup>.

The majority of the CI, led by the PCR, signed the agreement in order to then hold a *post factum* referendum in the assemblies, which represented only a minority and none of the fired workers. On the other hand the workers of the night shift resolved not to hold any assemblies without the presence of the fired workers, and held a meeting outside the plant with the fired workers present, which rejected the Agreement signed by the PCR. This was later ratified in a shift assembly. In this way, the struggle which had resisted so many attacks by the company, the government and the trade union bureaucracy, was now being attacked seriously from within.

## 12) Elections to the Comisión Interna: The Victory of the Consistent and Democratic Wing of the Struggle

A few days after the signing of the Agreement and despite the conflict for the reinstatement of the 53 fired workers being ongoing, the union called elections to the CI on March 11<sup>th</sup>. The fraudulent nature of this was evident: the fired workers had no right to vote, the register of affiliated workers

was not released, and only 11 members were to be elected when by law there should have been at least 27.

In response to this situation, the minority led by Hermosilla, despite its differences with the majority, proposed a united list of opposition to the bureaucracy and the company<sup>54</sup>, based on presenting candidates according to shift. However the PCR faction rejected this. At the same time, the majority of the CI rejected the idea of any measures of struggle either inside or outside the factory due to the signing of the Agreement.

The fired workers however carried out protests against the Argentina Industrial Union and Chamber of North American Commerce, accompanied by Hermosilla but not by the majority of the CI who refused to participate. Eventually, the elections would take place between Lists: List 1, led by Hermosilla, militants from the From Below tendency, and independents, including 5 women colleagues; List 2, of Bogado and the PCR; and List 3 which was loyal to the leadership of the union under Rodolfo Daer. **Hermosilla's list, which represented the militant activists, won with 676 votes. The list led by Bogado, who had for 16 years led the CI at the plant, came second with 660 votes.** In third place came the Peronist bureaucracy with 390 votes. This result would be reported in all the media, both national and regional, as an important story of Argentine politics. The election was also one of the most widely participated in at Kraft, as can be seen in the table below<sup>55</sup>.

54 "Ante las elecciones fraudulentas de Daer y la empresa: asambleas del turno noche proponen una lista unitaria y democrática para seguir la lucha", *Comunicado de la Agrupación Desde Abajo*, 28/10/2009.

55 After the counting of the vote, the Ministry of Labour and the Union tried desperately to organize a fraud, announcing the appearance of a ballot box which would change the result of the vote within which "external repository workers" would have voted and which as a result was not to be counted by either List 1 or List 2. Bogado rightly said that he would not accept the counting of a ballot box which he himself had rejected, and he recognized the victory of List 1.

53 J. P. Cannon, *La historia del trotskismo norteamericano*, Canadá, Pathfinder Press, 2004.



**Results of the Elections to the Comisión Interna of Kraft Foods-Terrabusi from 1993 al 2009<sup>56</sup>:**

**1993:** 890 votes (Only Bogado Slate ran).

**1995:** 904 votes (Bogado Slate) to 395 votes (Daer Slate).

**1997:** 725 votes (Bogado) a 285 votes (Daer) and 219 (Slate presented by the company).

**1999:** 944 votes (Bogado) a 572 votes (Daer).

**2001:** 952 votes (Bogado) a 598 votes (Daer).

**2003:** 1064 votes (Bogado) a 445 votes (Daer).

**2005:** 1124 votes (Bogado and Hermosilla Slate) and 394 votes (Daer) and 125 votes (Company Slate).

**2007:** 1106 votes (Bogado and Hermosilla slate).

**2009:** 676 votes (Hermosilla) a 660 votes (Bogado) and 390 votes (Daer).

**With the victory of List 1, the consistent democratic wing of the Kraft conflict, which had not signed the Act of Agreement, won the election. But it was also a victory for an anti-bureaucratic rank and file current which had built itself for years at the Kraft factory, in the**

<sup>56</sup> These statistics only count positive votes. Blank and spoiled votes were in all cases marginal.



**food processing workers union, and in different industrial unions in the Norther Buenos Aires area, as part of the left wing of the phenomenon of “rank and file trade unionism” which developed in argentina since 2004.**

After the elections, far from seeking to rebuild the unity of the rank and file in the factory to struggle for the reinstatement of the 53 fired workers –and despite the recurrent calls to unity by the new CI -, the PCR deepened its factionalist attitude. Meanwhile, the imperialist bosses didn’t cease to attack the workers, systematically holding the new CI hostage – and even threatening to disaffiliate them– as is struggled for the reinstatement of the fired workers.

**13) How was the conflict at Kraft led?**

In this article we have analyzed not only the key moments of the struggle, but also the role played by its key actors and, in particular, how the particular form of leadership emerged which allowed the struggle to develop in the way it did. This analysis and balance sheet of the conflict is obviously disputed, especially by the PCR. Since they lost the elections to the CI the PCR and its journalists have dedicated themselves to publishing articles claiming that the conflict was led entirely by themselves and the majority faction of the CI. In their official assessment they insist that: “The conflict was fought by 2,700 Kraft workers, led by the CI and its *Cuerpo de Delegados*, led by comrades from the CCC, the PCR and JCR (Revolutionary Communist Youth<sup>57</sup> – PCR youth wing). It is to the credit of all of these that it reached the point it did. It is to the credit of the classist and revolutionary communist leadership that it showed that there are leaders who can neither be bought or sold, who stay loyal to the working class quite apart from the things they get right and wrong and which we take full responsibility for”<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Revolutionary Communist Youth - *Juventud Comunista Revolucionaria*

<sup>58</sup> In their assessment they even provocatively maintain that “we will not be allies of this new CI which resulted from the fraud of the bosses”, in a new and brutal Stalinist

This understanding of events could not be farther from reality; but in order to test it we only have to ask ourselves a simple question: if it was the majority of the CI and the PCR who led the struggle with a genuinely “classist” line, even when they signed the Act of Agreement, then why did they end up losing the leadership of the factory to a list supported by the PTS? In other words; for what reason did the PCR faction, the historic leadership of the Kraft (previously Terrabusi) workers with which Ramón Bogado led the CI for 16 years, finally lose the leadership of the factory to a slate supported by the Trotskyist PTS, after having so heroically led the struggle and at a time of politicization and participation of the workers of the factory such as had not been seen for years? The PCR can only answer with a calumny: there was a “fraud” by Kraft, which forwarded the holidays of workers of the morning and afternoon shifts, “the direct beneficiary of which was Herмосilla”, in order to affirm that “we underestimated the maneuvers the bosses would carry out with regards to the elections. We underestimated the PTS. And above all, we didn’t think that the bosses’ maneuvers would benefit Herмосilla, and not Daer. The workers of the night shift punished us, because they didn’t understand how the signing of the Act was a step forward. Our defensive attitude and vacillation in defence of the Act as a step forward to continue with the struggle, harmed us here.”<sup>59</sup>

As we said in our introduction to this article, the strange picture which the PCR paints of the conflict in reality doesn’t explain anything, because in order to do this one would have to tell the truth, something which the PCR cannot do because its method of *la tergiversación*, *las amalgamas*, calumnies and the permanent spreading of lies are, to use a turn of phrase, “genetically inscribed” into the nature of such Stalinist groups.

**The PCR lost the election to the CI because they were neither the “leadership of the struggle” in the way they insist, and neither was the Act they**

**signed a “step forward” as they claim.** In reality, the PCR was part of the leadership of the strike, as a moderate wing from the moment the workers were fired to the moment the bosses accepted the return of the CI. In any case, the PCR throughout the struggle had a conciliatory line, sometimes interspersed with adventurism, and sometimes with initiatives of their own which were correct. However, in the key moments of the struggle, their proposals were defeated by the left-wing of the struggle.

Until the signing of the Act, this was the practice of the PCR, to accept the decisions of the rank and file militants which went much further than what they wanted. With the signing of the Act however the PCR positioned itself directly against the workers and ended its role as part of the leadership of the struggle, by signing a deal which committed the workers to no measures of force within the factory or road blockades which would impede the circulation of vehicles or people, in line with the text of the Act of Agreement.

**The one vital political action which was truly the PCR’s own during the conflict, which was supported by the full weight of the leadership without regards to the wishes of the rank and file or the pressure of the militants, was the signing of the Act of Agreement proposed by the Ministry of Labour which betrayed the mandate of the non-fired and fired workers, at a time when the balance of forces made it possible to push for more.** The PCR was unable to convince the assemblies to vote for their positions and wasn’t able to lead the conflict in line with their point of view. This was the case throughout the conflict. In the key moments they lost the vote, from the first blockade of the *Panamericana* to the rejection of the ACT by the assembly of fired workers. These defeats at the hands of the rank and file and the militants eventually led them to act against the decisions of the assemblies, which cost them dearly and was one of the fundamental reasons they lost the leadership of the CI. Effectively, the electoral result showed that the signing of the ACT didn’t correspond to the balance of forces and the views of the militants and rank and file workers.

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twist. See “La heroica lucha de Kraft marcó un camino para enfrentar la crisis”, *op.cit.*



But along with this, there is another important fact which the PCR has taken upon itself to hide this whole time: when they refer to the “*Comisión Interna* which led the conflict”, the Maoists refer only to four people, which is to say their leading organizers Arcadio Alfonso, Jorge Penayo, María Rosario and Ramón Bogado. But the *Comisión Interna* was composed of 11 members, one of whom had resigned before the conflict. So what happened to the other 5 *delegados* allied to the PCR faction? Except for one *delegada* who still works in the factory in the night shift, they all cracked during the conflict, negotiated individual pay-offs with the company and left the factory.

So, **how was the Kraft struggle really fought? It was led by a coalition, which at key points in the conflict cleared the way for a course of militancy and class struggle. The PTS was part of this coalition, from the minority of the CI and the From Below tendency, together with the most combative rank and file militants.** This militancy was formed over years and above all in the night shift, a revolutionary process of construction which forged a group of militants and *delegados*, defenders of rank and file democracy and with a clear class instinct. The great spontaneity of the rank and file added to this process, above all the women workers of the morning shift, which, often without leadership, stood up to the pressure of the co-ordinators, managers and bureaucrats and kept up a 38 day strike.

At the same time, **the intervention of the PTS, which guaranteed the support of a sector of the student movement which came out to defend the struggle and was at the same time a key factor in the spreading and deepening of the**

**conflict -; as well as of different public figures and organizations related to the defence of Human Rights – in great part as a result of the intervention of the PTS and the Centre of Professionals for Human Rights (Ce.Pro.D.H.)<sup>60</sup> -, was a key factor in the development and leadership of the struggle.**

**Obviously the PCR was also part of this system of leadership for the struggle, both due to being the majority of the CI, as for this historic importance at the factory and its drive to keep the conflict going while the CI remained barred from the factory. In addition, as we have said, at key points it was forced to take political lines which went beyond its intentions, in response to which it often acted to degrade the initiatives of the militants and the left-wing of the conflict until, at the decisive moment, it had to sign an agreement against the wishes of the fired workers.**

#### IV: A Balance Sheet and the Continuation of the Struggle

Next we will synthesize the fundamental elements of a balance sheet of the Kraft struggle:

1.) The objective of Kraft Foods of beheading the rank and file organizations – in order to push on with a drastic plan of the elimination of a whole shift -, in particular attacking the left-wing of the CI, the *Cuerpo de Delegados* and the militants, and launched on the back of the electoral triumph of the right wing of July 28<sup>th</sup>, was shown to be beyond the balance of forces, and failed. The electoral defeat of the pro-government coalition, the result of which was the political weakening of the government – and its main foundation of support, the trade union bureaucracy of the CGT - with the political fragmentation of the bourgeois opposition, marked a balance of forces which the business leaders of Kraft misled. In addition to this, it is also very relevant that at the end of 2008, the company had decided to fire 300 temp workers without any response from the majority of the

60 *Centro de Profesionales por los Derechos Humanos*

CI. At that time only the From Below tendency published leaflets and statements condemning this situation and calling for a response.

This fact – a massive firing of temp workers without any resistance – was without a doubt one factor which gave the company the confidence to attempt to push forward with its plan for August 2009. However, with this attack which went beyond the balance of forces, the company provoked the first large scale struggle in a major industrial plant in years, which became a political struggle of the working class and forced one of the largest industrial monopolies in the country to retreat, dragging behind them all the bosses corporations and even the US Embassy itself. On this level, the bosses as a whole, prominent lawyers like López Matheu and his assessors and the pro bosses lawyer Julián de Diego were heavily defeated.

2) The Kraft struggle united all the capitalist factions against the workers. After the Kraft conflict, the capitalists, the government, the bureaucracy, the imperialists, appealed to this unity and condemned the methods of direct action, in order to contain the impact of this struggle amongst thousands of workers and to avoid this example becoming a catalyst for a wave of struggles which would definitively open up a new political situation<sup>61</sup>.

61 After the eviction of the plant, the The Chamber of Commerce of the USA in Argentina (AmCham) condemned

3) The repression of Friday 25th unmasked the pro-boss and pro-imperialist carácter of the national government. The Presidential Kirchner couple and the Buenos Aires Governor Daniel Scioli, who had based their candidacy on a dialogue with the workers of the Buenos Aires conurbation based on a discourse of “protecting jobs”, opened up the road to the eviction called for by the US Embassy, while the Ministry of Labour acted basically as a clerk of the multinational company, all of which hit the relationship between the government and sectors of the working class, leaving a deep political wound whose depth remains to be seen.

4) The Kraft strike showed the real role of the mass media, in their majority supporting the imperialist company. In order to break through the wall around the dictatorship of the imperialist monopolies over the media, the workers had block the *Panamericana* Highway and appeal to the solidarity of the students and unemployed workers in order to bring the conflict to the attention of the population. Due to this, and because of their own political contradictions with the government, the means of communication began, after this, to give the conflict wide coverage, using the most relevant aspects of this like the blockades of the *Panamericana* and above the repression and eviction of the plant – to attack the government

“illicit acts as a form of pressure” in reference to the methods of struggle and the road blocks employed during the conflict.



and the trade union bureaucracy, in the context of the dispute over the Media Law proposed by the government which would limit the power of the large multimedia corporations like the *Clarín* Group.

These actions spread to various sectors which appealed to rallies, marches and road blockades to fight for their own demands, like the unemployed workers movement which returned to the streets in solidarity with the Kraft struggle and to fight for a share in the allocation of public housing announced by the government.

5) At the same time, the battle of Kraft Foods showed the crisis of the leadership of the *CGT* (and the *CTA*<sup>62</sup>) in the face of the first great battle of the industrial workers movement after decades of retreat, showing that a more direct dispute between the left and the Peronist trade union bureaucracy has opened up. The result of the Kraft struggle gives potential to the processes of “rank and file trade unionism” underway, situating the new workers movement which began to show signs of emergence after the electoral defeat of 28<sup>th</sup> June on the national stage.

That the result of the conflict definitively affected the processes of “rank and file trade unionism” can be seen by the renewed importance of the struggle of the *Cuerpo de Delegados* of the Metro for the recognition of their own independent

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62 The leadership of the CTA was left disorientated by and acted behind the times during the whole conflict. Its historic leader, Víctor De Genaro, initially minimized the importance of the strike due to it being led by the left. Later, when faced by its importance, he was forced to give a place to Bogado and Hemrosilla on the platform of a rally carried out for “trade union freedom”. Finally, he ended up criticizing the Labour Minister Tomada for ceding to the US multinational. Quite apart from this, while sympathy among the CTA members grew for this working class cause, in each instance of the conflict the leadership of the self-named “alternative confederation” maintained its distance from the struggle and did not carry out any measure of force in solidarity. It did not even call a meeting with the Kraft CI to discuss the conflict, which even the Peronist bureaucracy of Moyano and the CGT did (even though it obviously did this with the aim of appearing to be in solidarity with the strike before the masses, after having strongly attacked the workers in their declarations, thereby preparing the atmosphere for state repression).

union, as did the coverage in the media of the meetings in Buenos Aires and Neuquén called by the Ceramics Workers Union to launch the Classist Workers Plenary<sup>63</sup>.

6) En otro orden, el extenso y duro conflicto de los trabajadores y trabajadoras de Kraft Foods, enfrentando a la segunda empresa alimenticia más importante del mundo, demostró que es posible enfrentar a las empresas multinacionales, poner límites a sus ataques permanentes contra la organización de base y las condiciones de vida de los trabajadores. Pero no sólo eso, también mostró que es posible derrotarlas, poniendo en movimiento la extraordinaria fuerza y voluntad de los sectores más explotados y decididos de la clase obrera, objetivo que si en este conflicto no se logró plenamente, fue por el papel jugado por el ala conciliadora y reformista de su dirección, el PCR.

7) Despite this, for the first time in a large scale workers conflict which could be followed by the workers in all the media, the Kraft struggle showed up the concrete distinction between two political tendencies who since 2004 had been hidden under the generic term “Rank and file trade unionism”: the reformists, in this case the PCR – but who have the majority leadership of the new Metro workers union -, and the class-struggle, revolutionary left expressed by the minority of the CI at Kraft, the From Below tendency and the PTS – and in broader terms in the Classist Workers Plenary called for along with the ceramics workers of Neuquén.

8) This difference showed itself, above all, in the signing of the Act of Agreement by the majority

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63 The political-trade union current launched by the ceramics workers of Zanon together with the left wings of Kraft and the Metrovías workers, between hundreds of shop stewards of important factories and unions around the whole country – which in a later meeting in Neuquén adopted the name Plenary of Classist Workers – was formed in order to fight to fill the vacuum of a classist pole in the working class, not limiting itself to a syndicalist classism but rather fighting for political independence from all bosses factions and their parties, with the perspective of building our own. See “Programa del ‘Plenario de trabajadores clasistas’”, Bs. As, *La Verdad Obrera* N° 352, 19/11/2009

of the CI. At a time when the objective conditions existed for victory, the conciliatory – which is to say reformist – attitude of the PCR, led to a capitulation and the signing of a “social peace” clause which impeded a probable triumph of the struggle. And we say “probable” due to the fact that the energy of the workers inside the plant was not exhausted, it was impossible for there to be new firings at that time, the population supported the struggle and Kraft found itself isolated and widely condemned. We can say definitively that it was only necessary to hold on for a greater wearing down of the bosses; but as we have already explained, the PCR activists gave into the pressures of the government and signed the Act. Seen from the point of view of the national political situation, a total defeat of the bosses would have been a formidable victory for the whole of the working class and would have made possible the clear emergence of a left-wing of the Argentine workers movement. It was this possibility that the Maoists aborted with the signing of the Act<sup>64</sup>.

64 This conciliatory attitude of the PCR is consistent with their political positioning since last year as allies of the “farmers protests”, led by the landowners of the Rural Society, who carried out a lockout in order to deprive the cities of products in the middle of a struggle over the differential agricultural rent with the government and the industrial bourgeoisie, a protest which the PCR called an “agrarian rebellion”. Even during this conflict the majority of the CI met with the Agrarian Federation and its President Eduardo Buzzi seeking the support of this sector of agricultural businessmen. While the workers of Kraft continued struggling for the reinstatement of the fired workers, which the PCR refuses to participate in, its unemployed workers current, the Classist and Combative Current (CCC), participated in a farmers rally in Buenos Aires, along with the Argentine Industrial Union and the Association of Argentine Business.



9) Throughout the conflict the From Below tendency and the PTS fought for an orientation which confronted both the betrayals of the Unión – which after some days of support of the struggle placed itself in direct opposition –, and the line of the PCR and the majority of the CI, which was at first moderate and later openly in confrontation with the workers. However this was combined with a fight throughout for the broadest unity possible in struggle: for example the attitude taken towards PCR was to fight for a united front, to contribute ideas for the development of the struggle which were to be taken up by the workers as a whole, and to participate in all the measures resolved by the CI and the assemblies. This united front orientation also included participation in the measures called by the leadership of the Union when it was in struggle, like the united blockade of the *Panamericana* Highway and the march to the Ministry of Labour.

Which is to say that the From Below tendency and the PTS pursued a policy of Sharp political confrontation combined with the broadest unity which would be possible and progressive, with the objective of the triumph of the struggle.

10) The triumph in the elections to the CI of the “hardline wing” of the conflict, showed the forging through struggle of a new, class-struggle leadership in one of the strongholds of the Argentine industrial working class. This showed, on the one hand, the revolutionary role of the trotskyst activists of the PTS both in the preceding period as organizers of militant activism and in the struggle itself; on the other hand, the victory of the “Hermosilla” list in the elections to the CI of Kraft showed a categorical advance in the consciousness of the workers.

11) Lastly, the struggle at Kraft opened up once more the discussion, but this time more concretely, on the immediate necessity of building a revolutionary workers party, which would influence the development of the working class vanguard and present itself as a serious programmatic and organizational option for the phenomena of left-splits of sectors of the working class from Peronism.

Six months after it began, the conflict of the Kraft workers, with the new CI now at the helm, continues to fight for the reinstatement of the 53 fired workers and confronts the new provocations by the bosses. A few days after the elections, the company confirmed the sacking of those workers who at the time of igning the Act of 16/10 were suspended, unleashing a new wave of actions which forced the Ministry of Labour to order the company to reinstate them, even though the bosses have refused to do so. At the same time, the workers have redoubled their demands on the CGT and STIA to carry out actions of struggle and give economic support to the fired workers, while the latter have received the US ambassador at the headquarters of the Confederation to discuss (among other things) the conflict at Kraft. In the last few weeks, the new CI carried out a series of strikes according to production line for different demands and pushed ahead with the election of a new *Cuerpo de Delegados*, with 23 colleagues being elected and all shifts represented. IT is this



very organization, which the bosses especially wanted to destroy, which the new CI is putting back on its feet.

The struggle at Kraft Foods, which took place in a more general context of ascent of the working class which will lead to greater challenges ahead, despite being only one battle within a more long term war against the capitalists, has already written a new page in the history of class struggle in Argentina.

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