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Argentina's recuperated workplaces:

The emancipatory potential and the limitations of workers' control

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Introduction

During the 1990s and in the immediate aftermath of Argentina's economic meltdown in 2001-2002, the country witnessed an unprecedented formation of heterogeneous social movements such as newly founded trade unions, the unemployed workers' movement, neighbourhood assemblies, garbage collectors, swap shops and recuperated workplaces. (Uriona, 2006: 89) While most initiatives quickly disappeared during Argentina's economic recovery in the years following the crisis, occupied and recuperated enterprises successfully emerged as the strongest and most organised form of popular protest. The workers' longstanding struggle for the recuperation of the means of production, in part, radically altered existing forms of representation and participation within the workplace.

Assembly-based mandates, direct elections of internal commissions, the rotation of positions and coordinators, representation of minorities and the free expression of diverging voices became established practices which encouraged direct and democratic workers' involvement in the decision-making. (Korol, 2005) They replaced hierarchical capital-labour relationships and bureaucratic leadership provided by traditional client-based trade unions. This chapter will examine the specific socio-economic and political-ideological context that provoked the renaissance of Argentina's recuperated enterprises. In addition, it will discuss the emancipatory potential and the main obstacles and limitations of workers' control.

1. Contextualizing the renaissance of workplace recuperations in Argentina

Since the 1970s debates about democracy in the workplace, solidarity economics and self-management in production have experienced a strong revival. In particular, the intensified adoption and implementation of neoliberal policies around the world catapulted an increasing number of

working people into precarious working conditions and unemployment. These developments forced the disenfranchised and excluded sectors of society to look out for alternative forms of economic organization. Following the region's disastrous experience during the 1980s, heterogeneous approaches and initiatives of cooperation and democratically organized production expanded and gained ground in different parts across Latin America in the 1990s. (Sardá de Faria/Cavalcanti 2009, 23).

Argentina's history since the 1970s has simultaneously been paradigmatic and extraordinary compared to the rest of the region. On the one hand, along with other countries, Argentina experienced a series of profound, and, in part, tragic socio-economic and political transformations such as the murderous military rule (1976-1983), massive foreign indebtedness and structural adjustment following the debt crisis in 1982; the subsequent implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s; the deindustrialization and financialisation of its economy; the impoverishment, marginalization and social exclusion of large parts of its population; rising levels of social inequality and the general precarization of labour; and the ascendancy of social protest and resistance movements in the 1990s. (Ranis, 2010: 80) Argentina's particular aspect, on the other hand, was the country's economic and political collapse in 2001 which marked the most severe downturn in the country's history. The crisis, however, laid the foundation for the ascendancy of previously unconventional forms of economic organization, primarily for the purpose of satisfying basic needs.

a. A brief history of workers' control

Throughout most of human history the relationship with nature was collectively organized and founded on the active participation of the members of a community. Pre-capitalist societies were characterized by the embeddedness of the market within society. Polanyi (1978) detailed the historic inversion of this relationship with the emergence of the capitalist mode of production.

The concepts of workers' control or worker's self-management refer to "a form of institutionalization that rejects both external and internal bureaucratization." (Cox, 1987: 32) Historically, the concept has been intimately linked to the workers' struggle for a post-capitalist form of social organization. (Bonnet, 2011) Marx (1976: 171) had viewed the self-managed "association of free men working with the means of production held in common" as the basic organisational form for the creation of an alternative social order.

First experiences of workers' control under capitalism date back to Robert Owen's utopian socialism in the England of the early 19th century. (Leubolt & Auinger, 2006: 40f) In 1871, it was the formation of the Paris Commune that witnessed the short-lived attempt and the subsequent bloody repression

of a proletarian uprising.¹ (Marx 1871; Trotsky 1921; Gluckstein, 2011: 34f) During World War I, occupations of factories occurred in Germany under the leadership of revolutionary shop stewards (Hoffrogge, 2011) and in Russia as part of the Bolshevik Revolution (Mandel, 2011). During 1919-1920, the North Italian cities of Turin and Milano became the hotspots of workers' plant occupations. (Di Paola, 2011) From the end of World War II until the late 1980s, a historically unique system of workers' self-management was established in former Yugoslavia. In contrast to the Soviet Union, it rejected central planning and instead encouraged a decentralized economic, political and social model that was based on workers' participation and self-organization. (Herbert, 2006: 25ff; Musić, 2011)

Over the past two decades, Latin America as a region has moved to the forefront of the workers' struggle over the control of the means of production. As a direct response to the region's structural transformation, which had unfolded under the banner of neoliberal financialization in the 1970s, an increasing number of social movements emerged all across Latin America during the 1990s.² (Lucita, 2005) In addition to Argentina, initiatives of self-management surfaced in places such as the indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico (Boyer, 2006); Brazil (Müller-Plantenberg, 2006; Auinger 2005, 2007; Sardá de Faria & Cavalcanti, 2009; Sardá de Faria & Novaes, 2011); Venezuela (Azzellini, 2011); and in the border region of Arauca, between Colombia and Venezuela (Arps & Zelik, 2006).³

b. The re-emergence of recuperated enterprises in Argentina

Argentina has a longstanding and turbulent history of worker-led social conflict. During the early 1970s, the occupation of factories in Argentina already functioned as a regularly used tactic of workers' resistance. (Scodeller, 2011) Yet, until the mid-1990s, nearly all earlier bids to take control over production sites were short-lived and eventually ended in the resumption of production under traditional hierarchical relations. (Geiger, 2006: 93)

¹ For a detailed history of the origins and the first practical experiences of workers' control see Gubitzer, 1989; Albert, 2003; Ness & Azzellini, 2011.

² In some countries movements of unemployed workers managed to have their demands, at least in part, taken up by their national governments. In particular, the governments of Brazil and Venezuela demonstrated support for workers' self-management by funding loan programs for cooperatives, promoting targeted public-sector procurement policies and by subsidizing educational programs for members of cooperatives. In addition, both governments took concrete steps towards the institutionalization of solidarity-based economic initiatives by legalizing recuperated enterprises, passing legislation that facilitated the processes of bankruptcy and expropriation and by supporting the establishment of networks between workers' cooperatives. (Leubolt & Auinger, 2006: 43f)

³ During the same period (1990-2010) significant forms of worker-controlled production also took root in India (Hoering, 2006; Sen, 2011).

The crisis of 2001-2002 resulted in the bankruptcies of an estimated 30,000 industrial companies. It destroyed the jobs of around 750,000 workers which equalled 9 percent of the country's overall workforce. (Sardá de Faria & Cavalcanti, 2009: 39) The closure of the workplaces was in many cases preceded by a period of a drastic reduction and an eventual withholding of outstanding wages. With all its catastrophic and devastating social consequences, the crisis gave birth to new forms of popular praxis.

By November 2002, 150 of the country's 1,200 factories in bankrupt liquidation had been recovered by 13,000 former workers which eventually managed to resume production. During that period of fierce economic hardship, the federal government and provincial authorities pursued a Janus-faced strategy towards the workers' activism. In several cases, plant occupations were bolstered and offers were made to pay for rent and to grant workers the legal permission to produce without government interference for a pre-determined period of time.⁴ This step was mainly taken in the hope that it would revive the country's struggling economy and thus mitigate looming prospects of escalating social unrest. The co-optation of the workers by the federal and the provincial governments was concurrently paralleled by an outright attack against the most radical and revolutionary segments of the movement of workplace occupations. (Cockcroft, 2003; La Vaca Collective, 2007)

Argentina's movement of recuperated enterprises encompasses a wide range of heterogeneous political and social identities. The companies which in the broadest sense form part of the movement differ significantly with regards to their overall social focus and political orientation. In general, one can distinguish between two main strands: first, a group of enterprises whose prime objective is the political struggle and social emancipation of workers (Korol, 2005: 30ff), and second, a conglomerate of actors mainly concerned with the institutionalization of the process of workplace recuperations, the consolidation of secure employment and the satisfaction of the workers' immediate needs. (Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 191)

The first strand pursues a rather autonomous and independent agenda by working towards the expansion of workers' control and the nationalization of the workplaces without compensation. It vehemently rejects capitalist ownership and bourgeois state power and demands the expropriation of the occupied workplaces and the resumption of production under direct control of the workers. Moreover, it advocates a radical transformation of Argentina's society and the construction of new social order based on workers' administration, solidarity and participatory democracy. The group

⁴ In early 2002 changes in the country's bankruptcy law had opened up the opportunity for the workers to legally gain control over the occupied enterprises for a period of two years if they agreed to form cooperatives. The majority of the companies followed suit so that in 2010 90 percent of the recuperated companies operated as cooperatives. (Geiger, 2006: 96)

is double-spearheaded, on the one hand, by the workers at Zanón, a Neuquén-based ceramic factory and the *Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados Ceramistas de Neuquén* (SOECN); and, on the other hand, by the workers at Brukman, a tailoring factory in Buenos Aires, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and the *Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas* (MNER). (Villablanca, 2010; Aiziczon, 2009; Cockcroft, 2003)

With a more reformist stance, the second group of recuperated enterprises is primarily dedicated towards the gradual improvement of the position of workers within the existing context of capitalist production. It is mainly represented by the *Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores* (MNFRT) under the leadership of Luis Alberto Caro and enjoys the support of the Catholic Church's Pastoral Social, members of the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ) and the *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA) which together with the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT) forms Argentina's two central trade unions. The MNFRT supports expropriation of the workplaces under particular conditions such as compensation, rent payments for the plants and time limits to expropriation. (Caro, 2011; Apertura Colectiva, 2010: 14; Ranis, 2010: 84) In addition to above, leftist parties, grassroots print media, community radio stations and universities have provided cogent political, legal and advisory support to both strands of the movement.⁵

2. The emancipatory potential

Despite all their differences, Argentina's recuperated workplaces share a common ground that is nurtured by solidarity among the workers and towards their broader social environment, democratic participation in the decision making and the collective ownership of the recuperated plants. It is the practical application of these principles where the emancipatory potential of Argentina's initiatives of workers' control needs to be identified. (Bauni & Fajn, 2010: 19)

a. Solidarity and collective consciousness

The solidarity principle goes against the logic of capital valorisation in which human beings are degraded to mere means for the reproduction of capital-labour relations. Solidarity-based production models view economic activity rather as a means for human self-realisation and a step towards individual and collective emancipation. (Schneider, 2010: 77) Solidarity between the workers as an expression of collective consciousness arises out of shared experiences in the struggle of the workers during the processes of occupation, the common resistance against repression and evictions, the eventual recuperation of workplaces and the collective establishment of a system of moral values.

⁵ For detailed information see www.nuestralucha.org; www.lavaca.org; www.argentina.indymedia.org; www.lafogata.org; www.pts.org.ar

Unlike traditional capitalist enterprises which pursue the maximisation of profits, strategies of internationalisation, increase in exports and profitability, the majority of the recuperated enterprises subordinate private individual profit-making to the accomplishment of greater social goals, collective profit distribution and the establishment of cooperative forms of organization. The main objective of workers' self-management is not the mere generation of profits but the utilization of the latter for social and collective aims, both inside and outside of the workplace, i.e. the re-dedication of private economic initiatives to the totality of social, ecological and moral purposes. (Schneider, 2010: 77; Birkhölzer, 2006: 68f)

With regards to the practical application of solidarity, there exists a strong correlation between the intensity of the workers' struggle during the occupation and the recuperation and the subsequent solidarity-based, democratic and collective organization of production. In terms of remuneration, the recuperated enterprises replaced traditional salaries by a collectively-determined system of profit distribution which reflects the workers' decision to either share the profits equally or to establish a specific payment scheme according to the workers' needs. (Geiger, 2006: 97) As by 2010, fifty six percent of Argentina's recuperated enterprises had established schemes of egalitarian distribution of profits between the workers. (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2010: 55)

In many enterprises, a discriminatory remuneration system gradually emerged that incorporated particular aspects such as qualifications, experience, number of children, responsibility and seniority. However, Argentina's recuperated workplaces still distinguish themselves from traditional capitalist companies through the absence of stark stratifications between workers, exemplified by the introduction of limits on maximum ratios between the lowest and the highest salaries. (Bauni & Fajn, 2010: 28; Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 189; La Vaca Collective, 2007: 38)

In addition, through the implementation of flexible rotation schemes, workers began to perform more tasks than during the time of traditional employment. This increased the workers' responsibility over the different steps of the production process and simultaneously instilled a feeling of participation, ownership and freedom. (Costa, 2010: 119) The organizational changes within the recuperated workplaces also transformed the previously utilized mechanisms of control. Rather than coercion and surveillance, the workers resorted to consensual forms of persuasion and dialogue, once a disciplinary code of conduct had been collectively agreed upon. (Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 196)

b. Participatory democracy in the workplace

The democracy principle is founded in the conviction that political equality, which is the fundamental principle of democracy, cannot be achieved

without equality in the economic sphere. By accepting difference and dissent within the process of assembly-decision-making, the democracy principle comes very close to the notion of 'radical democracy'. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) It challenges both the liberal, parliamentary democracy based on equality, freedom and representation; and deliberative democracy focused on building a consensus through public discourse. (Calhoun et al., 2007; De Sousa Santos, & Rodríguez-Garavito, 2006; Pannekoek, 1936) Historically, defining democracy primarily in terms of formal elections and the granting of political and civic rights played a crucial part in undermining the formation of material and ideological capabilities to substantively transform the predominant set of social relations.

Workers' participation in the recuperated plants is firmly rooted in the idea of democratic and equal, i.e. one man/woman - one vote, decision-making. The overall objective is to create even distribution of power between workers and to establish democratic control within the enterprise. (Auinger 2009; Costa, 2010: 121) The disposition to participate in the decision-making on part of the workers is highly dependent on their level of education - in particular, on the personal knowledge and understanding of the historical evolution of social structures and the power relations therein. (Hafner, 2009: 54)

In almost all of Argentina's recuperated enterprises the assembly is the highest decision-making organ. It provides the workers with a space and opportunity to discuss relevant day-to-day issues such as legal and political tactics, financial and organizational matters or solidarity campaigns in favour of their local communities and other recuperated workplaces. The discussion among the workers becomes a mutual truth-seeking activity in which individual participation directly influences the future operations of the collective. (Gramsci 1919) For practical and time-saving purposes, however, many enterprises under workers' control witnessed the creation of delegations elected by the workers which reduced the relevance and frequency of assembly meetings. (Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 196)

c. Collective ownership and new subjectivity

By prioritizing the right to work over the right to private property, factory occupations and workers' self-management radically question one of the fundamental pillars of the social relations under capitalism. The concept of collective ownership transcends the class-defining division between capital and labor, and replaces the fundamental characteristic of capitalist production and organization by building egalitarian and horizontal relationships amongst the members of the enterprise. (Heller, 2002: 4)

In addition, collective ownership and self-management of production and administration gave birth to a new form of workers' subjectivity, in the sense that the autonomous and collective organization by the workers

transcended post-Fordist production methods through its focus on self-experimentation and self-determination. It was the workers' attempt to reverse Taylorist methods of production which aimed at the meticulous planning and the rigorous control of every movement and every moment of the working process. Workers' self-management demonstrated the potential to encourage the comprehensive utilisation and integration of the worker's skills into the operations of the collectively-run enterprise. (Moldaschl & Weber, 2009: 95; Sanmartino, 2003)

3. Main obstacles and limitations

Following the recuperation of the premises, the majority of Argentina's worker-controlled enterprises were confronted with an adverse and obstacle-ridden environment which served as a rather unfavourable point of departure for the resumption of production. The main external obstacles that workers had to deal with were the lack of available capital, the aggravated conditions of access to bank loans, the uncertain legal status, the absence of significant legalization in favour of workplace recuperations and the competitive pressure from traditional capitalist enterprises within the marketplace. Internally, the principal challenges were antiquated, and in some areas, completely outdated machinery and technology; the unwieldiness of the decision-making process; the dynamics of group formation; the development of systems which regulated the fair distribution of ownership and profits among the workers; the equitable differentiation of incomes; and the recruitment of new workers. (Moldaschl & Weber, 2009: 97f; Bauni & Fajn, 2010: 24) For reasons of space, the following paragraphs will briefly discuss three centres of gravity towards which most obstacles and limitations of Argentina's recuperated workplaces can be linked.

a. The dilemma with the state

In relation to the state, workers' control is faced with a twofold dilemma. If the workers decided to opt for an autonomous struggle by completely ignoring the role of the state, it is likely to remain limited to the local level. This involves the potential risk of either outright failure due to the lack of adequate legislation and the necessary funding or the incorporation of the workers' initiatives into the existing power structures. If the workers' struggle, on the other hand, is focused on the collaboration with the state, it will eventually see itself confronted with a similar threat of government cooptation aimed at undermining the potentialities of subordinate, antagonistic projects. (Leubolt & Auinger, 2006: 44)

Argentina's recuperated workplaces are consequently forced to determine the appropriate fix between a certain necessity of a strategic cooperation with the state in terms of legalization and fundraising and the permanent risk of the state's cooptation and the subsequent incorporation of the transformative potential into the established order. Given the existing need

for legal and financial support, the workers have to assure that their strategic and inevitable cooperation with the state apparatus does not turn a transformation from below into a transformation from above.

To the present day, Argentina's federal government has not come up with a coherent policy towards the increasing number of self-managed and worker-operated enterprises. As the case of Venezuela's workers' cooperatives demonstrated, financial support provided by the state played a vital role in ultimately determining the sustainability of enterprises under workers' control. (Arps & Zelik, 2006: 130) Legislature in favour of private property also considerably determined the outcome of the legal battles that were fought over the recuperated plants. In many cases the former owners profited from the expropriation of the enterprises as the workers ended up paying more than the actual value of the property in the auctions. (Geiger, 2006: 99) The picture deteriorates further considering that in many cases the means of production, in particular the machinery, were antiquated and, in part, defective.

b. The dilemma with the market

Workers' control bears the potential risk of self-exploitation within a capitalist environment. In the past, workers often tried to offset their competitive technological disadvantage by increasing the overall workload when faced with antiquated machinery. The dilemma of potential self-exploitation is aptly described by Luxemburg (1900) in the following central paragraph:

“But in capitalist economy exchanges dominate production. As a result of competition, the complete domination of the process of production by the interests of capital – that is, pitiless exploitation – becomes a condition for the survival of each enterprise. The domination of capital over the process of production expresses itself in the following ways. Labour is intensified. The work day is lengthened or shortened, according to the situation of the market. And, depending on the requirements of the market, labour is either employed or thrown back into the street. In other words, use is made of all methods that enable an enterprise to stand up against its competitors in the market. The workers forming a co-operative in the field of production are thus faced with the contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur – a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production co-operatives which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving.”⁶

⁶ The average working day in Argentina's recuperated enterprises lasted 8.6 hours in 2010. (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2010: 55) Such a figure would, in fact, contrast Luxemburg's

As in capitalism, production is determined by exchange and competition, the exploitation of the workers becomes a prerequisite for a company's survival and its viability in the marketplace. In the case of the recuperated enterprises, market forces obliged them to become capitalists themselves. The removal of their former bosses did not simultaneously free the workers from the coercion that is exercised by other competitors. To overcome the dominance of exchange over the sphere of production would require the recuperated companies to artificially escape the claws of free competition. This can ultimately only be achieved through the successful establishment of a system of consumer-producer networks between different solidarity-based enterprises, i.e. the creation of a parallel market structure. This, however, ties the fate of the producers to that of consumers which, in turn, tends to limit production to the satisfaction of the most immediate social needs within a local context. Luxemburg (1900) thus concluded that "cooperatives in the field of production cannot be seriously considered as the instruments of a general social transformation."

Following more than a decade of workers' struggle and the day-to-day experience in self-management, no industrial sector within Argentina's economy has hitherto experienced a significant shift towards the establishment of autonomous and solidarity-based structures. The majority of the worker-run companies have remained small- and medium-size enterprises of mainly local relevance and with a limited market share in their particular economic sector. (Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 189) Most recuperated enterprises thus continue to be strongly integrated in the valorisation dynamics of the capitalist market.

In terms of the organization of the labour process, i.e. the relationship between the worker and machinery, equipment, technology and other materials that enter the transformative process of production, the fragmentation of work steps and the repetition of particular identical operations, Argentina's self-organized enterprises actually differ very little from traditional capitalist companies. (Bauni & Fajn, 2010: 20; Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 198) The use of certain technologies restricts the possibilities of the workers to reorganize the labour process in such way that it actually reflects essential organizational and social changes within the enterprise. (Costa, 2010: 118)

c. Self-help myopia

Historically, the prime objective of worker self-management has not been the creation of democratic economic structures but rather the satisfaction of basic needs and the improvement of material protection on the part of the workers. (Flieger, 2006: 57) In this respect, the Argentine case was no

argument. However, the potential risk of self-exploitation as a result of the coercive market forces remains a ubiquitous threat.

exception. The general activism of the workers should therefore not be equated with the aspirations of working class emancipation and the radical criticism of capitalism. In the majority of the cases the occupation of the premises and the subsequent appropriation of the means of production did not arise out of a particular anti-capitalist ideology shared by all the workers. (Rebón, 2004: 10) The actions were primarily self-help emergency measures taken against the backdrop of a discredited political and economic system that was widely perceived as corrupt and criminal. The breach of law which occurred with the occupation of the workplaces and the appropriation of the means of production during the height of Argentina's crisis was widely regarded by the workers themselves as a legitimate act of self-defence given the adverse socioeconomic conditions. (Fajn et al., 2003: 102; Altvater, 2007: 29)

The adoption of entrepreneurial and rent-seeking attitudes by the workers in the majority of recuperated factories had, indeed, a rather stabilizing effect on Argentina's post-crisis context. By encouraging self-help practices in a situation of crisis, most of the workers in a certain sense *ex-post* legitimized the dismantlement of the welfare state under the Menem administration and simultaneously, at least in part, undermined the potential of a more radical transformation of Argentina's society following the country's most severe economic downturn in its history. (Schlosser & Zeuner, 2006: 32)

4. Prospects for future expansion

During Argentina's post-crisis era the number of self-controlled, recuperated companies increased from 161 in 2004 to 205 in 2010. (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2010: 7) The conditions that nurtured such a development were significantly marked by the lack of viable alternatives given Argentina's structural un- and underemployment⁷ stemming from increasing foreign competition and the general development of the productive forces. In addition, the workers' ten-year experience in their struggle coupled with the economic viability of most recuperated plants shaped public awareness and positively influenced other workplace recuperations.

The prospects for a future expansion of workers' control in Argentina will, on the one hand, depend on a set of favourable socio-economic and political circumstances and, on the other, on the workers' capacity to continue and to advance their struggle, both in terms of its material-institutional foundation and an ideological-cultural formation. The structural limits, contradictions and the increasing tendency towards crisis formation inherent in the post-Fordist model of accumulation are likely to intensify popular resistance in

⁷ Argentina's official unemployment rate dropped from 14 percent in 2004/Q1 to 7.5 percent in 2010/Q4. During the same period underemployment declined from 15.5 to 10 percent. (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de República de Argentina, 2011)

the near future and to encourage the search for alternative forms of socioeconomic and political praxis.

In that process, the eventual success and the growth of Argentina's recuperated enterprises under workers' control will largely be contingent upon their productive, commercial, financial integration and political, cultural and educational embeddedness within networks based on collaboration, solidarity and mutual support. (Rebón & Salgado, 2010: 206) In particular, the expansion of provincial and national networks between self-managed enterprises within Argentina, coupled with the concurrent regional and transnational integration of different national initiatives will be of major significance. Crucial for the propagation of alternative forms of production and organization and the general formation of a critical and liberating cultural vision is the workers' collaboration with local communities, grassroots organizations, cultural institutions, social movement, educational entities, alternative media, etc. (Korol, 2005: 20)

Conclusions

The renaissance of workers' control within the global context of a post-Fordist, neoliberal, finance-driven regime of accumulation is an attempt to overcome the dominance of the market and to re-embed it within nature and society. (Altvater, 2006: 17) In the face of the increasing precarization and the de-skilling of masses of working people around the world initiatives of factory recuperation and workers' self management have emerged as a pragmatic and, in part, radical response by marginalised sectors within society. Contrary to the trend of workers' atomization under neoliberalism, workplace recuperations have nurtured processes of genuine democratisation and encouraged solidarity among its members.

Ultimately, the struggle for participatory democracy needs to be first and foremost fought in the workplace, the community, the family and educational institutions, i.e. in the "apolitical' network of social relations." (Žižek, 2010: 88; Le Blanc, 2010: 25) Despite their hybrid and partly contradictory character, Argentina's recuperated enterprises have allowed for the creation of a new space of critical, academic research, popular education and emancipatory and liberating projects. Organically interrelated with a host of actors, Argentina's workers' control bears the potential to contribute to the construction of collective strategies in the pursuit of alternative forms of living and to the re-thinking of societies that transcend the prevailing relations of power.

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