

Working Class Protest, Popular Revolt and Urban Insurrection in Argentina: The 1969 Cordobazo

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Global Research, January 01, 2018
libcom.org 28 August 2007

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)
Theme: [History](#), [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Introduction

The working class protest, popular revolt, and urban insurrection which shook Argentina's second industrial city, Cordoba, on May 29-30, 1969 attracted shortly thereafter the brief but intense interest of scholars, primarily sociologists, who struggled to explain the paradox of a violent urban uprising led by the best paid and presumably most privileged sectors of the Argentine working class.¹ The Cordobazo, as the uprising came to be known, defied the common wisdom of the moment on working class politics in Latin America. Students of Latin American labor in the years prior to the Cordobazo had borrowed liberally from the writings on the American working class of Herbert Marcuse, Daniel Bell, and Seymour Lipset, who themselves had merely restated Lenin's and Gramsci's labor aristocracy theories, and posited that the decline of militancy and the "embourgeoisement" of at least the more privileged sectors of the working class in the United States also characterized Latin America. Students of Latin American labor argued that workers, especially in the more technologically-sophisticated, capital-intensive industries such as automobiles, the very one which dominated the Cordoban economy, found their material needs and social mobility aspirations fully satisfied by the relatively high wages and sophisticated industrial relations systems that the modern corporation offered. Politics, even unions, were thereby becoming increasingly irrelevant for such workers.²

After the dramatic events of May 29-30, 1969, such arguments lay buried in the ashes of Cordoba. The purpose of scholarly exegesis suddenly turned to accounting for the explosion of this supposedly content, apolitical labor aristocracy, to explain the workers' startling occupation of the city and the unforeseen destruction of a significant part of a major Latin American industrial metropolis. The explanations offered by sociologists, Argentine and foreign alike, responded as much to the respective authors' ideological and political inclinations as to empirical inquiry. For some, the Cordobazo was the result of particular model of economic development and a peculiar urban milieu, the social anomie caused by sudden industrialization and equally sudden industrial decline, the response of a labor elite to falling living standards and frustrated expectations of social mobility.³ For others, it was rather a testimony to the class consciousness-raising experience of employment in the most advanced sectors of imperialism, a revolutionary act in which the automobile workers played the role of vanguard.⁴ None of the explanations offered, however, had either the advantage of historical perspective nor the recognition of the interplay of multiple causality and temporal conjuncture which historical analysis utilizes. The purpose of this article is to take a step toward providing such an historical analysis and thereby extricate the Cordobazo from the realm of political folklore and return it to its rightful place as a complex social, political, and cultural phenomenon and reestablish its true significance as a

seminal political event in modern Argentine history.

The Regime



Perón with military uniform, drinking coffee. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

In 1955, a coup d'état overthrew Juan Domingo Perón's government, thereby beginning a period of a circumscribed democratic rule and successively weak military and civilian governments. The proscription of the country's principal political force, Peronism, deprived all the governments of the period of the legitimacy they needed to withstand the opposition and intrigues of other political actors in Argentine society and remain in power. The outlaw status of the Peronist party, in turn, forced its followers to work through non-parliamentary means and to establish practices, especially within the ranks of the Peronist working class, which justified direct action and labor militancy. Society was increasingly divided in its outlook and political practices between the pueblo-antipueblo and peronista-antiperonista, a polarization which undermined political dialogue and compromise through normal constitutional means.

The June 28, 1966, coup d'état which ended President Illia's Radical government (1963-66) established what was until then the most authoritarian regime in the country's hardly democratic recent past and deepened the frustrations and sense of exclusion on the part of the Peronist working class and an increasing portion of Argentine society in general. General Juan Carlos Onganía's "Argentine Revolution," as the civilian and military planners of the coup subsequently baptized the dictatorship, loudly proclaimed its intent to dispense with the venality of civilian politicians and oversee a process of deep structural change in Argentine society. The government suppressed nearly all forms of political participation for that purpose. The Congress was shut down, political parties were proscribed, and all forms of opposition and dissent intimidated into silence.⁵ It did so, moreover, without any promise of a future democratic restoration, speaking of "los tres tiempos," the economic, the social, and the political, with a Comtian certainty in the evolutionary sequel of its authoritarian program. Similarly, it employed the term "revolution" not only for its connotations of systemic change, but also for its sense of a social process with no temporal limits. In a country in which interest and participation in politics, in some form, was high, the regime's autocratic pretensions soon transgressed the limits supported even by those who were originally sympathetic to ousting the feckless Illia.

One of the regime's principal goals, and closely related to its authoritarian political character, was economic modernization. Much of the government's economic program hinged on weakening the power of organized labor as both a factor of power in civil society

and an obstacle to plans for rationalizing the country's economic structures and attracting foreign investment. The government froze wages and established obligatory arbitration in industrial disputes for this purpose, thereby effectively prohibiting the right to strike. It also eliminated thousands of jobs in public sector industries such as the railroads and the Buenos Aires port works and generally established a climate which emboldened business to attack its labor costs. Those Peronist union leaders who had initially looked favorably upon the coup, such as Augusto Vandor of the Union Obrera Metalurgica (UOM), were forced to confront the regime once it was clear that their hopes for reestablishing the alliance between the armed forces and the trade unions which had characterized the Peronist governments of the 1940s and 1950s would not be realized under Onganía. The vandorista-dominated COT called a general strike to protest the government's labor policies on March 1, 1967. Onganía responded by stripping six of the country's principal unions, among them the UOM, of their legal status ("personería gremial") and suspending all collective bargaining until December 31, 1968, leaving the trade union movement in disarray.⁶

It was in large measure due to the inability of Vandor and the established union leadership to resist effectively the government's anti-working class measures that a dissident trade union movement, the COT de los Argentinos (COTA), emerged in the March, 1968 COT national congress. The COTA mobilizations would play an important role in the events leading up to the Cordobazo. The COTA, led by Raimundo Ongaro of the Buenos Aires print workers' union, built on the still potent Resistance sentiment within the ranks of the Peronist working class and drew support from many of the country's disgruntled unions, but was especially strong in the provinces, most notably in Córdoba. The rivalry which union leaders in the country's second industrial city felt for their portfolio counterparts, evidenced once again by their willingness to adhere to a renegade COT which challenged the leadership of Vandor and other trade union bosses, was also stoked by the severe crisis affecting the Cordoban economy.

Onganía's economic and labor policies were especially resented in Córdoba. In the city's pivotal automobile industry for example, Industrias Kaiser Argentina (IKA), soon to be IKA-Renault, had taken advantage of the government's hardline labor policies and had already in early 1967 reduced wages by some 20%, laid-off nearly 1,000 workers, and periodically reduced the workweek, the latter a policy which naturally had an adverse effect on the workers' monthly incomes. All these measures, moreover, were intended as merely the first phase of a wholesale attack on its labor costs.⁷ The local UOM was similarly passing through a disastrous year with almost weekly bankruptcies in the highly dependent small parts industry while the strategic light and power workers' union (Luz y Fuerza) confronted a rationalization of the provincial public power company, the Empresa Provincial de Energía Eléctrica de Córdoba (EPEC), which led to the suspension of personnel, reduced work weeks, and plans to transfer jurisdiction over nuclear power development from the province to the central government.⁸

The Unions

The establishment of the foreign automobile firms in the mid-1950s transformed the local economy and labor movement and eventually made Córdoba propitious grounds for a major working-class protest. Córdoba's "new industrial worker," concentrated in the city's great automotive plants, moved in an environment significantly different from that of most Argentine workers. The most distinguishing characteristic of the auto workers' union, the Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines del Transporte Automotor (SMATA), was its autonomy and independence from the control of Buenos Aires. Though the SMATA belonged to a centralist

union structure, and was therefore technically subject to the control of the auto workers' union headquarters in Buenos Aires, in actual practice it was virtually independent.



[Source](#)

Independence was in great part due to the decentralized nature of collective bargaining in the Argentine automobile industry. Unlike textiles, metalworking, or indeed most industries in Argentina, there were no national collective bargaining agreements in the automobile industry. Instead, agreements were negotiated on a company by company basis. Such procedures gave the automobile multinationals the flexibility they wanted in a highly volatile market but also made the Cordoban auto workers' local more dependent on rank and file support with the leadership held more accountable by the workers they represented. The SMATA's more democratic internal union practices and traditions of consultation and mobilization led it to become one of the most militant unions in the country during the 1960s. The shop stewards' commission ("cuerpo de delegados"), collective bargaining committees ("comisiones paritarias"), and open assemblies greatly raised the participation of the workers in union affairs, evidenced by the high levels of union affiliation (almost 90% of the labor force in 1969), the heavy turnout of workers in union elections (above 85% of union members for the period 1962-66), and the massive participation of the workers in the labor protests of the decade, of which the Cordobazo was merely the culmination.⁹ The union's ability to resist disciplinary measures coming from Buenos Aires was also bolstered by a change in SMATA union statutes in 1968, adopted at the Cordoban local's insistence, which circumscribed the SMATA central's powers to discipline maverick union locals and, most importantly, established a broad fiscal decentralization which gave locals almost complete control over union funds.¹⁰

Other Cordoban unions were similarly free from the strictures which Argentine trade unionism frequently imposed on union locals and were more responsive to rank and file pressures. The strategic light and power workers' union had the advantage of membership in a federalist union structure and therefore enjoyed nearly complete control over union monies, collective bargaining negotiations, and the unfettered administration of elections and union social services. Its relatively small size, union membership never reaching more than 3,000, and the fortuitous presence throughout these years of a union president, Agustin Tosco, of great prestige, adamant integrity, and deep democratic convictions, also fostered the participatory union democracy and established a leadership highly

sensitive to the changing moods of the rank and file.¹¹

The significance of these more independent and democratic structures as an explanation for the leadership exercised by these unions in the Cordobazo is a complex question. In the case of both the SMATA and Luz y Fuerza, the formation of a deep trade union consciousness, a close personal identification between the workers and the union, encouraged resistance to the regime's assault on union autonomy and privileges. This "conciencia sindical," was itself the product of diverse influences. In Luz y Fuerza, the character of the labor force, largely middle class and university-trained, made the union members particularly sensitive to the loss of democratic freedoms under Onganía. Employment in a public service industry, in turn, and exposure to the economic model's perceived baleful effects on the development of a fully integrated national electric power system made the association between union rights and problems of national economic development unusually close. For example, the workings of a rate system which now strongly favored the big-bloc purchasers, largely the foreign-owned automobile companies, at the expense of the smaller, locally-owned industries as well as private consumers contributed to fashion the union's dissent as an anti-imperialist issue. That is, for the light and power workers, the problems experienced by their particular economic sector received an ideological and political interpretation which merged with their own grievances over the loss of union rights and encouraged their union's opposition to the regime.¹² In the SMATA, the hardline Peronist leadership's militancy had not only won the union such benefits as employment stability and quarterly cost of living adjustments ("clausula gatillo") in all its collective bargaining agreements, but also had filtered all these gains through a syndicalist ideology that stressed SMATA autonomy and union rights to co-management (cogestion) and participation in planning as part of Peronism's obrerista legacy.¹³

Despite the severity of the government's measures, the Cordoban unions were therefore more likely to confront the regime than were most Argentine trade unions. Nevertheless, the Cordoban labor movement had deep divisions and the cooperation that the unions would demonstrate in the months leading up to the Cordobazo is best explained as the result of the crises existing in individual industries. The SMATA and Luz y Fuerza workers' discontent with the specific measures of the regime and their adverse effects on rank and file interests compelled the leadership to adopt increasingly militant tactics between 1966 and 1969 but also to look for allies among other unions. For the auto workers employed in the IKA-Renault plants, the suspension of collective bargaining rights and the sudden assaults on all forms of union protection, especially as they negatively affected employment stability and incomes, led to unrest and violent protests between 1966 and 1969. To this there was added a simultaneous rationalization of the plants by Renault after the French multinational bought out IKA in late 1967, deeply disrupting established work practices and increasing production rhythms.¹⁴

For the light and power workers, the influence that their union had come to enjoy with EPEC, reflected in consistent gains in collective bargaining agreements and a considerable union role in administering the company, ended with the 1966 coup. The regime's refusal to allow EPEC jurisdiction over the development of the nuclear power plant in Rio Tercero, transferring authority instead to a federal government agency, offended both regionalist sentiments and the deep commitment of the union members to protect the integrity of the public power company. Their suspicions that EPEC was headed towards a wholesale privatization were only reinforced when the regime-appointed local governor assumed control over all appointments for the EPEC directorship.¹⁵ Thus, despite the fact the SMATA

and Luz y Fuerza headed the rival vandorista and ongarista factions respectively in the local labor movement, by early May 1969 they were in close consultation and preparing the labor protest that would culminate at the end of the month.

The leadership role both the SMATA and Luz y Fuerza would assume in the Cordobazo was due in no small part to their more independent, democratic structures and the constant need and willingness of the leadership to respond to shifting rank and file wishes. The traditions of militancy and mobilization which characterized both unions allowed them to give a concrete focus to the working-class discontent triggered by the Onganía dictatorship. Yet even unions not characterized by such internal practices such as the UOM or the local the bus drivers' union, the Union Tranviarios Automotor (UTA), were swept into the gathering working-class opposition to the regime and played leading roles in the May protests.

The explanation for this broad working-class front is, again, certainly partly attributable to specific problems existing in individual industries. The bankruptcies, for example, in the local parts industry occasioned by the regime's economic model, the near complete elimination of obstacles to foreign investment and corresponding loss of protection for small industrialists in the metalworking industries, were also accompanied by a general employer offensive against labor costs. One particular source of worker discontent was the refusal of the Cordoban branch of the employers' association, the "Federación Argentina de la Industria Metalúrgica del Interior," to implement the abolition of the *quitas zonales* as pledged in the 1966 UOM collective bargaining agreement. The *quitas zonales* practice permitted employers in the provinces to reduce the wage rates established in the UOM national contracts and resulted in the Cordoban metal workers receiving wages 20% lower than their Buenos Aires counterparts.¹⁶ The bus drivers affiliated to the UTA were similarly bitter over the failure of their cooperatives and the privatization of the city's bus system that was consummated in the months leading up to the Cordobazo and would seriously interfere with established job classifications and retirement plans.¹⁷



Elpidio Torres ([Source](#))

The massive nature of the Cordoban working class's participation in the Cordobazo, however, cannot be attributed to such instrumentalist factors alone. The local working class also had a tradition of militancy which preceded the onset of the Onganía dictatorship and which influenced the unions' participation in the uprising. The sources of this militancy were not only industrial, but also political and cultural. In the SMATA, the Peronist union leadership under **Elpidio Torres** had been forced, both by the union's more democratic structures but also by the presence of a captious leftwing opposition in the plants, to adopt a combative union style and discourse in order to maintain its standing among the rank and file. The SMATA union leadership presented every gain won in collective bargaining

agreements as a hard fought conquest, wrung from a miserly foreign predator, the ubiquitous octopus representing the company in union publications. To outflank the left's more intransigent positions and the Marxist shop stewards' greater belligerence on the shop floor, the Peronist leadership of the SMATA made periodic calls for the nationalization of IKA-Renault and at least publicly expressed demands for worker participation in administering the company. Torres and the union leadership also challenged certain managerial functions such as the company's right to control overtime work.¹⁸ Finally, Torres reinforced the *linea dura* tradition of the Cordoban SMATA by participating enthusiastically in the Peronist labor movement's strikes and protests, especially after the early years of building the union machinery among the inexperienced auto workers in the late 1950s and early 1960s were completed. Indeed, rather than the product of either a labor elite's social mobility frustrations or a revolutionary predisposition, what explained the militancy of the SMATA in the years prior to the Cordobazo was a rather more conventional hardline Peronist labor tradition in which demands for the lifting of the proscription weighing against the Peronist party and the return from exile of Peron played a prominent part.

The *linea dura* tendency, a proclivity for confrontation with the employers rather than negotiation and an obstinate demand for the relegalization of the Peronist party and the return of Peron from exile, also served the tactical needs of many of the city's unions in the formative stage of the modern Cordoban labor movement. Like the SMATA, the Cordoban UOM under Alejo Simo was a young union in a young industry which initially needed to adopt militant tactics in order to be accepted as an interlocutor by reluctant employers and thus gain even a minimum of credibility among the workers. The establishment of a solid union machinery was also necessary to ward off the ever present threat of an intervention from the Buenos Aires headquarters of the highly centralized UOM. That is, like the SMATA and Luz y Fuerza, though due not to the structural factors which encouraged independence in those unions but rather to the strategic calculations of the leadership which served to protect their own union positions, union tactics were formulated with virtual independence from Buenos Aires. The UOM local's leadership of the *linea dura* faction, the so-called *ortodoxos*, in the city's the Peronist trade union movement allowed it to join the anti-vandorista COTA and add its members to the ranks of the militant Cordoban unions.¹⁹

The immediate tactical needs of the unions, moreover, found resonance in Cordoba's recent labor tradition. The Peronist labor Resistance had one of its strongholds in Cordoba. The most intransigent, *linea dura* programmatic statements of the Resistance, the 1957 "Declaracion de la Falda" and the 1962 "Programa de Huerta Grande" had both been drafted in Cordoba under the heavy influence of the attending Cordoban delegations. The *linea dura* tendency also received sustenance in Cordoba after the rise of vandorismo and a more bureaucratized trade union movement since it built on regionalist sensibilities and the rivalry local union leaders felt for their portfolio counterparts. Finally, there were the political priorities of a few unions like Luz y Fuerza which joined the COTA and led the opposition to the regime, not simply in response to rank and file unrest, nor to strengthen support for the leadership and outflank the internal opposition, but because of genuine political differences with the regime, an ideological dissidence expressed in its attacks against both Ongania and the vandorista union bureaucracy.²⁰

The Students

Perhaps as important as these factors in explaining the massive, popular nature of the protest was the influence of the specific characteristics of Cordoban society and its political culture. Cordoba's historic rivalry with Buenos Aires had become impregnated with the

radical currents germinating in Argentina society throughout the 1960s, currents that gained even greater strength after the 1966 coup. The rebel ethos which characterized the city in these years affected many groups and classes, but unquestionably had its greatest impact among Cordoba's large university student community. The students comprised some 10% of the city's population and since the 1918 University Reform the local student community had become accustomed to a high degree of self-government, university autonomy, and even a considerable influence in public life. Despite such privileges, the regime repressed the university with the same severity it had attacked the labor movement. The university was placed under government control, classes were suspended for a year, the faculties purged, and debate and dissent were intimidated by an atmosphere of persecution, conformity, and mediocrity. The regime responded predictably to the early protests of its university policies by the Federación Universitaria de Córdoba (FUC), the principal organization which coordinated university student politics, by intervening in the FUC and banning all student political organizations.²¹

The regime's repressive measures did nothing more than push student politics underground where they became even more radicalized. Anti-capitalist ideologies and the romantic appeal of revolution were already strong sentiments within student ranks. Student activists had powerful symbols such as the Cuban Revolution, an exiled Peron, even Che Guevara, Cordoba's native son whose death in the Bolivian jungle in 1967 had deeply affected the local student population, to attract new militants and build up sentiment for resistance to the regime. Guerrilla groups such as the Uturuncos, the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas (FAP), the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL), and others had been active and won over student cadres in the years prior to the Cordobazo. It was largely in student ranks that the growing, underground Cordoban "new left," Peronist and Marxist alike, was sustained. The Maoist, Partido Comunista Revolucionario (PCR) and Vanguardia Comunista (VC), the neo-Trotskyist-Leninist, Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT), and the Peronist left, Juventud Universitaria Peronista (IUP), for example, developed strongholds in various university departments.

For the city's large Catholic student body, the liberation theologians who organized the clandestine study groups that served as early centers of opposition to the regime and were the promoters of human rights organizations such as the Movimiento de Reivindicaciones por los Derechos del Pueblo, allowed them to reconcile their Catholic beliefs with oppositional, even revolutionary politics. The local radicalization of Argentina's famously conservative Catholic Church was itself emblematic of the changes sweeping the city in these years. After the 1966 Latin American Bishops' Conference held in Mar del Plata, liberation theologians had begun to make significant inroads in Cordoba, especially at the parish level. Radical priests had moved into the city's poorest neighborhoods and embarked on literacy campaigns and community service programs which frequently drew in student volunteers. In 1968, the first congress of the "Movimiento de Sacerdotes del Tercer Mundo" was held in the city, the official baptism of the radical Church and an event which drew many Catholic students further toward oppositional politics.²²

The underground student resistance was nevertheless found more in the two student organizations that emerged out of the proscribed FUC, the Peronist, Frente Estudiantil Nacional, and the Marxist, Coordinadora Estudiantil en Lucha, both of which then based their opposition to the regime more on its university policies and the general lack of democratic freedoms in the country than in favor of the establishment of socialism in Argentina. Whereas the students' participation in the Cordobazo was massive, only a relatively small

number of them were members and even fewer were seasoned militants in the revolutionary parties in 1969. By the time of the Cordobazo, moreover, much of the Argentine left had temporarily adopted programs giving immediate priority to ending the dictatorship and postponing the struggle for socialism. The radicalization of Cordoba's political life throughout the decade accelerated discontent with the regime, encouraged greater student militancy, and provided some with an ideological justification for protest and confrontation with the regime. Nevertheless, the underground leftwing student culture would not find a full and tragic expression until after the Cordobazo when many of the student dissidents of the 1960s would become the revolutionaries of the 1970s. The Cordobazo itself served to crystallize those sentiments into a more purposeful ideological and political opposition.

The most significant result of the students' radicalization in these years was thus perhaps less the growth of left-wing sentiment among them than the specific opposition to the regime that their organizations and parties encouraged. This non-sectarian opposition also increased opportunities for making common cause with Cordoba's still far from radical Peronist working class. The worker-student alliance had actually been born in the early months of the regime when engineering student and part-time IKA worker Santiago Pampillon was killed by police gunfire during a 1966 student protest and occupation of Barrio Clinicas, an historic downtown neighborhood and traditional stronghold of the university students. The Cordoban COT's declaration of a general strike to protest Pampillon's death was only one of countless examples of reciprocal solidarity between students and workers in the city over the next several years.²³ The COTA mobilizations were a step further in sealing the alliance. For the first time since the historic break between the working class and students which had taken place under Peron's first government, students entered union halls, mingled with workers, and were accepted more or less as equal partners in building the alternative trade union alliance. Students did much of the spade work for the COTA in these months, running errands, printing manifestoes, organizing rallies, all of which helped to break down the barriers between workers and students, kept the lines of communication open between them, and allowed the students to coordinate their opposition to the regime with that of the local working class.²⁴

The Events

By early 1969, a series of incidents raised the already charged political atmosphere in Cordoba to a fever pitch. On January 11 and 12, the militant sectors of the Peronist trade union movement and Peronism's revolutionary political wing met in Unquillo, outside the capital city, to plan the next stage in the COTA campaign. Under the influence of the Cordoba delegation, the congress released a document, the so-called "Declaracion de Cordoba," which urged a broad civil front against the regime.²⁵ That same month, Ongania's appointed governor in Cordoba, Carlos Caballero, presented a project to harness the city's unruly labor movement through a vaguely corporatist scheme, the Consejo Asesor Economico. Caballero's proposal required representatives from the labor movement, along with those from business, the Church, and the military, sit in a purely ceremonial consejo asesor, something Caballero ingenuously believed would allay the workers' growing discontent with the regime and weaken increasing demands for the reestablishment of democratic rule. The workers naturally distrusted the motives of the governor, the very government official they accused of supporting the brigadas fantasmas, reputed bands of off-duty policemen and local thugs who were using strong-arm tactics to force union cooperation with the government. The increased property and municipal taxes which

Caballero decreed in these same months merely aggravated middle-class discontent, already deep given the lack of democratic freedoms, and added it to that of the workers and students.²⁶

The frustrations of both the workers and students reached a breaking point by early May. On May 6, the Cordoban UOM called a twenty-four hour strike to protest the unresolved problem of the *quitas zonales*.²⁷ On May 12, the regime repealed the “*sabado inglés*,” a provincial law dating from 1932 which granted workers in certain local industries a full day’s pay for a half day’s work on Saturday. The revocation implied a monthly 9% reduction in the workers’ already greatly deteriorated wages.²⁸ The May 14 protest of the SMATA workers and violent confrontation with the police to protest the government’s action served as a dress rehearsal for the *Cordobazo*, with the auto workers’ union holding the police at bay and controlling the city center for a period of several hours.²⁹ The labor protests coincided with ongoing unrest among the country’s university students, particularly in the provinces. The death of one student in a May 15 protest in Corrientes touched off a week of nation-wide student demonstrations, many of which received the support of local unions. Student protests in Cordoba on May 17 and May 21 served further to rally the university and trade union opposition to the regime.³⁰

The ecumenical spirit apparent in working-class ranks over the previous year reached a climax in this month. Though the two rival national COT’s on May 26 had individually declared a general strike for May 30 to protest recent events, in Cordoba the *vanclorista* and *ongarista* factions, locked in a bitter dispute for control of the local COT, managed to negotiate a common 48-hour general strike to begin on May 29. Representatives from the SMATA, UOM, UTA, and Luz y Fuerza, as well as from various student organizations, met on May 28 to plan the strategy for the strike. It was agreed, at Tosco’s suggestion, to stage a *paro activo*, a mass abandonment of work and subsequent street demonstration in order to display the unity of the Cordoban working class and fortify local labor militancy, rather than the lackadaisical stay-at-home strike, the *paro matero*, called by Vandor and the national COT.³¹ The plans for the strike were otherwise general. The SMATA workers, the largest working-class contingent in the protest, were given instructions to abandon their jobs at ten o’clock on the morning of the 29th and proceed in separate columns to the COT headquarters at the Vélez Sarsfield plaza, in the city center, with every indication given for a peaceful demonstration there and then dispersal.³²

In the IKA-Renault plants, shop stewards on the morning shift stopped work in their departments and gathered the workers together to organize the factory abandonments.³³ As they left the plants, workers grabbed steel bars, tools, bolts and screws, anything that might be of use in a confrontation with the police. Once outside, the some 4,000 workers from the morning shift joined Torres and the other workers who were waiting. Together they proceeded to march the some eight kilometers to the city center. As they moved through the Santa Isabel and Villa El Libertador neighborhoods, workers from the UOM, other IKA-Renault factories, students, and even common citizens began to join them, the column swelling to some 6,000 by the time it reached Vélez Sarsfield avenue. Here the first confrontation with the police took place, scattering the column into the adjacent Nueva Cordoba and Güemes neighborhoods, student and working-class preserves respectively, where the workers received the first demonstrations of solidarity from the Cordoban citizenry:

Quote:

the people's reaction was incredible, they came out into the street to hand us things, women, old ladies, gave us matches, and bottles or brooms to protect ourselves with. Everyone was in the street, old men, kids . . . there was a certain feel to the moment, joyous I would say, until then the worst hadn't happened.³⁴

The dispersed column finally reunited in San Juan boulevard, near their ultimate destination, the COT headquarters, and shortly thereafter the police opened fire, killing one IKA-Renault worker, Maximo Mena. The worker column then charged the police cordon, disbanding the latter and leaving the city center empty of the security forces. At this point, the protest lost its organization and became a spontaneous urban revolt which drew in nearly the entire Cordoban citizenry. Word spread through the downtown neighborhoods of Mena's death and the workers were soon joined by middle-class residents who had watched the confrontation from their windows and balconies and were now sharing in the collective indignation, not only with the immediate police brutality, but with three years of authoritarian rule. One student present, Luis Rubio, was stunned to see these middle-class residents part with their property, to "bring out furniture and mattresses to build the barricades and start bonfires" that would serve as ramparts against the police.³⁵

Meanwhile another worker-student column, this one led by Tosco, had marched on the city center from the north. To the rage of IKA-Renault workers was added the indignation of the Luz y Fuerza, UTA, and other workers who had been attacked by police with tear gas outside the EPEC offices where they had gathered to march. Upon reaching the city center, after Mena's death a scene of confusion and tumult, this column melted into the general protest. By one o'clock, some one hundred and fifty city blocks, nearly the entire western district of the city, had been occupied by the protesters. Since both the SMATA and Luz y Fuerza headquarters lay within the occupied zone, Tosco and Torres initially attempted to establish some degree of organization over the protest. Nevertheless, the uprising had taken on a spontaneous character, responding to the ebb and flow of the struggle in the streets without regard to any greater tactical design. The union leadership was largely working in the dark, barely able to follow the course of events much less control them.

By late afternoon, the protest had turned destructive. On Avenida Colon, the city's principal commercial street, protesters burned down the offices of Xerox, a Citroen dealership, and many other businesses. On the nearby La Canada street, they sacked the junior officers' club. The targets and nature of the destruction were significant. Whereas during the October 17-18, 1945 protests, the working class in various Argentine cities had vented its collective fury over Peron's imprisonment against the Jockey Club, the university, and other symbols of aristocratic privilege, in May, 1969 the Cordoban worker and student protesters targeted the representatives of the government and its perceived ally, foreign imperialism.³⁶ Moreover, the destruction was not wanton. The Cordobazo was remarkably free of incidents of pillaging or looting. The protesters destroyed but did not ransack. Nor were there many examples of gratuitous violence and none of the sanguinary terror such as surrounded the events of Latin America's other great urban protest in this century, the Bogotazo.



Source: libcom.org

In the streets and at the barricades, students and workers mingled freely throughout the afternoon. Alberto, an architecture student, nonetheless, had early noticed the difference between the two in response to the police repression unleashed against them:

Quote:

From the start I noticed a difference in the students' protest and the workers' protest . . . we lived in the downtown neighborhoods, the downtown was ours, to destroy it was to destroy our own. The worker, on the other hand, had merely occupied the downtown neighborhoods, it wasn't his, so he didn't hesitate; if he had to set fire or destroy, he would do it, since it was occupied territory; he wasn't going to be setting fire to a friend's car. That wasn't the case for us.³⁷

The workers, seasoned in such confrontations, had a much more expeditious approach to the protest, evidenced by the fact that, despite the repression waged against them and their massive, enthusiastic participation in early hours of the uprising, by late afternoon many, perhaps the majority, abandoned the barricades. The sense of reaching the end of the working day with wives and children waiting for them at home and yet another protest consummated was stronger than any desire to stay in the city center. As they straggled back to their neighborhoods on the city's outskirts or in the eastern, southern, and northern districts of the city, many for the first time realized the significance of the day's events. Smoldering buildings and the charred frames of cars, streets strewn with shards of glass, barricades and bonfires gave the appearance of a city at war. Much of the union leadership was also now apprehensive about continued participation in the protest. The UOM leaders retreated to the sanctuary of their union headquarters in the safer eastern district and ceased to participate further in the events.³⁸ Elpidio Torres had been in union's headquarters since the early afternoon and had passed from euphoria, to petulance, to gloom. From the time of the burnings on Avenida Colon, he had broken off communication with Tosco and other union leaders and withdrew for a period of several hours from a direct involvement in the protest, thereby depriving the uprising of the only labor leader other than Tosco perhaps capable of reestablishing some degree of organization over the workers'

Thousands of workers nonetheless stayed in the city center and the working class remained the principal protagonist in the street demonstrations and resistance. The student neighborhoods of Barrio Alberti and especially Barrio Clinicas were now the epicenters of the revolt and Tosco and the student leaders there tried to organize the worker-student resistance, an organization facilitated by the students' familiarity with the neighborhoods since these city blocks had been the scenes of many their protests in the past. From other parts of the city sympathetic supporters streamed in. A local radical priest, father Erio Vaudagna, arrived with a small group of his parishioners. One student who lived near Barrio Clinicas, Jorge Sanabria, found himself at the barricade alongside not only fellow students, but also workers, businessmen, and even housewives, many of whom he recognized as neighbors but who had never joined in one of their many protests before.⁴⁰ The city's streets filled with the protesters. Tosco subsequently estimated the total number in these hours in Barrio Clinicas to be 50,000, and a confrontation with the army, the police, or both seemed inevitable.⁴¹

On the city's western outskirts, General Sanchez Lahoz, on the orders of Ongania and army commander General Alejandro Lanusse, declared a curfew and prepared troops from the Cordoban-based Third Army Corps for a march on the city. Around five o'clock, they began to enter the city's western districts and by six they had moved into the barricaded zone and received the first gunfire. The appearance of the rooftop snipers added the third element to the Cordobazo, that of an urban insurrection led by more organized groups with clearer political, perhaps even revolutionary designs. The appearance of these groups, not included in the original planning of the protest, remains the most controversial aspect of the uprising. The regime would later attempt to attribute the Cordobazo solely to them, to a carefully organized plot by the revolutionary left with support from the international communist movement. Such a scenario naturally fit the purposes of the regime and served to deflect the causes of the protest from popular discontent to sinister revolutionary cabals. The insurrectional component was, in terms of the number of participants and the underlying causes of the uprising, a relatively minor facet of the Cordobazo when compared to either the worker-student protest or the popular revolt of the Cordoban citizenry. Nevertheless, it cannot be simply written off as the ranting of a mortally wounded dictatorship; its presence merits some explanation.

For the workers, students, common citizenry, and political militants, the unifying element in the Cordobazo was opposition to the regime. Nearly all groups and classes had been adversely affected by the Ongania government's suppression of politics. The loss of political freedoms was perhaps felt more acutely in Cordoba than anywhere else in the country given the city's local political culture, with its high levels of political participation and the presence of social actors outside the established political parties - the students, radical clergy, and the smaller Marxist parties and organizations especially - that by 1969 were outspoken in their opposition to the regime. Also involved were the Radical and Peronist party activists in the city, many of whose political careers and political aspirations respectively had been rudely cut short by the 1966 coup. The proscription of all political life had moved politics to the clandestine party committee, hardly a substitute for an open participation in politics. The snipers who resisted the army's advance therefore not only included members of the Marxist parties, but also Radicals and Peronists.⁴²

Caught off guard by the events, the city's political organizations joined the uprising only belatedly and certainly in an improvised and haphazard fashion, highlighting the

spontaneous nature of the uprising. Their preparedness, moreover, proved woefully inadequate to meet the overwhelming firepower of the army. Low caliber hunting rifles, pistols, and Molotov cocktails were no match for the army's tanks, bazookas, and machine guns. Their appearance in the Barrio Clinicas and other parts of the city by the late afternoon and the resistance they mounted throughout the night, nonetheless, was an element of the uprising and escalated the violence, most of the deaths taking place only after the snipers began opposing the army's advance.

The gunfire from the Barrio Clinicas rooftops could not ultimately stop but did retard the army's progress. For several hours, the army commanders, astounded by the massive nature of the protest and confused by the unexpected presence of an armed resistance, however modest, hesitated and postponed a final assault on the neighborhoods. As one conscript noted, the initial foray into Barrio Clinicas in the evening encouraged caution on the army's part:

Quote:

. . . we went toward Santa Rosa (a street which traverses Barrio Clinicas) . . . from there we returned to Avenue Colon because just a block and a half into Barrio Clinicas it was terrible, the gunshots, the fires, and everything . . . we spent almost half the night under the trucks and cars because we were really afraid, the gunfire against us was relentless and we didn't ourselves know where to shoot.⁴³

Shortly before eleven o'clock that night, Luz y Fuerza workers entered the Villa Revol power plant, the principal source of electric power in Cordoba, and blacked out the city. The blackout was part of a contingency plan worked out by Tosco and the Luz y Fuerza leadership on the night of the 28th independent of the other unions in the event of prolonged street resistance and repression by the security forces.⁴⁴ In effect, for several hours the city was submerged in total darkness. As shots rang out, the protesters communicated to one another by tapping telephone wires to warn of troop movements while the army commanders deliberated nervously about which steps to take next. Once power was restored, around 1 a.m., the army resumed its assault on Barrio Clinicas. The neighborhoods here remained the strategic center of the protest though Cordoba's north and south districts were new areas of disturbances, the uprising apparently having moved to the peripheries of the city where the military presence was weak.

At dawn on May 30, the day of the COT's national strike, Cordoba was an occupied city. Though sporadic gunfire could be heard and the snipers in Barrio Clinicas continued to offer resistance, the army had posted troops at strategic points throughout the city and moved in heavy tanks. As infantrymen mobilized for a final assault on Barrio Clinicas, protest marches previously planned for the national general strike that day drew the support of much of the populace and tied up downtown streets, forcing the military commanders to postpone yet again a final crushing of the resistance. After the marches, however, the troops did finally take Barrio Clinicas, decreed another curfew, and raided the union halls of the principal unions involved in the protest, arresting Tosco, Torres, and several other union leaders, adding their names to the list of the hundreds of workers who had already or would soon fall prisoner. After two days of protest and violence, the Cordobazo had ended. The uprising had caused a considerable destruction of property and left an official figure of twelve dead and ninety-three wounded, but the actual figure was much higher with perhaps as many as sixty

killed.⁴⁵ The Cordobazo immediately disrupted national politics. The unpopular Caballero abandoned the governorship and the position of the regime was greatly weakened. Onganía was henceforth nearly completely dependent on the support of the army to remain in power and, his government never able to reassert his authority after the Cordoban protest, he was forced to resign a year later.

The 'Popular Memory'

Oral testimony of the Cordobazo reveals certain recurring themes in the recollections of the individuals who participated in the May, 1969 events which, accompanied by a careful historical reconstruction, help to decipher the greater meaning of the uprising. One recurring image is the regime's authoritarian character as precipitant, the widespread sense of exclusion from the country's economic, social, and especially political life felt by all groups and classes. Unlike the *viborazo*, a second great urban protest which would shake Córdoba again in March, 1971, there were no demands for systemic change, no explicitly anti-capitalist impetus behind the events of May, 1969. Such sentiments, though gathering strength throughout the decade, were still inchoate and not the driving force in the Cordobazo. They perhaps provided an ideological justification for opposition among some protesters but did not compel it for most, though the destruction of foreign businesses such as Xerox and Citroen indicate there were at least certain anti-imperialist "imaginaries" present in the uprising, political notions still lacking a fully elaborated ideological content but serving as a, perhaps unconscious, emotional stimulus to the protest.⁴⁶ The principal image that has remained in the participants' recollections, however, is of a mass protest, one in which all differences, political and class alike, were momentarily eclipsed. Alberto, the student protester recalled this, as did many participants, of their most vivid memory of the Cordobazo:

Quote:

In my neighborhood, Güemes, virtually everybody was out on the street. The last people in the world you would have expected to see in the protest were there . . . there weren't just a lot of people in the protest, there were swarms of them . . . just ordinary neighbors who weren't usually involved in politics in any way.⁴⁷

In the case of the working class, the government's illegitimacy was undoubtedly rooted in the combination of its authoritarian political character with economic policies that hurt its specific interests. For the workers, the regime postponed, now indefinitely, the long-standing demand for a lifting of the proscription of Peronism. The resentments that had festered in their ranks since the time of the Resistance as a result of Peronism's pariah status only grew worse as the regime's economic policies led to rationalizations, plant closures, and firings. Indeed, for the entire Cordoban working class, but especially for the auto workers, political and economic grievances had certainly become one, evidenced in the blurring of both complaints as causal explanations for the Cordobazo which characterizes many worker testimonies. In a representative testimony, Mizaël Bizzotto, an IKA-Renault shop steward, stated:

Quote:

. . . the year 1969 was one of political crisis, of political and moral dissatisfactions ~ as a result of the terrible persecution unleashed against the workers and the Peronist movement, with the people without any power to express themselves politically, without any say or rights our main reasons for abandoning the plants were economic grievances . . . our participation was political, we had our political ideas very clear in this respect.⁴⁸

The role of the local working classes' Peronist identity in the Cordobazo, however, resided more in a deepened sense of exclusion due to Onganía's indefinite postponing of the relegalization of their movement, more than it served as an immediate cause of the protest itself, indicated by the lack of Peronist slogans or traditional Peronist imagery during the Cordobazo. No demands for the return of an exiled Peron, for example, seem to have been heard and very few of the workers interviewed attributed their participation strictly to Peronist causes per se, undoubtedly a factor which helps to explain the unity of the Cordoban unions despite the divisions which then separated them. The workers' protest drew on a Cordoban tradition of labor militancy in which the workers' Peronist identity and Peronism's proscribed status were an integral part, but the object of the protest was the Onganía government itself. The political opposition of the working class, in the popular memory and in the concrete historical reality, was not Peronist, but anti-dictatorial:

Quote:

. . . the Cordobazo was an essentially political protest but political in the broadest sense, not sectarian but in demand of the ending of the dictatorship.⁴⁹

The students' distinct political loyalties were similarly muted. The vast majority of the city's university students, that sector of Cordoban society where leftist sentiment was strongest, also opposed the regime and adhered to the protest for less than revolutionary reasons. Nora, a freshman at the time of the Cordobazo, echoed the recollections of other students about how even the cosseted university environment still bred a sufficient set of grievances to galvanize the student opposition to the regime that eventually culminated in the protest:

Quote:

. . . after Onganía there was no participation allowed in the university, something that made the students think about what the more politicized fellow classmates were saying . . . to think that there were professors giving classes now who were only there because they were somebody's crony, people without any academic credentials at all. People saw that the government's university policies were disastrous.⁵⁰

The worker-student alliance born in the CGTA and carried into the streets during the Cordobazo did not, moreover, necessarily mean ideological affinity with the radical currents that were germinating in the students' ranks. As Fernando Solís, the IKA-Renault employee, said:

Quote:

In the years leading up to the Cordobazo, in 1967 and 1968, there were always students at the factory gates passing out political literature. The workers neither rejected them nor accepted them. They simply looked upon the students as being part of another world.⁵¹

Another recurring image therefore was the lack of perception of participating in any sort of revolutionary assault on state power and without motives other than expressing dissatisfaction with the regime, in a protest that united opposition to Onganía and transcended sectarian differences. The political and ideological rivalries in Córdoba and in Argentine society generally, which would indeed become acrimonious in the years following the Cordobazo, were not present in the 1969 uprising. For the workers, there was similarly no distinction by industrial sector, no differences between the supposedly more militant auto workers and the rest of the working class. The SMATA workers had played a crucial role in organizing the May 29 general strike and had provided the largest working-class contingent in the protest, but the Cordobazo was a protest that had drawn in all the city's workers. A young parish priest, Rodolfo, who had returned recently from Europe where as a seminarian he had been heavily influenced by the liberation theologians, noticed the broad working class participation as a great difference between the Cordobazo and the events of May, 1968 in Paris which he had also witnessed:

Quote:

In Córdoba, the columns that marched to the city were mainly workers my own barrio was comprised mainly of poor workers, not workers from IKA-Renault or EPEC but construction workers, garage mechanics, handymen, and domestic servants. Even so, they went to the city center, maybe just as spectators but they went.⁵²

Finally there exists the image, perhaps the dominant one, of a successive misinterpretation of the uprising, of a romanticization of the Cordobazo which informed the subsequent political behavior of many of its participants. The testimony of Luis, a university student who participated in the protest and would later become a militant in the Peronismo cle Base movement, reflected the feelings of many who would be deeply and personally affected by the events of May 29-30, 1969:

Quote:

. . . the Cordobazo turned into a romantic image that was present in everything, it established a myth that was very powerful . . . that would later end in the holocaust of blood that would lead many of us to get killed and, it's true, to kill . . . it precipitated everything.⁵³

Conclusion

The Cordobazo had its roots in the particular characteristics and distinct political culture of Córdoba which interacted with a specific historical conjuncture to produce a protest of unforeseen violence and consequences never imagined, notably by its own protagonists. The Onganía regime galvanized the opposition of diverse groups and classes in the city, each with its own set of grievances, who found common cause in the local working class's

protest. The workers provided the largest contingent of protesters for the length of the uprising, but nearly all the Cordoban citizenry was represented in the rebellion. The Cordobazo was also a spontaneous revolt. Other than the loose plan that union and student leaders had worked out for the May 29th demonstrations, there was no organized strategy, much less any presentiment of the shape that events that would take. The Cordobazo certainly cannot be attributed to revolutionary designs, either on the part of Cordoban auto workers or the city's other unions. Similarly, economic causes were just one of a number of factors contributing to the opposition to the regime. Finally, because of the close association between the government's economic program and its authoritarian character, the protest was felt and expressed more as a direct political opposition, a protest against non-democratic rule, than an ideological one.

Although the Cordobazo's immediate causes were not revolutionary, its ultimate effects might well have been. The uprising's mythologization served to deepen local working-class militancy and sparked the almost six years of uninterrupted labor struggles which followed. Ironically, despite the overwhelmingly Peronist identity of the workers who were its principal protagonists, the Cordobazo came to be subsequently associated almost exclusively with other sectors of the labor movement. The Marxist left in the city appropriated the Cordobazo and transformed it into a legitimizing myth of its own, an instrument it used for the ideological assault on Peronism's monopoly of working-class loyalties. The clasista movements in Cordoba in the early 1970s drew heavily on the myth of the Cordobazo in their political work in the Cordoban car plants and thereby provided the grist for the romanticized image of the revolutionary Cordoban working class which still exists today.⁵⁴

Because of the complexity of the event and the confusion which surrounded it, and indeed still does, the left itself gave diverse interpretations to the Cordobazo. Each of the left-wing parties and organizations saw the uprising through its own set of ideological precepts and built its revolutionary program around its example. For the PCR and the Vanguardia Comunista, the Maoist left, it was proof of the latent power of the masses and the efficacy of the revolutionary general strike and popular insurrection as the surest road to socialism. For the Trotskyists and Marxist-Leninists in the PRT on the other hand, it confirmed the need to form a revolutionary party to give the working class the institutional and organizational discipline required so as not to dissipate its efforts. For the PRT and Guevarists in the FAL alike, it convinced them of the need to devise a parallel military strategy, a revolutionary army, to confront the repressive powers of the state in future confrontations. For the Peronist left, it was a vindication of the revolutionary essence of Peronism and the innate militancy of the Peronist working class, only in need of the return of its historic leader to wrestle it away from the corrupt and traitorous elements in the movement and to restore its original revolutionary promise. The historical truth behind the myth was not so important as the myth's existence, and the Cordobazo would exercise a profound influence on the imagination of the local working class and the Cordoban youth in coming years. It was a final, fateful step toward the violent climax the country would experience in the 1970s.

Notes

1. Juan Carlos Agulla, *Diagnostico social de una crisis: Cordoba, mayo de 1969* (Cordoba: Editel 1969); "Significado de Cordoba," *Aportes* 15 (Jan. 1970): 48-61; Francisco Delich, *Crisis y protesta social: mayo de 1969* (Buenos Aires, 1970), "Córdoba: la movilización permanente," *Los libros* 3: 21 (Aug. 1971): 4-8; Ernesto Laclau, "Argentina-Imperialist Strategy and the May Crisis," *New Left Review* 62 (July-Aug. 1970): 3-21; Robert Massari, "Le cordobazo," *Sociologie du Travail* 4 (1975): 403-418; James Petras, "Córdoba y la revolución socialista en la Argentina," *Los libros* 3: 21 (Aug. 1971): 28-31.

2. Henry J. Landsberger, "The Labor Elite: Is it Revolutionary?", *Elites in Latin America*, S. M. Lipset and Aldo Salari, eds. (Oxford, 1967), pp. 256-300, is representative of the pre-Cordobazo consensus.

3. Juan Carlos Agulla, *Diagnostico social de una crisis: Córdoba, mayo de 1969*, (Córdoba, 1969), pp. 23, 81. This particular interpretation continues to be a favorite of non-leftist scholars of the Argentine working class. See Peter Ranis, *Argentine Workers. Peronism and Contemporary Class Consciousness* (Pittsburgh and London, 1992), pp. 186-187.

4. Echoes of this argument can also be heard in subsequent sociological interpretations, especially by a somewhat dogmatic school of Argentine Marxists, who attribute the Cordobazo solely to working-class economic grievances. See B. Balvé and B. Balvé, *El '69. Huelga política de masas* (Buenos Aires, 1989), pp. 195-199. Both the Marxist (which, in reality, is simply a vulgar Marxist analysis) and labor aristocracy arguments suffer from the same ascriptive flaw in interpretation. Both assume that a particular kind of economic development and the existence of a specific "worker's condition" resulting from employment in a determined economic sector (e.g. an automotive multinational) can explain the working class's political comportment, in this case its participation in a major urban protest. They minimize the special political circumstances which triggered a by no means, as such interpretations often seem to imply, inevitable protest. They also overlook or minimize the other factors that this article will address: the development of a local militant trade union tradition, the formation of a uniquely Cordoban "conciencia sindical" in the city's principal unions which heightened the identification between the workers and the union, and especially the important role played by other sectors of Cordoban society, including other sectors of the working class, in the uprising.

5. See Oscar Anzorena, *Tiempo de violencia y utopía (1966-1976)* (Buenos Aires, 1988); Guillermo O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* (Berkeley, 1979); Gregorio Selser, *El onganiato*, vols. I, II (Buenos Aires, 1986).

6. Informe, Servicio de Documentacion e Informacion Laboral, 85 (March, 1967): 12-23.

7. Archives des Usines Renault, Boulogne-Billancourt. Direction juridique 0734 3400 "Argentine" File "Situation IKA," Memorandum from]. M. Palacios to M. Maison, Jan. 16, 1967; Memorandum from A. Copain Mefray to M. Maison, Feb. 3, 1967.

8. Informe, Servicio de Documentacion e Informacion Laboral 89 (July 1967): 6; *Electrum* IV, 109 (March, 1967): 1-4.

9. Monica B. Gordillo, "Los prolegomenos del Cordobazo: los sindicatos líderes de Córdoba dentro de la estructura de poder sindical," *Desarrollo Economico* 31:122 (July-Sept. 1991): 171-172.

10. *La Voz del SMATA*, SMATA-Cordoba IV: 32 (Nov. 1968): 6.

11. Carlos E. Sanchez, *Estrategias y objetivos de los sindicatos argentinos* (Córdoba, 1973), p. 34; I. M. Roldan, *Sindicatos y protesta social en la Argentina. Un estudio de caso: el Sindicato de Luz y Fuerza de Córdoba (1969-1974)* (Amsterdam, 1978), pp. 119-120.

12. Sindicato de Luz y Fuerza de Córdoba, *Memoria y Balance (1966-67)*. pp. 69-71, "La situación económica-financiera de la Empresa Provincial de Energia de Cordoba. Una contribución sindical a su solución," *Electrum* XVI: no. 65 (Aug. 1972): 6-11.

13. The SMATA's union publications, comunicués, and broadsides throughout the 1960s are replete with a syndicalist language which presents the union as the main repository of Peronist traditions regarding the protection and advance of basic workplace rights. This *linea dura* discourse contains strong anti-

capitalist currents that have clear roots to the Resistance. See, for example, *La Voz del SMATA* 1:3 (June 1964): 1-3 and *El mecanico* 6:5 (Nov. 1967): 3. On the resilience of the Resistance's myths and political consciousness in the Argentine working class generally, see Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration. Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge, 1988).

14. James P. Brennan, "El clasismo y los obreros. El contexto fabril del sindicalismo de liberación en la industria automotriz cordobesa, 1970-1975," *Desarrollo Economico* 32: 125 (April-lune 1992): 9-12.

15. Gordillo, "Los prolegómenos del Cordobazo: los sindicatos líderes de Córdoba dentro de la estructura de poder sindical," pp. 181-182.

16. *Clarín*, May 12, 1969, p. 24, "El sindicalismo cordobés en la escalada," *Aquí y ahora* 3:26 (May 1971): 6-15.

17. *La Voz del Interior*, May 7, 1969, p. 21.

18. Gordillo, pp. 177-178.

19. "El sindicalismo cordobés en la escalada," *Aquí y ahora*, pp. 6-15.

20. Gordillo, pp. 184-185; Roldan, *Sindicatos y protesta social en la Argentina*, pp. 133-145.

21. Ramon Cuevas and Osvaldo Reicz, "El movimiento estudiantil: de la Reforma al Cordobazo," *Los libros* 21 (Aug. 1971): 17-18.

22. Claudia Hilb and Daniel Lutzky, *La nueva izquierda argentina: 1960-1980* (Buenos Aires, 1984), p. 20; Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron. Argentina's Montoneros* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 52-60.

23. Cuevas and Reicz, "El movimiento estudiantil: de la Reforma al Cordobazo," pp. 17-18.

24. *CGT* 1:1 (May 1968): 1; *COT* 1:2 (May 1968): 1; *CGT* 1:10 (July 1968): 2.

25. "Declaración de Córdoba," Regional Delegation, March 21, 1969.

26. *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), March 23, 1969, p. 34; *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), May 6, 1969, p. 11; *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), May 21, 1969, p. 10; Agustín Tosco, "Testimonio del cordobazo," *Presente en la lucha de la clase obrera. Selección de trabajos* (Buenos Aires, 1984), pp. 37-55.

27. Informe, Servicio de Documentacion e Informacion Laboral 111 (May 1969): 11

28. The importance of the repeal of the "sabado inglés" as a causal explanation for the Cordobazo, nonetheless, has been greatly overstated and is the common property of both the labor aristocracy and vanguard interpretations of the working class's role in the uprising with which we disagree. The government's revocation of the "sabado inglés" applied only to workers who entered employment in the companies after the abrogation of the law. For all the workers who were already on the payroll, in IKA-Renault and in other provincial industries where it was paid, it remained in effect. The importance of the "sabado inglés" repeal on the Cordobazo was thus less direct than is generally assumed. Rather, its significance was as yet another event which raised tensions in the city at a critical moment and deepened the unrest in working-class ranks with a government widely perceived to be hostile to its interests.

29. *Jeronimo* 1, 10 (May 20, 1969).

30. Daniel Villar, *El cordobazo* (Buenos Aires, 1971), p. 12; Jorge Bergstein, *El cordobazo. Testimonios, memorias, reflexiones* (Buenos Aires, 1987), pp. 58-59.

31. Interviews, Elpidio Torres, secretary general of Cordoban SMATA, Córdoba, July 25, 1985; Miguel Correa, secretary general of the CGT de los Argentinos, Córdoba delegation, July 3, 1985; Alfredo Martini, vice-president of Cordoban UOM, Córdoba, July 20, 1987.

32. "Paro Nacional," union directive, May 28, 1969, SMATA-Córdoba, SMATA archive, SMATA-Córdoba, Volume "Volantes, Comunicados y Diarios del SMATA, 1969."

33. Narrative histories of the Cordobazo, of varying degrees of accuracy, can be found in Roqué Alarcón, *Cordobazo* (Buenos Aires, 1989); B. Balvé and B. Balvé, *El '69. Rosariazo-Cordobazo-Rosariazo* (Buenos Aires, 1989); Jorge Bergstein, *El cordobazo* (Buenos Aires, 1987); M. Bravo Tedin and G. Sarria, *El cordobazo, un grito de la libertad* (La Rioja, 1989); Daniel Villar, *El cordobazo* (Buenos Aires, 1971). Our reconstruction and analysis of the Cordobazo is based primarily on the oral testimony of worker, student, and middle-class participants in the uprising, the only historical record that remains, outside of newspaper accounts, of the protest.

34. Interview, Fernando Solis, administrative employee in the IKA-Renault forge plant, Córdoba, August 10, 1989.

35. Interview, Luis Rubio, university engineering student, Córdoba, May 22, 1990.

36. Nor, given the strength of the worker-student alliance in these months in Córdoba and elsewhere in the country, of course, were there examples during the Cordobazo of working-class resentments directed against the students such as those found in the October 17-18, 1945 events. The insults and taunts such as "¡alpargatas si, libros no!" hurled against the students and the general anti-elitist, anti-intellectual tenor of the working-class protest that characterized the October 17-18 events had no counterpart in the Cordobazo. See Daniel James, "October 17th and 18th: Mass Protest, Peronism and the Argentine Working Class," *Journal of Social History* (Spring, 1988): 445, 452-454.

37. Interview, Alberto, university student, Córdoba, September 22, 1989.

38. Interview, Alejo Simo, president of Cordoban UOM, Córdoba, June 30, 1985; Alfredo Martini, vice president of Cordoban UOM, Córdoba, July 20, 1987.

39. Interview, Elpidio Torres, president of SMATA-Córdoba, Córdoba, July 25, 1985.

40. Interview, Jorge Sanabria, university student, Córdoba, August 12, 1989.

41. Agustín Tosco, taped testimony of the events of the Cordobazo, circa 1972, Luz y Fuerza headquarters, Córdoba.

42. Agustín Tosco, taped testimony of the events of the Cordobazo, circa 1972, Luz y Fuerza headquarters, Córdoba. Tosco's testimony is adamant on this point and is confirmed by the oral testimony of Radical and Peronist militants.

43. Interview, Osvaldo, university engineering student performing his military service at the time of the Cordobazo, Córdoba, August 10, 1989.

44. Agustín Tosco, taped testimony of the events of the Cordobazo, Luz y Fuerza headquarters, Córdoba. Interview, Felipe Alberti, member of Luz y Fuerza executive committee, Córdoba, July 22, 1985.

Interview, Oscar Alvarez, member of Luz y Fuerza executive committee, Cordoba, August 5, 1987.

45. Daniel Villar, *El cordobazo* (Buenos Aires), p. 96; *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), May 31, 1969, p. 13; *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), June 1, 1969, p. 16.

46. The authors' interpretations of the Cordobazo generally coincide, enough obviously, that they feel comfortable co-authoring an article on the uprising. This is perhaps the most important point where they diverge. Brennan puts much more emphasis on the peculiarities of Cordoban society combined with the specific conjuncture of the Onganía dictatorship as the explanation for the May events. Gordillo asserts that, 'in addition to these factors, that there was gestating throughout the 1960s in the city a "culture of resistance" and that certain political "imaginaries," among them the proto-revolutionary sentiments of the students for example, were also present in the protest.

47. Interview, Alberto, university student, Cordoba, September 22, 1989. Brennan also believes such sentiments were present in the Cordobazo, but argues that their influence in the 1969 protest should not be overstated, that to do so conflates the ideology of the 1970's with that of the 1960's and ignores the importance of the liberal political culture of the majority of Cordoba's university students in 1969.

48. Interview, Mizaël Bizzotto, IKA-Renault shop steward, Cordoba, August 15, 1989.

49. Interview, Miguel A. Contreras, President of Cordoban Communist Party, Cordoba, November 23, 1989.

50. Interview, Nora, university student, Cordoba, July 22, 1989.

51. Interview, Fernando Solís, administrative employee IKA-Renault forge plant, Cordoba, August 10, 1989.

52. Interview, Rodolfo, parish priest and member of "Sacerdotes del Tercer Mundo" movement in Cordoba, Cordoba, September 1, 1989. The Cordobazo was, as this testimony indicates, a protest which drew in almost the entire Cordoban working class, not just the presumed labor elite in the local automobile industry. Indeed, one of the few sectors of the working class which did not participate notably in the protest were the Fiat workers, in 1969 still closely watched through their company-controlled plant unions, SITRAC-SITRAM, and therefore not included by the other unions in the planning of the May 29 general strike. Only a handful of Fiat workers marched into the city center to participate in the protest.

53. Interview, Luis, university student, Cordoba, March 3, 1990.

54. Brennan, "El clasismo y los obreros. El contexto fabril del sindicalismo de liberación en la industria automotriz cordobesa," pp. 15-19.

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