

Social dialogue, industrial relations and union revitalization in Argentina after 2003

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Abstract

After two decades of neoliberalism, Argentina goes through different transformations that reactivate the economy and generate a restructuration process. At the same time, these transformations entail an institutional strengthening: the best examples are labor institutions.

This new context is characterized by an economic growth based on the domestic market and supported by several active wage policies within an employment recovering framework. All of which makes this context favorable for the resurgence of a central actor of industrial relations: the unions (Collier y Etchemendy, 2006, Senén y Medwid, 2007; Kelly y Frege, 2003)

The resurrection of their actions becomes visible in different ways: the institutional strengthening of the social dialogue, the recovery of the collective bargaining dynamism, as bipartite form of social dialogue, and the rise in labor conflict, as its opposite.

In order to understand the reach of union revitalization, especially regarding the collective bargaining, is necessary to consider as a starting point the social dialogue achievements. The aim of this paper is to think about the space taken by the social dialogue in this new stage in Argentina, in which development has been fundamental the prominent role of the union actor and the State active participation. In this paper we will analyze the period after 2003 in Argentina. However, we will refer to the 90s decade, necessarily attending to the comparison with another recent period of time.

This paper is in line with the industrial relation discipline and tries to contribute with it. We took the strategic choice theories and the central question is: the social dialogue establishment depends on the socioeconomic and political context in which is inserted or on the actors or on the interaction of both? (Thelen y Steinmo, 1992; Kochan, Katz y Mc. Kerise, 1994; Locke, Kochan, y Piore, 1995).

For this, we will use data produced by the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security (MTESS) that shows recent trends in terms of collective bargaining and labor conflict. In particular, the results of the *Módulo de Relaciones Laborales* (MRL) (Labor

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Relations Module) - from the *Encuesta de Indicadores Laborales* (EIL) (Survey of Labor Indicators) in 2006 and 2008³ – will be shown.

Key words: Social dialogue, industrial relations, union revitalization, Argentina

³ The *Encuesta de Indicadores Laborales* (EIL) (Survey of Labor Indicators) is monthly conducted by the MTEySS since 1998. It is targeted at private formal businesses with more than ten employees in five urban centers: Greater Buenos Aires, Greater Cordoba, Greater Rosario, Greater Mendoza and Greater Tucuman in all branches of activity, except the primary activities sector (agriculture, mines and quarries).

Introduction

After two decades of neoliberal reforms, many countries of Latin America are suffering in this new millennium different changes that give rise to processes of economic restructuring and reactivation and which, at the same time, lead to the institutional strengthening: what happened with labor institutions is a clear example of it. In Argentina, the year 2003 opens a new phase characterized by the economic growth based in the internal market and sustained by different active policies of wages in the framework of an employment recovery.

These new conditions are favorable for the resurgence of the central actor of labor relations, i.e. labor unions. The resurgence of its action becomes visible in different ways: the strengthening of social dialogue, the recovery of the dynamism of collective bargaining as the bipartite form of the dialogue, and the increase of the industrial dispute as its opposite.

In order to understand the scope of union revitalization, it is necessary to consider as starting point the progress as regards social dialogue. Therefore, this article aims to reflect on the place occupied by social dialogue in this new phase in Argentina, in which dynamics union revitalization and the State's active participation were fundamental.

Therefore the analyzed period will start in 2003. However in the development of the analysis of these indicators we will refer to the 90s, since the need to contrast the current context with other recent historical event.

The study falls within the disciplinary context of labor relations and seeks to contribute to discipline. In this line, the question that guides this reflection is whether the establishment of social dialogue depends on the actors or on the general socioeconomic and political context in which this phenomenon is placed, or is it the interaction of both, actors and institutions, actors and context? (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992; Locke, Kochan, and Piore, 1995.)

As regards the structure of the study, in the first part we will explain the main contributions of the chosen theoretical framework and show which is the context in which the phenomenon is placed and which is the role of the actors in the analyzed case. In the second section, we will analyze the concept of social dialogue; without the intention of being exhaustive, we will explain what it refers to, how the concept is redefined in Argentina, its origin, nature and purpose. In the third part, we will describe the evolution of social dialogue in Argentina, the different experiences taking into account its recent history (1990-2011) and we will specially describe The National Board of Employment, Productivity and Minimum, Vital and Mobile Salary (CNEPS for its abbreviation in Spanish), which we consider is the best result of the current phase of social agreement.

In the fourth section, we will show the evolution of collective bargaining which is nowadays very established in our country, for which we will analyze its evolution in terms of quantity, content and level. In the fifth part, we will analyze the industrial dispute in Argentina as the opposite of the dialogue but at the same time as complementary in the current situation of labor relations which is another proof of

union revitalization. Finally, we will outline the main conclusions and reflections taken from the analysis.

1. Applying the strategic approach

As we mentioned in the introduction, the analysis of social dialogue in the current Argentine situation puts again in the centre an important debate on the discipline of labor relations: which role plays the environment –the economic growth and the institutional strengthening- and which is the role of the actors (strengthened unions, interventionist State) in order to understand the revitalization in its different ways, specially the consolidation of social dialogue.

The theories of strategic analysis have been developed by many American authors as a response to the limitations of the more traditional approaches of labor relations in order to explain some of the phenomena and current characteristics of the actors of industrial relations (e.g. the administration of human resources as actor of industrial relations, the decrease of the union affiliation rate, the outcomes of bargaining in non-unionized contexts, etc.) (Kochan, Katz and Mc. Kerise, 1994; Kochan, Piore, and Locke, 1995.)

In the words of its own authors, we wish to develop a more strategic perspective on U.S industrial relations and thereby demonstrate that future patterns are not unalterably predetermined by the economic, technological, or some other forces in the American environment. Our central argument is that industrial relations practices and outcomes are shaped by the interactions of environmental forces along with the strategic choices and values of American management, unions leaders, workers, and public policies decision makers. We believe that by better understanding the nature of these interactions, the consequences of alternative strategic choices (and the different values they embody), the parties can gain greater control over the destiny of the organizations and interests that they represented. Kochan, Katz, and Mc. Kerise (1994, p.4y5.).

An important element of the theory is the role of the environment as determinant of the current dynamics in labor relations. In effect, the current context of reactivation and economic restructuring in post-2003 Argentina seems to be radically different from the one of the 90s.

During the 90s, the government of Carlos Menem boosted a series of structural reforms which main measures were directed to the deregulation of all markets, included the labor market. The laws and decrees of labor flexibility affected workers negatively, since the increase of unemployment and precarization, as well as the union action, due to the consistent weakening of these organizations. As reference framework, some examples are: the Employment Act (December 1991) which introduced flexibility in employment contracts with the aim of contributing to the creation of employment; the Decree 1334/91 which inhibited salary rises that were not justified by productivity increase; the Decree 470/93 which allowed the bargaining of collective agreements by companies and included explicit clauses referring to investments, technology incorporation and professional training systems as factors to bear in mind in equivalent agreements: and Act 24.467 (March 1995) which established a new labor regime for small and medium sized enterprises.

The culmination of this period in 2001, with the abolition of the Convertibility Law and the suspension of public debt payments, gave rise to an unprecedented economic,

political and social crisis. The devaluation after the 2001 crisis changed the game rules that had structured the functioning of the economy during the 90s (Felder, 2007.)

The phase initiated in 2003 is characterized by the economic reactivation, the growth of the internal market and an active salary policy in the framework of a sustained recovery of employment –unemployment fell from 17.5% in 2003 to 8.9% in 2011- and the State’s intervention seems to have taken a more favorable direction for workers (Senen Gonzalez and Medwid, 2007.) Since 2003, the Argentine economy has grown in a sustained way and shows favorable indicators as regards growth, external and fiscal surplus. According to Trajtemberg (2008), the economic growth of the manufacturing sector is the first evidence of the differences between the current economic regime and the one that ruled in the 90s until the end of 2001. The change of relative prices allowed to improve the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector directed both to the internal and the external market.

All these contextual changes were a result of an emphatic change of the government’s political orientation in which the recommendations of the Washington Consensus were left aside since the 2001 crisis. The first months of Nestor Kirchner’s government (2003-2007) were marked by the low election percentage that took him to the presidency and stimulated the need to generate alliances with different social groups. In this direction, a ‘coalition’ between the government and the unions takes place, especially with the majority labor union, the General Confederation of Labor of the Argentine Republic (CGT for its abbreviation in Spanish), which led to a greater state intervention in industrial disputes and the encouragement to collective bargaining and social agreement (Etchemendy and Collier, 2006.) The CGT also plays a political role in bargaining since it negotiates with the State in order to obtain concessions and boost the definition of national-scope economic, labor and social policies.

This environment or context is an unavoidable start point for the analysis of the characteristics of industrial relations systems but it is not expressed immediately nor does it determine processes, tendencies and outcomes. In more general terms, the actors do not adapt their strategies and policies to the changes of the environment in a constant way. Therefore industrial relations systems often go through long periods of stability which are interrupted by great transformations. These transformations –such as the structural reforms in the 90s and today’s economic growth and State’s intervention- do not have a univocal and deterministic effect in the reorientation of industrial relations; rather, this reorientation depends on the government, unions and businessmen’s responses against the forces of the context. At the same time, the responses depend on the strategic choices of the different actors which affect the processes and outcomes of labor relations systems.

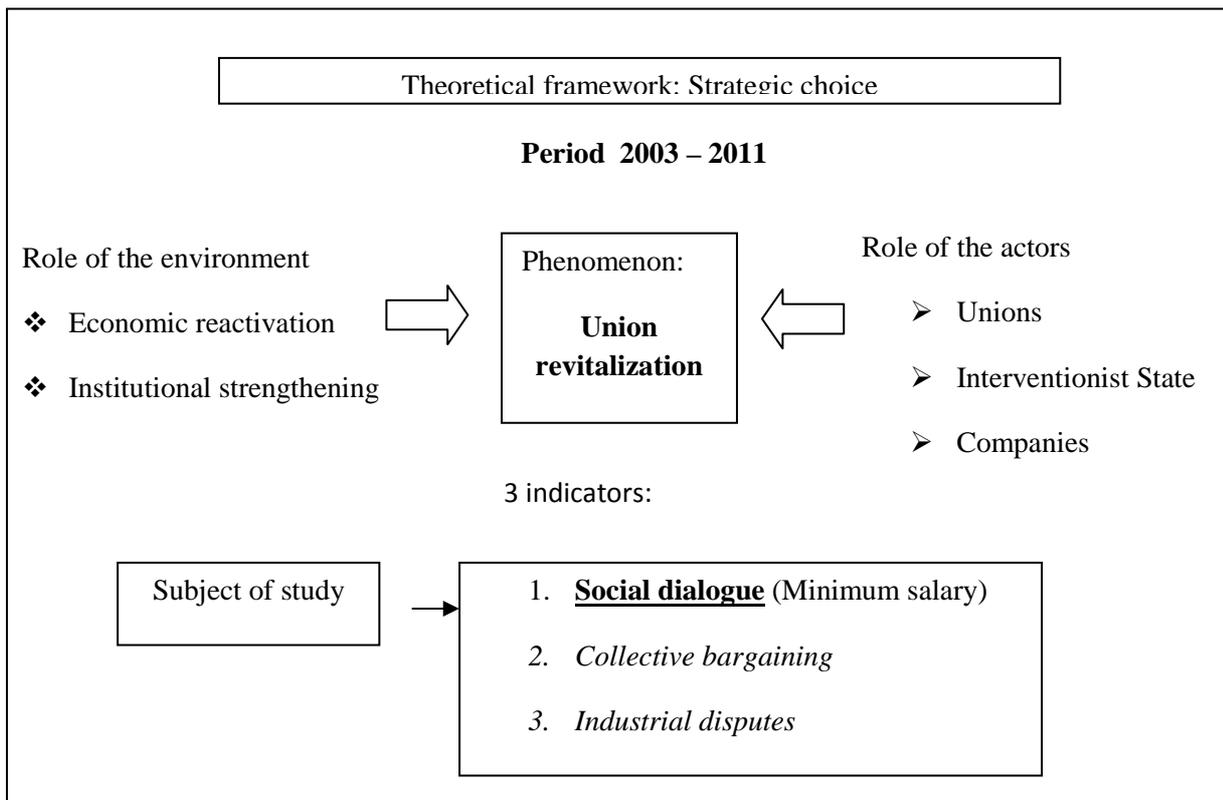
So we have another central element of theory: the roles of the actors –in this case the CGT and the State- which act in the inside of the industrial relations systems and affect their structure and outcomes. On the matter, the new context has been accompanied by an increase of the State’s intervention in the economic and labor relations fields through the place given to unions and has retraced a decade of state disregard and market primacy as main regulators of economic activities and social life (Felder, 2008.)

The decisions of these actors are not patrimony of unique or monolithic representatives nor are they always planned or consciously influenced. At the same time, they are registered in concrete historical and institutional structures that limit and restrict them. Thus viable strategic adaptations and their outcomes depend on preexistent choices and are strongly influenced by history (path dependence.)

In short, the outcomes of cyclic or structural changes in industrial relations systems are shaped in the organization between the forces of the context, the conditioning factors that emerge from the institutional frameworks and the historical structures and strategic choices of unions, governments and businessmen. This helps us to explain the phenomenon of union revitalization.

We graphically present an adaptation of the strategic approach as the theoretical framework chosen to analyze the phenomenon of social dialogue.

Table 1: Conceptual diagram of analysis of social dialogue from the theoretical approach of ‘strategic choice’



Source: own production

As we have seen in Table 1, our subject of study is social dialogue as a key indicator of union revitalization. Although it is not a quantifiable phenomenon, as could be collective bargaining –measured in terms of number of signed agreements and collective agreements- or industrial disputes –number of disputes, strikers-, it is an important factor in the dynamics of labor relations.

2. The concept of social dialogue: definition, origins, nature and purpose

The concept of social dialogue, taken from the International Labor Organization (ILO), was introduced into the legal and sociopolitical language as well as the media language.

In Europe, this term began to be used after World War II while in Latin America its use is more recent.

Although academic production in our country comes from specialists on labor law, social dialogue as a procedure is a phenomenon of political nature, not legal nature. Quoting Ermida, Garcia (2004) points out that the idea of social dialogue refers to a greater dimension of political content related to citizenship, politics, the government in democracy and the society as a whole.

Labor relations as disciplinary field still does not have a clear definition of social dialogue. Some say that maybe in this lack of definition lies part of its utility (Ermida Uriarte, 2003) since it includes different institutions and practices: an aspect to be considered when we mention social dialogue is that this term can refer to different topics. According to the definition of the ILO (2007) 'social dialogue includes all types of bargaining and consultations or just the mere exchange of information between government representatives, employers and workers about topics of common interest relating to economic and social policies. In this way, it covers from the information exchange up to macro social bargaining or social agreement and collective bargaining.' Therefore, social dialogue may be considered to be any type of practice with the exception of the open dispute.

The existence of social dialogue presupposes the presence of strong, representative and independent social actors. In this sense, union revitalization in Argentina is a key fact of which bargaining stimulation is a sign.

Social dialogue is characterized as a bipartite or tripartite process of which company representatives and workers take part actively, as well as government representatives – in this case the process is tripartite and it is called an agreement-. In some cases, besides these fundamental labor relations actors, we may find representatives of other sectors, such as NGOs, religious or political parties, etc.

Although in a different way, we could say that collective bargaining is also a tripartite process in the case of countries like Argentina in which the State intervenes as its driving force and authenticator –the former since it stimulates it in many cases and the latter since it recognizes the collective agreements, in the case of the activity field-. Collective bargaining is a way of institutionalizing social dialogue, since while social dialogue may or may not result in an agreement between the actors, collective bargaining is the culmination of social dialogue in an agreement.

In this sense, Garcia –based on Valdeverde- highlights that social dialogue is different from collective bargaining and social agreement since these two report bargaining of strategic decisions that aim to reach joint agreements.

However, social dialogue does not necessarily aim to reach an agreement, but to channel and spread the information within the bargaining actors. This is why it has a comprehensive meaning of diverse relations which take place within labor unions, companies and the government, in the shape of encounters, contacts, mere exchanges, and which main objective is to influence public policies (Garcia, 2004.) In this sense, Romagnoli (2004) defines social agreement as a democratic mechanism of creation of public policies, ideal to channel social actor's expectations. Through it, labor unions,

companies and the government exchange information trying to reach a consensus on certain policies.

'The participative resource implied by social dialogue turns out to be fruitful to the aims of social justice, as well as to the composition of the social dispute and the real application of the policy. It definitely constitutes a means for the defense of rights and the promotion of employment as a source of stability in all levels, which goes from companies to society as a whole' (p. 5, Garcia, 2004.) Social dialogue has a double function: as method of social authentication of the decisions taken by the authorities which bases governability on social actor's participation and consensus; and as peacemaker of the effects entailed by those decisions in the political and social context when achieving social peace in the natural dispute between the parties (Garcia, 2004.)

3. The different forms of social dialogue in Argentina

3. a. A bit of history

Taking into account the European reference as well as the ILO's regulations and recourses, Latin American political systems have put social dialogue into practice, with a greater or lesser degree of progress in its institutionalization, in their own model of agreement. The social dialogue's incipient institutionalization in Argentina relies almost exclusively on the ILO's regulations and procedures with no significant influence of another paradigm (Garcia, 2004.)

Briefly analyzing the recent history of social dialogue in Argentina, we may find an experience that took place in 1994: The Framework Agreement on Employment, Productivity and Social Justice. This agreement, signed by the CGT the main company associations, was mainly an initiative to negotiate matters related to the creation of employment and the reforms of labor relations laws: most of the points were never put into practice. In other cases, such as sectorial agreements of productivity and training and other recommendations about the Mercosur, results were mainly experimental and could not become systematic, principally because Menem's government failed in assuring its fulfillment (Cardoso, 2007.)

A frustrated experience as regards social dialogue as procedure took place in 1997: the Coincidences Act, which aimed to make the labor market more flexible in order to fight unemployment. But the dialogue did not change the regulations and was discontinued that year.

In the 90s, the experiences of social dialogue may be pejoratively evaluated if we consider the type of flexibilizer public policy proposed.

The 2001 crisis reactivated social dialogue which was expressed in the Argentine Dialogue. New actors became part of it: these included the Catholic Church, NGOs, social movements, political parties, etc. The immediate creation of the Social and Economic Council was suggested for the development of social policies with the purpose of lessening the impact of the economic crisis. The consensus was unanimous in relation to the structural need for reforms and to base social policies on the principles of universality, transparency and social control: the main result were the Plans for Householders. The Dialogue Table for Decent Work was also created. Furthermore, there existed various decentralized attempts of social agreement. The agreement process played an important role but had to deal with representation problems which are

characteristic of the loss of power and the weakening of labor unions during Convertibility.

The State's interventions after 2003 were directed to recover its lost leading role in the field of labor regulation and regarding labor institutions, and to promote social dialogue (Cardoso and Gindin, 2009.) Etchemendy (2010) holds that, from a historical perspective, in Argentina since 2003 the tripartite bargaining has been notable due to the lack of effective social agreement or previous social pacts. The tripartism is also present in the process of normalization and certification of the jurisdictions of the economic sectors, i.e. sector policies (Tomada, 2009.)

The post-devaluation economic recovery opened a path to wage debate within these three actors, as it can be seen since the bargaining of the minimum, vital and mobile salary and the collective bargaining of wages for different groups of employees and activity sectors. The objective of promoting from the State a wage guideline in collective bargaining can also be considered a sign of agreement.

Also, did the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security create committees such as the the Tripartite Commission on Equal Opportunities and Treatment of Men and Women in the Labor Market and the National Commission on Agrarian Work.

3. b. The National Board of Employment, Productivity and Minimum, Vital and Mobile Salary

The best example of social dialogue in Argentina is the tripartite mechanism of the CNEPS. The Board is formed by 16 company representatives and 16 worker's representatives and a president named by the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security. Decisions are taken by majority of two thirds and if there is no agreement, the president of the Board decides on the points of controversy. The objectives are: the establishment of a basic inferior limit for the wage structure; a macro policy instrument to encourage the added demand and improve employment levels and income distribution; the protection of vulnerable groups of workers; and the determination of 'fair' wages (Szretter et al, 2003.)

The CNEPS was created with the sanction of the National Employment Act in 1991, but it has been inactive for many years. The Board defines the wage base for all the wage-earning workers of the country regardless of their activity or work place and it is a central tool of public policy.

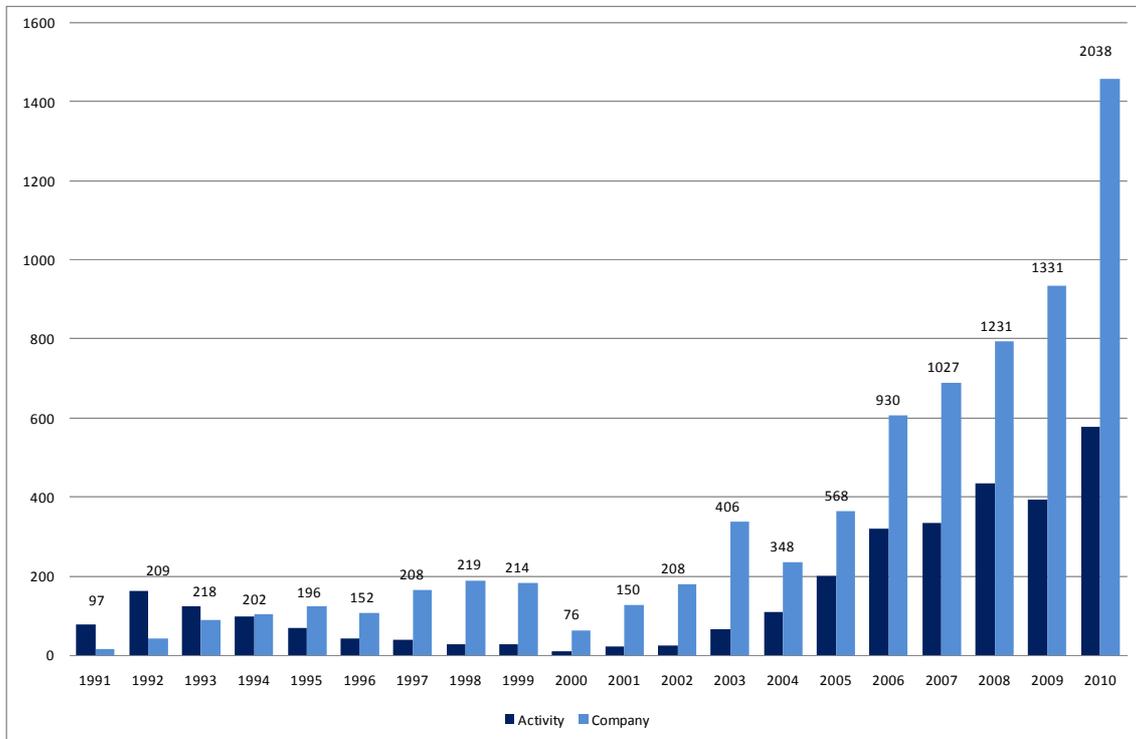
Moreover the topic became the centre of public debate from the beginning of this new period since the government doubled the minimum, vital and mobile salary. After its reactivation in 2004, the Board met every year to update the level of the minimum, vital and mobile salary. which today has an equivalent of \$1,840 –approximately USD450-.

Another important aspect to emphasize is that the call for the Board meant the active participation of union actors, not only from the CGT, but also from the opposition central, the Argentinean Worker's Central, with the presence of the business actors of the Argentine Industrial Union and the Argentine Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security. In this sense, the participation of the Argentinean Worker's Central, historically closer to social movements, has an important role in the representation of the informal sectors and the unemployed which have been, to a large extent, absent from the tripartism in Argentina in the last years (Etchemendy, 2010.)

4. The dynamics of collective bargaining post-devaluation

When analyzing the evolution of the amount of collective agreements approved in this period (2003-2010), the first thing that stands out is that from 2003 collective bargaining became the institutional mechanism of agreement more and more used as economic growth consolidated (Palomino y Trajtemberg, 2006.) According to data from the Area of collective bargaining of the Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, collected by David Trajtemberg and his team, while in 2003 348 agreements were approved, in 2010 the amount reached 2038 –it increased more than five times- which was the highest number since the reestablishment of collective bargaining in Argentina in 1988 (Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Recognized collective agreements (1991-2010)



Source: own production based on the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security - Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies.

However, not only does the amount substantially increase, but also an important change is seen in the agreed topics. The content of the agreement differs from the 90s where agreements with at least one flexibility clause expanded, as concluded in a study by Novick and Trajtemberg. According to this study, a high percentage of agreements included at least one clause as regards flexibility –the 75% of them agreed at least two clauses-. Flexibility of work hours was the most debated point of the period since it has been revealed that the 47% of the agreements included aspects that exceeded wage matters.

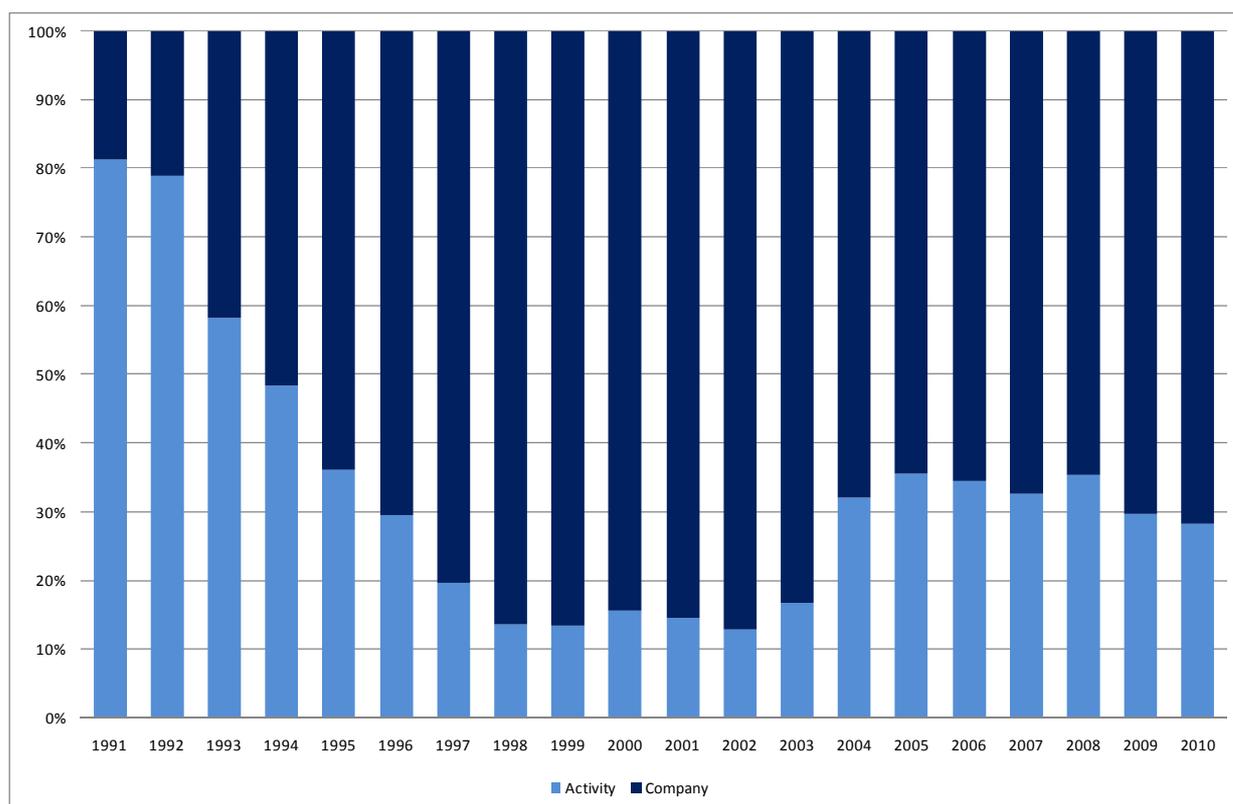
Nowadays –between 2003 and 2010- the agreement of wage clauses is the predominant topic. Collective bargaining acquires an important role as labor institute of wage determination and as mechanism of social dialogue for the settlement of the struggle

over wealth-distribution. Between 2003 and 2010, all collective agreements with higher coverage obtained a wage increase partly due to the boost of the official policy as well as to the decision of social actors in collective bargaining.

At the end of 2010, it can be observed that the relation agreement wage-real wage, which in 2001 was 60%, reaches 90%: this difference acts in the sense that it conditions and limits the market, on which ground companies find it harder to impose the individual will (Senén González, Trajtemberg and Medwid, 2009.) This implies that collective bargaining is significantly important as authority for the collective determination of wages, authority which in the past decade had been almost deactivated since companies, which payed higher salaries than those settled in the agreement, had a powerful tool to ‘individualize’ the wage relation, i.e. there is a noticeable convergence between agreement wage and real wage.

As regards the preferred level of bargaining, the strong tendency towards the decentralization of the 90s (Figure 2) stands out. When comparing the evolution of both five-year periods of the 90s, it can be observed that from 1994 bargaining increases and the supremacy of company agreements stands out over the activity ones; such tendency was found in almost all the economic sectors.

Figure 2: Agreements according to application field (activity or company). In Percentage (%) (1991-2010)



Source: own production based on the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security - Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies.

In the year 1991, company agreements only represented 19% of all the agreements, but in 1994 they reached 50% and almost 70% in 1996. The marked and increasing predominance of companies as functional field of application became more pronounced in 1998 when it reached the highest percentage: 86%. However, activity agreements

strongly declined and in 1998 they only reached 20%. This is exactly the reverse structure of 1991 that indicates the stagnation of these added levels of agreement.

Today, we can clearly see the reactivation of collective bargaining and the return to collective bargaining by activity. This has been verified since the increase of collective labor agreements and agreements in that field, although the amount of company agreements continues increasing.

Finally, another aspect to be considered is that not only are there more agreements and their content directly affects worker's incomes, but bargaining reaches more and more workers. An increase in the collective bargaining coverage can be verified. In the years between 2003 and 2010, collective bargaining coverage increased from 3 million to 5 million workers. About this, we must point out a fundamental characteristic of the union model: the effect of the 'erga omnes' criterion, since according to this principle, wage agreements and work conditions that arise from collective bargaining apply to all the workers under the representation of the union with legal recognition, regardless of whether they are members or not (Senén González, Medwid and Trajtemberg, 2010.)

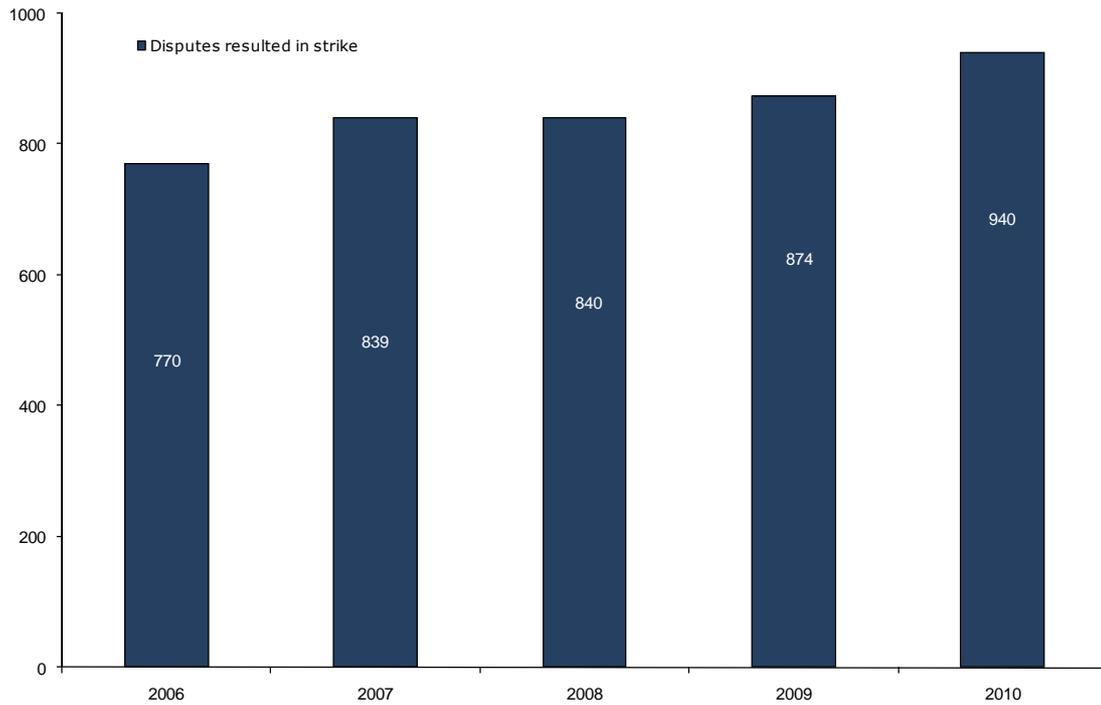
5. The industrial dispute in present-day Argentina

As we mentioned in the first section, in Argentina the neoliberal reforms resulted in the increase of unemployment and precarious labor. This favored the company offensive and weakened labor unions and drastically reduced industrial dispute demonstrations and strikes. During the 90s the dispute moved from the industrial sector to the public sector and it reduced the claims of wage increase, although other forms to express the social protest such as the movements of 'recovered companies' or the 'piqueteros' – unemployed workers that use disruptive tactics to force the government to remedy social grievances- were observed (Palomino, 2003; Auyero, 2002, quoted in Senén González y Medwid, 2007.)

In the present study, when talking about industrial disputes, we will take the definition adopted by the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security which defines them as *a series of events triggered by a conflict action carried out by a group of workers or employers with the aim of achieving their labor demands*. We must highlight that not do all industrial disputes result in a strike, but that the quoted definition also includes alert states and demonstrations in order to pressure the employers and the government to reach an agreement.

According to data from the Area of industrial dispute of the Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, collected by Ricardo Spaltemberg and his team, between 2006 and 2010 there is an increase of industrial disputes that resulted in strike, taking into account a quantitative intensification in the disputes (Figure 3.)

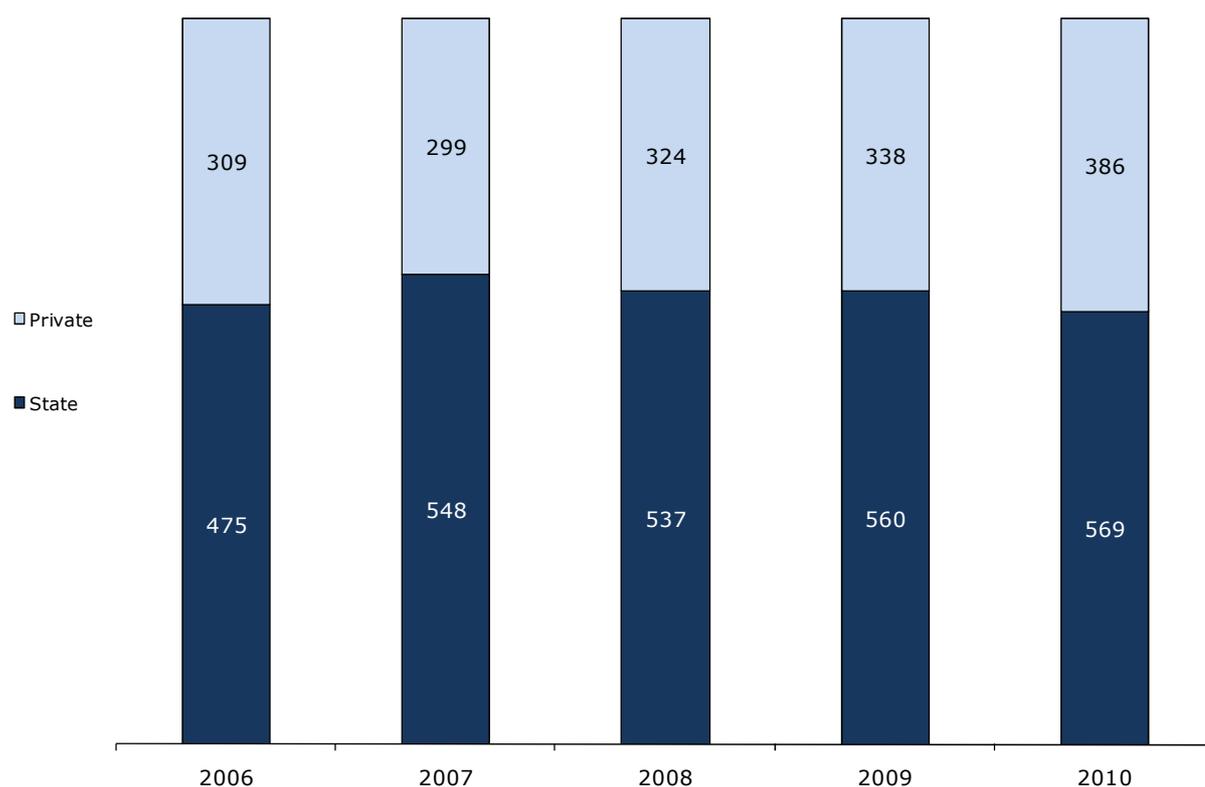
Figure 3: Disputes and strikes (2006-2010)



Source: own production based on the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security - Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies.

If we establish a field differentiation, we can observe that the state sector has a greater number of disputes, as it is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Disputes and strikes. State and private workers (2006-2010)



Source: own production based on the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security - Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies.

Although in absolute terms the state sector maintains the greater number of disputes, we must highlight that in relative terms, there has been an increase in the number of industrial disputes in the private sector. Such is the case of the manufacturing industry which, apart from presenting a greater number of disputes, has changed its configuration resulting, in 2010, in a significant increase of strikers and a decrease in the average of not worked days per striker in relation to past years.

This change in the configuration of industrial disputes in the industrial sector can be explained since a qualitative change. That is to say that, while in 2006 and 2007 disputes characterized by their long duration and by taking place in companies and establishments with a low number of employers, since 2008 disputes began to centralize by activity unions with a low number of not worked days due to a strike during a marked process of collective bargaining. As regards 2009, the international crisis had a key impact in relation to the increase of both the number of strikers and the not working days, which no longer had such impact in 2010.

Table 2: Not worked days and strikers. State and private workers (2006-2010)

	Strikers					Not working days				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Estate	807.965	874.012	975.118	877.455	867.146	5.409.030	7.371.785	7.021.785	7.348.232	5.097.640
Private	343.063	276.440	954.961	774.643	621.203	904.202	981.040	1.564.431	1.823.152	1.465.999

Source: own production based on the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security - Under-Secretariat for Technical Planning and Labor Studies.

According to the data of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, we can say that this new configuration of the industrial dispute in the industry results from an economic reactivation initiated since 2003, which was strongly based on a process of reindustrialization which promoted production and generated employment in such sector. As well, the State intervenes in its regulation and thus stimulates the formal employment and the increase of union members and collective bargaining and promotes its revitalization.

6. Conclusion: social dialogue and union revitalization in Argentina

After ten years of the establishment of this model in Argentina, we can conclude that social dialogue has got stronger as mechanism, fact that can be observed through the increase of collective bargaining as well as through the establishment and continuity of authorities such as the CNEPS. This states that union revitalization is a continuous process. This phenomenon is also observed in the neighboring countries of Brazil and Uruguay, and in the case of Latin America it means the resurgence of the leading role that unions used to have but that had been lost due to the crisis that entailed the neoliberalism. In Argentina, union revitalization may be observed particularly since three indicators: the consolidation of social dialogue, the growing evolution of collective bargaining and the dynamics of the industrial dispute.

However, this process clearly contrasts with the experience of EU countries, where some studies such as Frege y Kelly's (2003) confirm tendencies to the crisis of the union's centrality as employment regulator, reduction of its political influence and limitations of the basic tools of labor relations –collective bargaining and contracts of employment- to face the new industrial dispute. In this direction, debates on union revitalization were used to define innovative strategies which were followed by the labor movement in the United States and Great Britain with the aim of strengthening union organizations against the representation crisis suffered by the restructuring of paid work in post industrialism (Senen and Haidar, 2009.) Argentina's experience, and also Brazil and Uruguay's, shows that union revitalization has characteristics that are not similar to those proposed by the Anglo-Saxon and the European continental literature, since it is not about unions that respond to the challenges of an adverse context, but about union actors that, having survived neoliberalism, adapt successfully to a new favorable political and economic situation in order to resettle as decisive actors in the political, economic and social arena (Senen Gonzalez, 2010.)

Taking into account one of the theoretical questions stated in this study, i.e. whether the social dialogue's institutionalization is the result of the context or the actors or the interaction of both, we can say that none is decisive, but determining of the phenomenon: the economic and political context was favorable and made easier the fruitfulness of social dialogue which was observed since the results as regards public policy (the CNEPS, the scope of collective bargaining), with an opposite direction to what happened in the 90s. However, this must not darken the key importance of the presence of strong actors.

The crucial difference with the 90s is that social dialogue was also present as mechanism but with a strong flexibilizer direction which lead to the suspension of, for

example, the Commission on Minimum Salary and to the weakening of unions as leading political actors. In this sense, an important contextual factor is the ‘temporality’ in which these initiatives develop. In this comparative level of analysis we can state that the roles of the actors have been diverging depending on both historical moments. Precisely, the use of a strategic approach allows to see especially which role the context plays and which is the role of the actors in this consolidation process of social dialogue.

In order to better understand these results, we must bear in mind the specific historical context in which the initiatives of social dialogue developed. Following the Giddens’ (1984) structuring theory, we consider that the current structures, in this case the economic, political and social context, promote the actor’s action and condition them to act from these incentives to modify and redefine the structures in order to accept different possibilities for future actions.

Our questions for the future are directed to an authority which may be characterized as the superior of social dialogue as regards labor relations, since it covers the employment world as a whole: the Social Contract. The Social Contract, i.e. the agreement between the greatest union confederations (in our country, the CGT and the Argentinean Worker’s Central) together with the main chambers of commerce, and the State as interlocutor, would show an even greater institutionalization of social dialogue: will it be possible to reach this expected contract? Will it be viable to change the political culture of labor relations’ key actors in order to reduce particular interests in search of a social consensus?

In the last months, in our country the debate and the initiatives for this Contract to come true have increased. A series of encounters of which many union and company representations take part have been promoted by the Argentine government. Although these meetings have not reached conclusive solutions, their objective is the search for consensus to design long and medium term political policies. For the moment, this initiative augurs a good horizon as regards social dialogue in our country.

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