

Neoliberal restructuring and its impact on the labour process in the Argentine manufacturing industry 1980-2010: the case of ARCOR

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Since the 1970s, the world has witnessed a neoliberal restructuring process, characterized by the increase in world trade, the deregulation of financial transactions, and a growing transnationalization of productive capital under the domination of financial capital (Duménil y Lévy, 2007; Harvey, 2007). In Argentina, although there are extensive discussions about the ruptures and continuities of the neoliberal period, there is a broad consensus on the relevance of studying the 1980s and 1990s, since the predominant features of the productive and occupational structure generated during these years allow us to better understand today's structures.

However, in Argentina, studies that comprehensively and historically address the impact of these neoliberal transformations on different scales are scarce. The focus has been either the impact of neoliberalism on the macro level -as Neoclassical Economics and certain Heterodox Schools do - (Basualdo, 2010; Gerchunoff y Llach, 1998; Kosacoff, 1996; Schorr, 2014), or those changes that occur at a microeconomic scale -as is done, for example, by the Latin American Anthropology of Labour- (Capogrossi y Palermo, 2020; Palermo, 2012; Soul, 2014, 2015). Consequently, connections that mediate between both levels have not been studied. This has amounted to a neglect of the transformations in social relations that occur as a consequence of neoliberal policies around the world, and that have an impact on the concrete lives of thousands of people. These social relations are condensed in certain business strategies, negotiations between workers and employers, workers' resistance, modifications in the content of labour and mechanisms of coercion and consent (Braverman, 1998; Burawoy, 1983, 2012; Thompson y Smith, 2017).

Taking this into consideration, the *general question* that will guide this research is: what relationships are established between processes of neoliberal restructuring at the macro level and the transformations observed in the daily lives of workers during the period 1980-2002? For this, a review of the transformations occurred in the Argentine mode of accumulation will be made, in order to establish their relationship with the changes observed in the workplace of a hard candies factory belonging to the multinational group of local capital ARCOR. Answering this question will allow analyzing the scale of neoliberal practices, taking into account the variegated instantiations on which they operate.

Thus, the *general objective* is to analyze the effects of Argentina's neoliberal restructuring process on the labour process at ARCOR's hard candies plant in Arroyito during the period 1980-2002. To achieve this general objective, the following specific objectives are proposed:

1) To analyze the outstanding features of the industrial restructuring process in Argentina during the period 1980-2002.

2) To examine the main technological and organizational changes in the labour process at ARCOR's hard candy plant in Buenos Aires during the period 1980-2002. The emphasis will be on the construction of a new industrial plant, the incorporation of machinery, the adoption of ISO standards and the Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) system, among other phenomena.

3) To analyze the transformation of social relations within the factory (business strategies, worker resistance, negotiation, coercion and consent) and how they constitute a mediation between the process of neoliberal restructuring observed in (1) and the changes in the labour process examined in (2).

Regarding methodology, for the analysis of the labour process, the methods applied will be fundamentally qualitative, while for the historical analyzes referring to the Argentine neoliberal restructuring process, the analysis will be based on secondary data and quantitative techniques. Thus, for the specific objective (1) an analysis of representative variables and indicators of the transformations in the national mode of accumulation will be carried out using information provided by various sources. On the other hand, for specific objectives (2) and (3) a series of steps will be followed. First, a detailed approach to the history of the factory have been made, identifying the main milestones in terms of the production process. Second, 35 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with key actors at the factory, using a multilevel recruitment of participants based on intentional and opportunistic sampling (Creswell, 1994) . In a second stage, contacts will be made with the Food Industry Workers' Union in order to obtain the perspective of the workers and the union.

Regarding funding, I recently obtained the DIGIT's Marie Jahoda Visiting Fellowship that will allow me to visit the Leeds University Business School to finish writing my PhD thesis under the sponsorship of David Spencer. The scholarship covers air travel to Leeds and accommodation, but does not cover all the daily living costs. The stay will be for 60 days so I would like to apply for \$1500 (\$25/day).