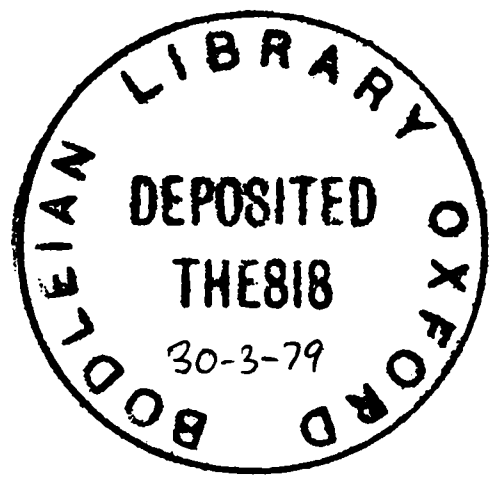
ORGANISED LABOUR IN ARGENTINA:

THE RAILWAY UNIONS TO 1922

by Ruth Thompson



Thesis presented for the degree of D.Phil,

September 1978 [i.e 1979]

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Organised labour in Argentina: the railway unions to 1922

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Thesis submitted for the degree of D. Phil., Trinity Term, 1978. [ie 1979] HT

Analysis of the formative years of the Argentine labour movement is in its early stages, since historians have generally neglected the years before 1930 in favour of developments associated with Perón and Peronism.

This thesis aims to fulfil two functions. No adequate account of the origins of the Argentine railway unions exists, although the importance of the railway sector to the growth of the export economy has been recognised by historians. Official union histories provide a somewhat tendentious picture. Thus the thesis provides a narrative outline of the struggles between 1887, when the footplatemen's union La Fraternidad was founded, and 1922, when the general rail union was consolidated in its present form as Unión Ferroviaria. The development of La Fraternidad as a stable craft union contrasts with the uneven growth of a general rail union, illustrating the practical problems and ideological dilemmas faced by unions and their organisers in this period.

The railwaymen's case provides a framework for consideration of general aspects of the Argentine labour movement. The nature of the immigrant influence in unions and the reasons why the Socialist, Radical and Communist parties failed to dominate labour organisation are discussed. Anarchism, generally accepted as a dominant union ideology in Argentina, was tempered by practical considerations; likewise the highly successful syndicalist movement, which from 1915 to 1921 controlled a greater proportion of organised workers in Argentina than anywhere else, is shown to be notably reformist.

The rail unions pioneered the use by unions of legal remedies and state institutions in their own interest, though it emerges that there was extensive contact between all labour leaders and government officials from an early date. Moreover, the relatively centralised modes of organisation adopted by the railway workers set an example for other sectors, especially since railwaymen formed a higher proportion of unionised workers in Argentina than in more diverse and developed capitalist economies.

Abstract

The origins of the labour movement in Argentina have received little detailed attention from historians, who have generally neglected the years before 1930 in favour of developments associated with Perón and Peronism. Such secondary literature as does exist consists largely of personal memoirs. Moreover, most studies have examined these early years from a general standpoint, regarding the period as a prelude to Peronism instead of treating it in its own right. Detailed analysis of the subject is still in its early stages.

The origins of Argentine labour organisation date from the period of rapid economic expansion and mass immigration before 1914. The footplatemen's union was founded in 1887, and a relative wealth of documentary material testifies to the durable and stable growth of organisation in this sector; the vicissitudes of organisation in other railway trades can also be traced from the various working class journals. The railway sector was crucial to the export economy and the growth of the beef and wheat markets, as has been emphasised in economic histories of Argentina. By contrast, the history of railway trade unions and the development of industrial relations on the railways have been neglected.

This thesis sets out to fulfil two necessary functions. No adequate basic account of the origins and development of Argentine railway unions exists outside the official union histories. These provide a somewhat tendentious picture, responding to policy needs at the time of writing and relying heavily on hindsight. Thus the first part of my thesis provides a narrative outline of the struggles between 1887, when the footplate union La Fraternidad was founded, and 1922, when the general rail union was consolidated in its present form as Unión Ferroviaria. These chapters trace the steady growth of La Fraternidad from its original,

inward-looking base to its eventual standing as an influential and effective craft union. This development contrasts with the difficulties attendant on the organisation of a lasting general rail union for other trades. The initial success and ultimate collapse of the Railwaymen's Confederation (1902-1908), and the transformation of the Railway Workers' Federation (FOF) into a solid counterpart to La Fraternidad in 1922 illustrate the practical problems and ideological dilemmas faced by unions and their organisers in the period. At the same time, particular attention is given to the history of the large-scale strike movements on the railways of 1896, 1907-1908, 1912 and 1917, which are discussed with lesser railway disputes in the context of other contemporary labour unrest.

The second purpose of this thesis is to examine the broad themes which emerge consistently from the narrative account. In this way, the particular development of organised railway labour provides a framework for consideration of more general aspects of the early Argentine labour movement. The ideological formation of the union movement is considered with reference to the railwaymen's case. This entails discussion of the nature of the immigrant influence in unions and the reasons why political parties (Socialists, Communists and Radicals) failed to dominate labour organisation. Anarchism, generally accepted as a dominant union ideology in Argentina, is reassessed and shown to have been considerably tempered by practical considerations. It was largely superseded by syndicalism, whose growth is explained in terms of changes in union structure and aspirations, which in turn responded to the development of the economy. Large and successful unions dominated a syndicalist movement which between 1915 and 1921 - years of many important industrial conflicts - was exceptionally reformist. Syndicalist unions controlled a greater proportion of the organised working class in Argentina than anywhere else in the world at this time; for this reason their successful anti-political but reformist

attitudes and organisation deserve extensive examination.

Closely connected with the nature of Argentine union ideology is the question of the relationship between unions and the government; the development of this relationship is a key to the understanding of the union movement to this day. It emerges from this study that the government was concerned with the 'social question' and its possible political implications from the turn of the century. Moreover, despite repressive legislation and revolutionary union rhetoric, there was extensive contact between labour leaders and government officials from an early date. The railwaymen, consistently regarded as a special case, were increasingly protected by legislation on pensions and conditions of work, but in spite of government pressure they resisted efforts to restrict freedom of union action. While exceptional because of their strategic economic role, railway workers still qualify as pioneers of the use by unions of legal remedies and state institutions for their own benefit.

The subordination of ideological to practical considerations caused the railway unions to adopt centralised organisation, contrary to anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory and unlike many smaller, more local, but active components of the union federations. However, it took the general rail unions the thirty-five years spanned in this study to arrive at the degree of centralisation established by La Fraternidad in 1887. The story of this change involves consideration of the railway unions' place in relation to other unions; by the 1920s, it is clear that successful national unions in large-scale capitalist enterprises were adopting similar modes of organisation, though the only comparable group at the time was the Maritime Workers' Federation (FOM), another transport sector. Argentine railway unions had many structural similarities with their successful European counterparts. Since railwaymen formed a higher

proportion of unionised workers in Argentina than in more diverse and developed capitalist economies, their influence in the general union movement was even greater than elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written without the assistance of many institutions and individuals; it was made financially possible by grants from the DES (1974-1977) and the Managers of the Bryce Fund (1977-1978). The academic and administrative staff of the Latin American Centre, St.Antony's College, offered advice and encouragement from the start, and the staff of the Bodleian Library and the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, ensured that my initial research was rewarding.

In Buenos Aires, the librarian of the Biblioteca Obrera Juan B.Justo, Señora Andrea de Yorio, spent many hours searching out material I had not hoped to find. Archibald E. Norman, editor of the Review of the River Plate, tolerated my presence in his office and introduced me to Santiago Senén González, without whose help I could not have gained access to union archives. Vicecomodoro Cáceres, of the military intervention of the CGT, provided me with introductions to the interventors of Unión Ferrovaria, and to Luis H. Etchezar, vicepresident of La Fraternidad, who gave up his office for my use.

I benefited enormously from discussions with Michael Mullaney (of Essex University), David Rock (formerly of the Institute of Latin American Studies, London), and Heidi Goldberg (of Yale University). Juan Carlos Torre read much of my thesis in draft and his many comments helped me to revise important sections.

I owe a great deal to three supervisors: to Dr. Ezequiel Gallo, of the Instituto di Tella in Buenos Aires, who looked after my interests in Argentina, and to Malcolm Deas of St.Antony's. My greatest debt, however, is to Alan Angell, also of St.Antony's, who has provided patient and good-humoured support and criticism throughout my graduate studies.

Ruth Thompson, Oxford, September 1978

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Principal abbreviations

Railway companies

1. British

FCCA	Central Argentine Railway
FCS	Buenos Aires Great Southern Railway
FCP	Buenos Aires & Pacific Railway
FCO	Buenos Aires Western Railway
GOA	Argentine Great Western Railway
FCCC	Central Córdoba Railway
FCER/NEA	Entre Ríos/Argentine North-Eastern Railway

2. Other

FCPSF	Santa Fe Provincial Railway (French)
Cía Gral	= Compañía General: General Company of Buenos Aires (French)
FCCN	Central Northern Railway (State administered)
FCMVo	Ferrocarril de La Plata al Meridiano Quinto (Province of Buenos Aires administered)

Union organisations

1. Central federations

FOA	Federación Obrera Argentina (1901-1905)	anarchist
FORA	Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (1905-15)	anarchist
FORA IX	FORA del Noveno Congreso (1915-21)	syndicalist
FORA V	FORA del Quinto Congreso (1915-1930)	anarchist
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores (1902-1909)	PS/syndicalist
CORA	Confederación Obrera Regional Argentina (1909-14)	syndicalist
USA	Unión Sindical Argentina (1922-1930)	syndicalist

2. Unions

FOM	Federación Obrera Marítima (Maritime Workers' Federation)
FOF	Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera (Railway Workers' Federation)
LFA	Liga Ferroviaria Argentina (Argentine Railway League)
AAT	Asociación Argentina de Telegrafistas (Argentine Telegraphists' Association)

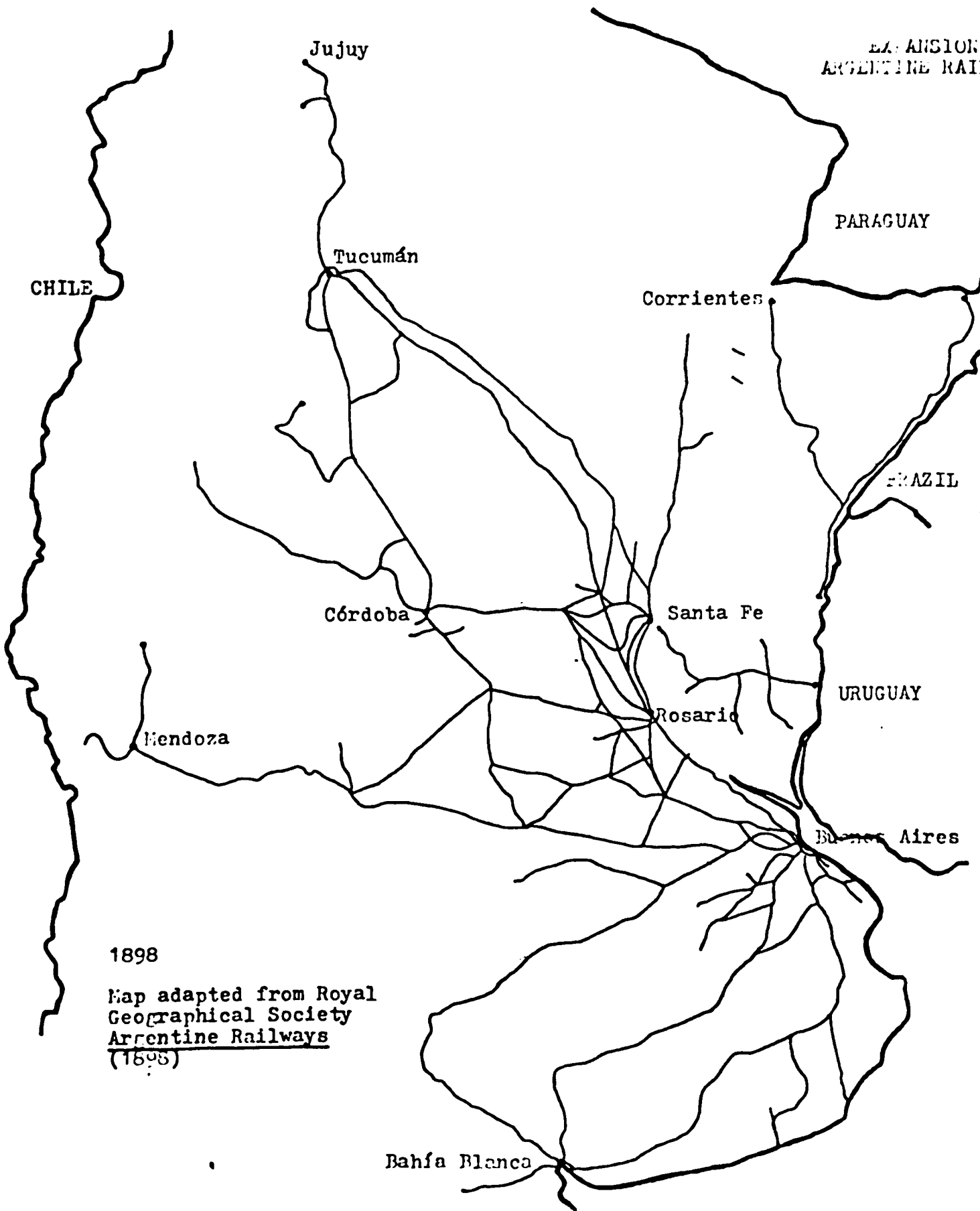
3. Committees

CD	Comisión Directiva (La Fraternidad, Unión Ferroviaria)
CC	Comité Central (Confederación de Ferrocarrileros)
CF	Consejo Federal (FOF, FOM, FORA)
CC CC	Comités Centrales (Sindicatos de Tráfico y Talleres)
JC	Junta Central (Confraternidad)
CE	Comité Ejecutivo (Partido Socialista, UGT)

Other bodies

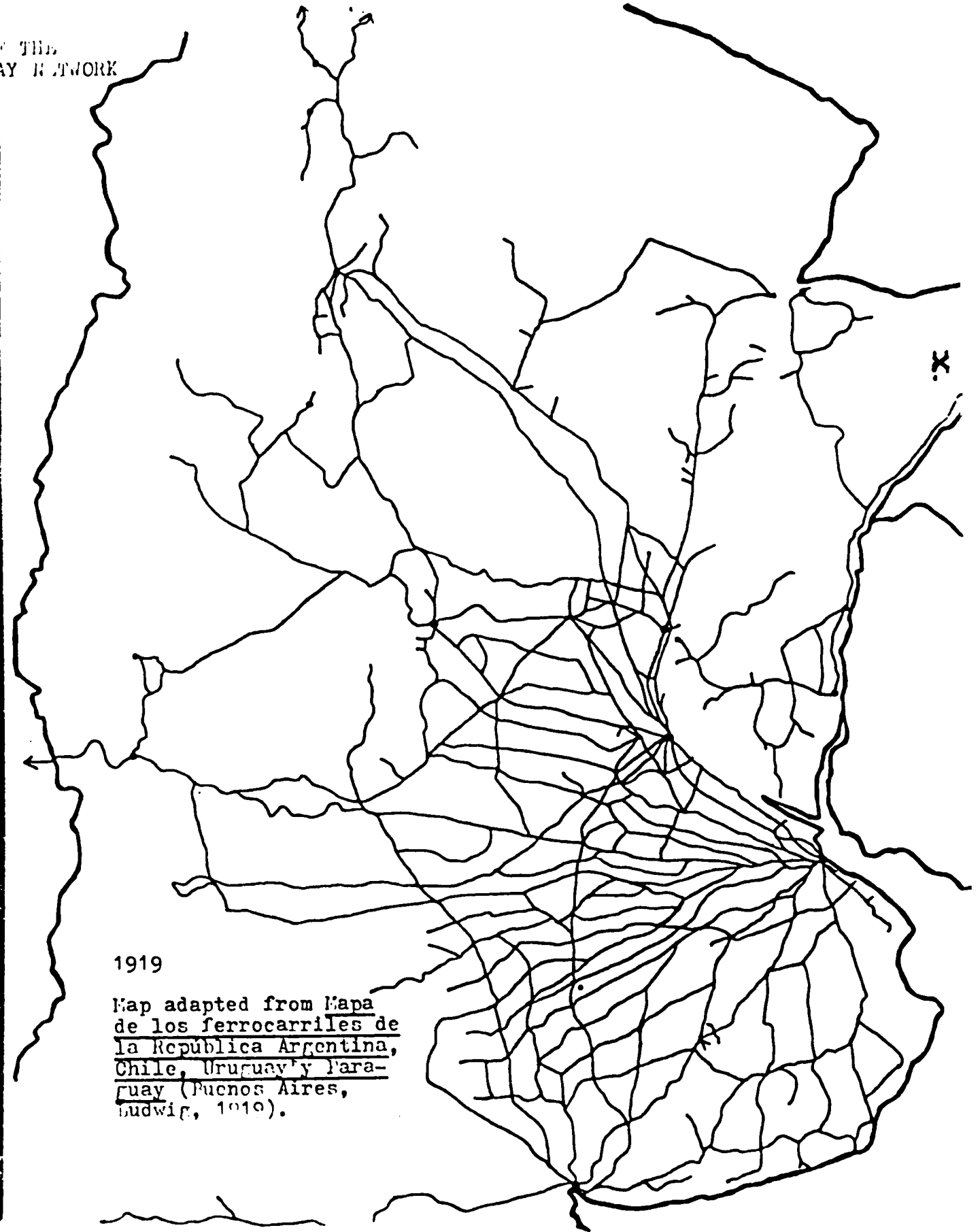
DNT	Departamento Nacional del Trabajo (National Labour Department)
DG FFCC	Dirección General de Ferrocarriles (General Railway Directorate)
ANT	Asociación Nacional del Trabajo (employers' association)
AFN	Asociación Ferroviaria Nacional (National Railway Association - amarillo or company union)
LPA	Liga Patriótica Argentina (Argentina Patriotic League)
PS	Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)
PSI	Partido Socialista Internacional (precursor of PC)
PC	Partido Comunista (Communist Party)
UCR	Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union, Radical Party)

EXPANSION OF THE ARGENTINE RAILWAY NETWORK



1898

Map adapted from Royal Geographical Society Argentine Railways (1898)



1919

Map adapted from Mapa de los ferrocarriles de la República Argentina, Chile, Uruguay y Paraguay (Buenos Aires, Ludwig, 1919).

Railway union organisations, 1887-1922

General railway unions

1888–1892 Sola workshop society

1896–1902 Rosario Sociedad de Ferrocarrileros anarchist

1903–1908 Ferrocarrileros del Sud anarchist

1905–1908 Ferrocarrileros del Oeste anarchist

1909–1912 Hacia la Luz

1902–1908 Confederación de Ferrocarrileros non-aligned moderate

1909–1916 Liga Ferroviaria Argentina PS dominated

1912–1920 Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera FORA IX/syndicalist

1917–1921 Divisionist sindicatos (FCCN, FCPSF, FCP, FCCA, FCCC)

1920–1922 Sindicatos de Tráfico y Talleres FORA IX/ syndicalist, moderate

1922– Unión Ferroviaria moderate

Footplatemen

1887– La Fraternidad craft-based, moderate

1920–1928 Confraternidad Ferroviaria railway union federation

→ Direct continuity or fusion

- → Linked through membership, leaders or ideology

- - → Federated bodies

Chapter 1. Introduction: an economic and social survey of Argentina, 1880-1920

This study of the development of organised railway labour in Argentina spans three and a half decades: from 1887, when the footplatemen's union was founded, to 1922, when the rest of railway labour was organised in Union Ferroviaria. Over the same period Argentina underwent profound social, economic, and political changes. Several valuable studies of these changes have been made;[1] the material they contain furnishes the basis for this introductory survey. It is not the purpose of this chapter to supersede work already done or to enter into detailed discussion of its general implications. Instead, it is hoped to recapitulate the changes which occurred, paying particular attention to those which most affected the formation of trade unions and the growth of railway union organisation.

Economic expansion: the rural sector

The Argentine economy underwent a spectacular transformation between the 1880s and the 1920s, and the expansion of rural exports played a crucial role in these changes.

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1. Particularly useful are James R. Scobie Argentina - a city and a nation (New York, OUP, 1964); Ezequiel Gallo & Roberto Cortés Conde La república conservadora (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1972) and the same authors La formación de la Argentina moderna (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2nd ed. 1973) pp.33-103; all on general aspects. Scobie Revolution on the Pampas: a social history of Argentine wheat, 1860-1910 (Austin, U.of Texas Press, 1964) and Peter H. Smith Politics and Beef in Argentina: patterns of conflict and change (New York, Columbia U.Press, 1969) Chapter 1 pp.10-31 cover rural developments in particular. Political studies are cited below, note 1, p.26.

The export of meat products had long been a staple of the economy. The development of freezing techniques in the 1870s - better suited to mutton than to beef[1] - and the more satisfactory chilling processes two decades later, enormously increased the volume and value of this trade. The increase in demand from Europe,[2] the decline in U.S. beef exports as the North American home market grew, drought in Australia and the war in South Africa all provided particular stimulus in the 1890s.[3] Thereafter the breeding of superior stock and the more palatable quality of chilled meat - which came into its own early this century - helped to ensure that growth continued.[4]

Aside from this modernisation and expansion of the established trade in meat, the export economy of Argentina, and indeed the appearance of the pampean region, were revolutionised by the cultivation of cereals and of wheat in particular. By 1910, one third of cultivated land was sown with wheat;[5] from the 1890s, about twenty years after wheat was first exported, maize and linseed became export staples as well.[6] The

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1. D.C.M. Platt Latin America and British Trade, 1806-1914 (London, A.& C. Black, 1972) p.260.

2. But note that a surprising amount was still produced in Europe. In 1913 British farmers produced 63.2% of beef and veal and 52.6% of lamb and mutton consumed in Britain (Platt op.cit. p.260).

3. Peter H.Smith op.cit. p.34; Platt op.cit. p.262.

4. Frozen and chilled beef exports from Argentina rose as shown:

Year	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1915
Quantity (lbs)	81m	133m	163m	195m	314m	800m

(José Peter Crónicas proletarias (Buenos Aires, Esfera, 1968) p.85)

5. Scobie Revolution p.49. See Table 4 after p.4 for expansion of wheat, bearing in mind that the greatest expansion occurred in the 1880s and 1890s.

6. Carlos F. Díaz Alejandro Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic (New Haven, Yale U.Press, 1970) p.5.

shift from stock-rearing to the production of cereals for export is illustrated by Table 1 after p. 3 , which also demonstrates the substantial role of overseas trade in the Argentine economy as a whole.

The rate of growth in exports averaged 3.8% p.a. in the period 1875-1900, rising to almost 5% p.a. between 1900 and 1929.[1] In order to sustain this growth, Argentina needed an increase in cultivable land, capital to finance its exploitation and establish an infrastructure to move the produce, and a growing labour supply.

Before the First World War it was possible to expand the production of meat and cereals by cultivating virgin lands; from about 1914, expansion in cereals could only occur at the expense of livestock, or vice versa, and through increased productivity.[2] Investment in land was conducted on a grand scale, usually by the Argentine upper class, and great estates were the norm.[3] Projects of land colonisation enjoyed some success, notably in Santa Fe before 1890,[4] but the position of both smallholders and share-croppers was generally precarious. The 1908 agricultural census shows that most agricultural workers were landless labourers, even where colonisation had been a success.[5] Where smallholding survived, usually

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1. Aldo Ferrer The Argentine Economy (Berkeley, U.of California Press, 1967) p.9

2. G.di Tella & M.Zymelman Las etapas del desarrollo económico argentino (Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 1967) pp.295, 300; D.Cantón, J.L.Moreno & A.Ciria La democracia constitucional y su crisis (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1972) pp.28-29.

3. Díaz Alejandro op.cit. pp.152-156. The exception is that Italian managers dominated the cereals and linseed sectors, according to the 1914 census. Owners did not always manage their estates, especially in these sectors. Holdings devoted to sheep and cattle raising were the largest, and most likely to be both owned and managed by Argentines.

4. Ezequiel Gallo Farmers in Revolt: the revolutions of 1893 in the Province of Santa Fe, Argentina (London, Athlone, 1976) pp.6-15; see also Todo es Historia Dec.1976, special issue devoted to 'Inmigrantes y colonos'.

5. Manuel Bejarano 'Inmigración y estructuras tradicionales en Buenos Aires, 1854-1930' in T.di Tella & T.Halperín Donghi Los fragmentos del poder (Buenos Aires, Alvarez, 1969) p.123; Oscar Cornblit 'European immigrants in Argentine industry and politics' in Claudio Veliz (ed.) The politics of conformity in Latin America (New York, OUP, 1970) p.225.

Table 1. Export trade by major products, 1885-1924, and the importance of exports and imports in the Argentine economy, 1900-1924

Years	Average p.a. value ($m.)	Livestock produce %	Agricultural produce %	Other %	Exports % of GNP	Imports % of GNP
1885-89	209	81	16	3		
1890-94	233	66	29	5		
1895-99	299	64	31	5		
1900-04	499	49	46	5	27.1	26.1
1905-09	761	39	58	3	25.4	28.6
1910-14	980	45	51	4	22.5	28.7
1915-19	1608	55	39	6	24.0	17.5
1920-24	1897	37	58	5	25.1	21.2

Sources: Scobie Argentina (1964) p.277; Smith op.cit. p.17. In 1899, 100 U.S. dollars was worth 103.65 gold pesos (the currency used here) or $235 moneda nacional; in 1923, 100 dollars was worth $270 moneda nacional (Juan B. Justo 'Estudios sobre la moneda', Los Pensadores, 30 Jan. 1923, p.3)

Table 3. Wheat exports from key Argentine ports, 1900-1910 (tons)

Year	Buenos Aires	Rosario	Bahía Blanca
1900	466 015	797 214	271 158
1904	n.a.	963 368	542 744
1905	865 290	796 476	949 796
1908	n.a.	1 075 945	1 032 046
1910	765 181	516 845	641 307

Sources: Julio Mafud La vida obrera en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, Proyección, 1976) p.94; E. Gallo & R. Cortés Conde La república conservadora (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1972) p.130. The 1908 wheat harvest was exceptionally large.

on very short leases,[1] it does not appear to have impeded agricultural expansion.[2] However, conditions were often hard for smallholders, whose discontent was manifested in the Santa Fe agitation of 1890-1893 and the so-called 'Grito de Alcorta' in 1912.[3]

Economic expansion: railways, foreign investment and the crises of 1890 and 1914-1918

Investment in the infrastructure which made the land profitable, and in railways in particular, was largely financed by capital from abroad. Cheap and (relatively) fast transportation of goods was an essential stimulus to the rural economy. Inevitably, the large landowners benefited most from the coming of the railways, but the opening of the Córdoba to Rosario section of the Central Argentine Railway (FCCA) in 1870 also ushered in a new era of colonisation in Santa Fe, assisted by the grant of a three-mile strip of land either side of the tracks, to be disposed of by the railway's highly profitable Central Argentine Land Company.[4]

British companies increasingly dominated the construction and operation of the most profitable lines.[5] By 1891, all railway access to the port of Buenos Aires was in British hands[6]. By contrast, Argentine state railways were concentrated in remote regions and were developed explicitly for strategic purposes or to aid national unification.

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1. Manuel Bejarano loc.cit. p.128.
2. Díaz Alejandro op.cit. p.157; Ferrer op.cit. pp.97-98.
3. See Gallo Farmers in Revolt (1976) for 1890-1893; E.Gallo & R.Cortés Conde La república conservadora (1972) pp.182-183 for 'Grito de Alcorta'.
4. Scobie Revolution p.36.
5. The first railway (1857) was Argentine, but had a British vice-president. President Juárez Celman was keen that private rather than government enterprise should run the railways; see his disposal of the Andino (1886) and Provincial (1890) to British capital (Winthrop R.Wright British-owned railways in Argentina: their effect on economic nationalism 1854-1948 (Austin, U.of Texas Press, 1974) p.22; Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz Historia de los ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires, Plus Ultra, 4th ed. 1964) pp.52-62).
6. Scalabrini Ortiz op.cit. p.73.

Table 2. Native and foreign ownership of Argentine railways, 1870-1920

Year	Argentine (govt. or private)		Foreign	
	km. line	%	km. line	%
1870	287	64.5	445	33.5
1880	436	17.3	2080	82.7
1890	922	9.8	8510	90.2
1900	2016	12.2	14547	87.8
1910	3490	12.5	24503	87.5
1920	4916	14.5	28968	85.5

Source: Laura Randall An Economic History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century (New York, Columbia U.Press, 1978) p.173.

The most profitable British and later French railways terminated at the ports of Buenos Aires, Rosario, and Bahía Blanca. The development of port facilities did not keep pace with the expansion of rural production,[1] but modernisation of Buenos Aires (begun in 1887) ensured that the capital came to dominate the rest. Rosario and Ensenada, the port of La Plata, which handled 15-20% of overseas trade in the early 1890s, were unable to sustain their positions. Ensenada was too close to Buenos Aires, and Rosario was weakened by the extension of the Central Argentine Railway to the capital.[2] As Table 3 after p. 3 indicates, the ports of Bahía Blanca, well developed by 1900, began to grow much faster than Rosario, partly as a result of the expansion of wheat cultivation in the south and west of the province of Buenos Aires and in the territory of La Pampa.[3]

The importance of railway transport to the growth of cereal and meat exports can be seen, along with the spectacular increase in the length of track and capital invested, in Table 4 after p.5. Even by 1887,

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1. Delays in the transportation of the harvest were sometimes unjustly blamed on the railways; in 1903 a law was passed ordering the companies either to increase their rolling stock or to construct sheds for storage of grain at stations (Scobie Revolution pp.94-96).

2. Scobie Argentina pp.141-142; Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora p.130.

3. Scobie Revolution pp.38, 42, 50. While Buenos Aires and Rosario were independent of the railways, Bahía Blanca's three main ports, Ing.White, Galván and Puerto Belgrano, belonged to the Great Southern, Pacific, and Rosario-Puerto Belgrano Railways respectively (Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora p.134).

Table 4. Indices of railway expansion and economic development, 1887-1917 (1900=100)

Date	Length of track	Railway capital	Goods (volume) transported	Livestock produce transported (volume)	Cereals transported (volume)	Area under seed
1887	40.4	33.3	30.3			
1888	45.7	37.0	34.8			
1889	49.3	47.9	52.4			
1890	56.9	60.5	42.8			
1891	75.3	71.5	36.5			
1892	82.6	83.1	47.6			
1893	83.6	89.2	56.6			
1894	84.7	90.9	64.3			
1895	85.2	91.3	76.2			
1896	87.3	93.7	86.2			
1897	89.1	95.6	70.9			
1898	93.3	98.5	74.4			
1899	99.1	99.3	93.3			
1900	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1901	102.1	101.3	110.4	125.1	86.0	114.0
1902	104.9	105.6	110.8	166.2	82.1	119.0
1903	105.1	107.9	134.4	178.2	146.3	148.0
1904	111.3	110.8	158.9	173.6	182.7	171.0
1905	113.5	118.0	177.0	185.7	194.2	179.0
1906	118.0	126.4	211.0	189.3	208.0	204.0
1907	127.6	145.6	220.6	229.3	190.0	213.0
1908	137.3	159.4	254.4	279.6	256.7	221.0
1909	143.6	169.2	245.5	322.2	222.7	241.0
1910	163.0	196.3	265.4	371.7	233.1	234.0
1911	175.4	214.0	271.5	466.0	176.3	254.0
1912	190.0	226.4	319.3	424.5	349.3	280.0
1913	196.2	238.7	332.0	470.6	341.2	291.0
1914	202.4	246.5	264.6	462.0	224.4	296.0
1915	203.5	251.7	265.8	492.8	326.9	289.0
1916	204.3	252.5	265.6	553.8	277.3	287.0
1917	204.5	270.3	225.0			268.0

Source: Alejandro E. Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires, 1918)pp.120-121, 125, 129-130, 134, 135.

railways had reached hitherto isolated centres of the Interior like Tucumán and Mendoza (reached in 1876 and 1885 respectively).[1] The production of Tucumán's sugar and Mendoza's wine increased enormously because these could now easily be sent to Buenos Aires. By 1922 the populous and productive heart of Argentina and many of the remoter areas were criss-crossed with railways.[2]

The process of investment in railways, and the economic expansion outlined above, did not occur smoothly. Argentina's dependence on overseas trade and foreign capital made her vulnerable to economic influences from abroad.[3] This was demonstrated by two major crises, in 1890 and again during 1914-1918.

The first crisis arose from the boom of the late 1880s. Enormous inflows of capital in 1887 and 1888, encouraged by the returns that could be earned and by confidence in the peso, placed an intolerable strain on the balance of payments. Imports rose dangerously, responding quickly to the capital inflows; projects, like railway building, intended to increase exports were slower to mature, and export revenues could not keep pace with the rising cost of imports or of servicing the external debt. The gold premium, stable till 1887, soared; the government failed to raise further loans on the London market, and was forced to choose between a severely deflationary policy and repudiation of its foreign debt. The situation was further complicated by political unrest and strikes protesting against the fall in real wages which accompanied devaluation.[4]

Service payments on the huge government debt were suspended between 1890 and 1897.[5] The time lag between the raising of finance and

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1. Scobie Argentina pp.143-145.
2. See the map on p.x.
3. Smith op.cit. p.17. See also Table 1 after p.3.
4. Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora pp.81-85. See also A.G.Ford The Gold Standard 1880-1914: Britain and Argentina (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962) pp.87-95.
5. A.G.Ford 'British investment and Argentine economic development, 1880-1914' in David Rock (ed.) Argentina in the Twentieth Century (London, Duckworth, 1975) p.23. In 1890 total debt service charges equalled 60% of export proceeds.

eventual expansion of output and exports meant that a high proportion of debt service charges had to be paid when output was relatively unexpanded. During this first crisis, foreign loans reached a peak in 1888, railway construction was at its maximum only by 1891, and the peak of cereal production occurred in 1893-1894. The crisis of confidence meant that the time lag could not be bridged by further loans.[1]

The Argentine government was naturally unable to raise loans abroad between 1890 and 1899, when the currency was stabilised and debt service payments had been resumed. Hence what foreign investment there was tended to be directed into the railway companies and to a lesser extent into public utilities; indeed, between 1890 and 1894 86% of new Argentine issues on the London Stock Exchange were for railway capital.[2]

During the 1890s the returns on railway shares were not as profitable as they had been in the 1880s or were to become by 1910, when according to one source over half the British money invested in Argentine railways yielded dividends of 5% or more.[3] Returns on land and mortgage companies were greater still, though British capital in these sectors was modest (£13 m. in 1913, compared with £215 m. invested in railways). In view of the returns, it is not surprising that native Argentine investors preferred to invest in land and real estate.[4]

French investment was second only to British, as is seen from Table 7 after p.7. French interests extended into diverse areas of Argentine

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1. Ford loc.cit. pp.26-28.

2. Ford loc.cit. p.20; G.di Tella & M.Zymelman Las etapas p.203, 257. In the 1890s investment diversified into banking and commerce; see Table 5 after p.7.

3. Platt op.cit. p.285; see also Chapter 3 p. 105 , and Table 5 after p.7.

4. Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora pp.140-141; Ford loc.cit. p.35. On urban real estate see Scobie Buenos Aires: Plaza to suburb, 1870-1910 (New York, OUP, 1974) p.90.

Table 5. British investment in railways as % of total British investment in Argentina, 1880-1913 (nominal values, public issues)

Year	1880	1890	1900	1910	1913
Investment in railways	37	41	45	60	60

Source: J. Fred Rippy British Investments in Latin America, 1882-1949 (Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota Press, 1959) pp.159-160.

Table 6. Average returns % on capital invested in private railways in Argentina, 1885-1920

Year	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920
% returns	4.63	2.63	2.59	3.33	5.14	4.32	3.41	4.24

Source: Argentine Annual (Buenos Aires, Standard Directory Co., 1921) p.112.

Table 7. % of total foreign investment in Argentina by country, 1890-1923

Year	GB	France	Germany	USA	Others
1890	75	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1907-1909	66	21	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1910	65.4	18.2	8.9	0.9	6.6
1913	59.3	14.6	7.7	1.2	17.2
1917	58.2	13.9	8.2	2.5	17.2
1920	57.9	13.0	8.4	2.4	18.3
1923	61.7	13.0	8.9	6.3	10.1

Sources: E. Gallo & R. Cortés Conde La república conservadora (1972) pp.142,145,147; Carlos Marichal 'Los ferrocarriles franceses en la Argentina', Todo es Historia, Feb. 1976, p.54.

financial and commercial life, including railway construction.[1] The Provincial Railway of Santa Fe (FCPSF) was begun with French assistance in 1890, and six years later passed into private French ownership; in 1904 construction of the Compagnie Générale des Chemins de Fer de la Province de Buenos Aires was started, effectively as an extension to the narrow-gauge FCPSF.[2] In many ways the most ambitious railway project, intended to exploit fully the richest areas of the pampas, was the construction by French interests of the Rosario-Puerto Belgrano Railway, which was completed in 1910. As well as passing through some of the most profitable lands, the railway ran from north to south and thus cut across the principal British lines.[3]

In both the British and French-owned companies, control was concentrated in a few hands. All three French companies were closely linked through their financing and directors. The British interests developed three main spheres of influence, comprising four principal companies. A merger between the Central Argentine Railway (FCCA) and the Buenos Aires-Rosario Railway was approved in 1908 (it had been agreed in England in 1901, and de facto unification began about 1903); the Pacific Railway (FCP) was united in 1907 with the Argentine Great Western, and it also controlled the Bahía Blanca-North-western Railway. The central and southern pampean zone was covered by the Great Southern and Buenos Aires Western Railways (FCS and FCO), who proposed a merger in 1912, but withdrew it two years later because of the conditions the Argentine government imposed on the deal; nevertheless, the companies maintained close cooperation.[4]

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1. In 1913 about 30% of French capital was concentrated in the railways; their investment was more diverse than the British (Carlos Marichal, 'Los ferrocarriles franceses en la Argentina' in Todo es Historia Feb.1976 p.54).
2. Marichal loc.cit. pp.45-47; Ricardo M.Ortiz El ferrocarril en la economía argentina (Buenos Aires, Problemas, 1946) p.31 says that private enterprise did not take over the FCPSF until 1900.
3. Marichal loc.cit. pp.52-53.
4. The fifth major company owned by British capital was the Central Córdoba Railway, consolidated in 1913 (Scalabrini Ortiz op.cit. p.232). The FCS-FCO merger was also called off because the threat from the US Farquhar syndicate was removed in 1914 (Wright op.cit. pp.104-108). See also Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora p.135.

By the outbreak of the Great War, the pattern of railway ownership which persisted until 1948 was established. With the War, the Argentine economy was once more faced with crisis. The flow of foreign investment was abruptly interrupted from the three major creditors, Britain, France and Germany. What capital did arrive was mostly directed into railways while other communications, public utilities, construction and agricultural machinery were severely affected.[1] Public works were curtailed because of the decline in customs receipts, the main source of government revenue, while construction was affected because it relied heavily on imported materials. These were symptoms of the other major transformation brought by the War, namely the disruption of trade and shipping. The railway companies were hit by the rupture of coal supplies, and had to transfer to wood fuel;[2] oil production was in its infancy, and though in 1917 Congress passed a law encouraging and regulating exploitation, the efforts made by government and private enterprise to take advantage of available energy sources were insufficient.[3]

The war years did not see a transformation of Argentine industrial production to provide import-substituting manufactures. For one thing, the serious shortage of imported manufactures occurred in 1914-1915 and the subsequent recovery of trade was quick, though falling real wages affected consumption of imported and native manufactures. A considerable degree of import substitution had already occurred by 1911-1915, especially in those consumer industries where the raw materials were home-produced.[4] Growth

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1. G. di Tella & Zymelman Las etapas pp.292, 313.

2. In 1913 75.5% of fuel used on the railways was coal; in 1916, this had fallen to 29.3% (Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires. 1918) p.199).

3. Cantón, Moreno & Ciria La democracia constitucional y su crisis p.47; Scobie Argentina p.181; di Tella & Zymelman Las etapas p.307.

4. Platt op.cit. pp.95-97. Industrial production increased by 130% between 1900 and 1913.

sectors during the War included cement, chemicals, paper and cellulose (which were to some extent import-substituting), edible oils, dairy produce and leather goods; textiles also did well but were subject to fluctuation because most of the raw materials were still imported.[1] Restrictions on agricultural and railway expansion and on public works and construction projects hit the iron and steel trades very severely, a recession exacerbated by the need of these industries to import raw and semi-finished materials.[2]

As can be seen from Table 8 below, the total volume of industrial production did not increase until after the war, since the expanding areas were matched by contractions elsewhere.

Table 8. Physical volume of industrial production, 1910-1923
(1950 = 100)

Year	Textiles	Metal excl. machinery	Machinery/ vehicles	Food/drink	Total
1910	5	10	3	28	20.7
1911	5	11	2	34	22.2
1912	5	11	3	31	21.0
1913	7	12	4	31	22.3
1914	7	10	5	32	20.3
1915	8	7	5	28	18.2
1916	3	8	3	30	18.7
1917	11	8	4	33	18.5
1918	14	6	2	39	22.1
1919	13	9	6	39	23.0
1920	10	12	10	37	23.8
1921	12	10	10	42	25.1
1922	12	12	14	45	27.9
1923	11	16	10	53	32.6

Source: G.di Tella & M.Zymelman Las etapas ... p.309

The war destroyed many small artisan workshops, whereas large, more modern enterprises made considerable advances.[3] In this sense the foundations of future industrial growth were laid, but this had already begun before the war and probably owed little to the fall in imports.

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1. Scobie Argentina p.180; di Tella & Zymelman Las etapas p.306.

2. di Tella & Zymelman Las etapas pp.299, 306. The difficulties of the metallurgical industry erupted in the Vasena strike of December 1918 and the Semana Tragica (see Chapter 4 pp.141-152). After the war, production increased fast (Ibid. p.339).

3. The value of businesses which went bankrupt peaked in 1914 (Cantón, Moreno & Ciria op.cit. p.36). See also di Tella & Zymelman Las etapas pp.299, 312.

Nor were government policies a stimulus to industry; the first Yrigoyen government allowed import duties to fall to the lowest levels since the 1870s, though a modest revision in 1920 marked the beginning of a gradual acceptance of more protectionism.[1] At the same time, an unexpected devaluation of the peso (which had been allowed to float since 1914) stimulated production in 1921 and 1922.[2] The post-war recovery brought relief after five or six years of considerable hardship for the working class, for whom the modernisation of industrial plant and the concentration of industrial capital had meant inflation, unemployment or underemployment and falling real wages and living standards, described in more detail below.

Economic expansion: regional differences

This account of economic expansion and integration has concerned these regions of the country where these processes occurred most rapidly. The separation of Littoral and Interior was not a new phenomenon[3] but the distinctions were accentuated by economic development and immigration. It is not easy to define what constituted the developed and growing Littoral; for instance, Córdoba was increasingly incorporated into the expansion (especially the southern part of the province), while the northern parts of Corrientes and Entre Ríos remained largely untouched by the agricultural changes on the pampas, which were concentrated in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe.[4]

Meanwhile centres like Tucumán and Mendoza, where local industries had previously depended upon limited inter-regional trade, received an enormous boost from their incorporation into the national economy through the arrival of the railway.[5]

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1. Scobie Argentina p.182; Cantón, Moreno & Ciria op.cit. p.37.
2. di Tella & Zymelman Las etapas p.338.
3. See Scobie Argentina Chapter 6, 'Two worlds' for a full discussion of this difference.
4. Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora p.169; Scobie Argentina p.147.
5. Scobie Argentina pp.144-145.

However, the railway also facilitated the decline of local artisan manufactures by giving easy access to goods from Buenos Aires and from overseas, thus benefiting the richest areas of the country the most.[1] Regions which did not serve the national market, like La Rioja, Salta and Santiago del Estero declined quickly in relation to the rest of the economy.[2] The extent of the concentration of economic activity in the Littoral was considerable; the 1914 census showed that the four favoured provinces of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Córdoba and Entre Ríos contained 70% of industrial establishments, absorbed 72.1% of capital investment, housed 76.5% of the industrial labour force, and produced 79.7% of total output. The proportion of the Argentine population living in the Littoral increased from 48% in 1869 through 66% in 1895 to 72% in 1914.[3]

Despite the considerable expansion in some areas of the Interior, the processing of flour, wine and sugar became concentrated in Buenos Aires. Thus the process by which the prosperous and growing productive centres of the interior were integrated into the national economy took place partly at their expense, in that they remained dependent upon the federal capital and its immediate environs.

The railway may be blamed for the way in which it fostered this regional imbalance, but it should also be pointed out that some benefits accrued to both the regions and the people it served. Secondary centres developed an importance they could not have acquired without the increased commerce brought by the railway, even if these were mostly found in the prosperous regions. Moreover, some sizeable towns grew up largely as a consequence of railway needs; examples are Junín (Buenos Aires), Campana (Santa Fe), San Cristóbal (Santa Fe), Tafí Viejo (Tucumán), and Villa

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1. Scobie Argentina p.145; Wright British-owned railways in Argentina (Austin, U.of Texas Press, 1974) p.5.
2. Ferrer The Argentine Economy p.130.
3. Cortés Conde & Gallo La formación pp.78, 81.

Mercedes (San Luis). Both the railways and (to a lesser extent) river and coastal shipping brought modern employment to areas previously dominated by often primitive rural conditions; while wages and conditions were sometimes worse than those in the main cities, and frequently abominable in the railway construction sector, expectations were increased and conditions gradually improved by workers in mobile jobs in a growth area of the economy.[1]

Immigration

So far this account of the transformation of Argentina has been concerned with economic growth, and in particular the foreign investment which brought the railway to Argentina. Inseparable from this growth was the mass immigration which took place in the period under consideration (see Table 9 after p.12).

Between 1869 and 1914 (the years of the first and third national censuses) the population of Argentina as a whole grew at the rate of 3.4% p.a.;between 1895 and 1914 the overall rate of demographic growth was 5.1% per year.[2] In nearly every year of the decade 1903-1913, the number of immigrants staying in Argentina exceeded the natural increase of the existing population.[3] Net immigration of perhaps 2½ million over forty-five years fuelled this growth, and the demographic effect of this influx - relatively much more substantial than that arriving in the USA - mirrored the economic patterns described above.[4]

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1. In 1903-1904 the workers of the State Railway workshop in Tucumán were described as the 'high aristocracy of the workers' world in Tucumán' (Juan Bialet Massé Informe sobre el estado de las clases obreras en el Interior de la República (1904: reprinted Córdoba, Univ.Nacional, 1968) p.285).

2. Ferrer op.cit. p.126; José Panettieri Los Trabajadores (Buenos Aires, Alvarez, 1967) p.172.

3. Walter F. Willcox (ed.) International Migrations (Washington DC, 1931) Vol II p.150.

4. A maximum of 14.7% of the US population was foreign (in 1910), compared with 30% of the Argentine population in 1912-1913 (Gino Germani 'Mass immigration and modernisation in Argentina' in I.L.Horowitz (and others, ed.) Latin American Radicalism (London, Jonathan Cape, 1969) p.332).

Table 9. Immigration to and emigration from Argentina, and net balance of migration, 1885-1922
(figures in thousands)

Year	Immigr.	Emigr.	Balance	Year	Immigr.	Emigr.	Balance
1885	109	15	94	1904	161	67	94
1886	93	14	79	1905	222	83	139
1887	121	14	107	1906	302	104	198
1888	156	17	139	1907	258	138	120
1889	261	41	220	1908	303	127	176
1890	110	80	30	1909	278	138	140
1891	52	82	-30	1910	345	136	209
1892	73	44	29	1911	282	172	110
1893	84	49	35	1912	379	173	206
1894	81	41	40	1913	365	220	145
1895	81	37	44	1914	183	24[illegible]	-61
1896	135	46	89	1915	83	148	-65
1897	105	57	48	1916	75	122	-47
1898	95	54	41	1917	52	84	-32
1899	111	62	49	1918	50	59	-9
1900	106	55	51	1919	69	67	2
1901	126	80	46	1920	115	80	35
1902	96	79	17	1921	122	63	59
1903	113	75	38	1922	161	73	88

Sources: G. di Tella & M. Zymelman Las etapas del desarrollo económico argentino (Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 1967) p. 229,235,318,344; Argentine Annual (Buenos Aires, Standard Directory Co., 1921) p.95.

Table 10. Population of selected towns and cities, 1869-1921

City	1869	1892	1895	1900	1903	1909	1914	1921
Federal Capital	187 126	500 000	663 854	821 293		1 231 698	1 575 815	1 681 240
Rosario		50 000	91 000		123 797		222 592	250 730
Córdoba			47 000				121 000	
La Plata			45 000				137 000	151 036
Tucumán		25 000	34 000				91 216	
Santa Fe		15 000	22 000				59 574	
Mendoza			28 000				58 790	
Avellaneda							46 277	
Bahía Blanca			9 000				62 000	
Paraná		18 000					36 089	
Salta		20 000					28 436	
Corrientes		14 000					28 681	
Santiago del Estero		10 000					23 479	
Concordia		11 500					20 107	

Sources: López Historia del movimiento social...(1974) p.1[illegible]4; General information for intending emigrants (London, HMSO, 1892) pp.11-17; Scobie Buenos Aires (1974) p.178; Boletín mensual de estadística municipal (Rosario, 1903) p.1; Vicente Vázquez Presedo Estadísticas históricas argentinas Vol I (1971) p. 22; E. Gallo Agricultural colonization and society in Argentina (D.Phil. Oxford 1970) p.264; Rock Radicalism and the Urban Working Classes (Ph.D Cambridge 1971) p.17 n. 18.
Note: there are considerable discrepancies in the figures, where two sets exist (notably for 1914); those for 1892 are not reliable.

Table 11. Naturalisation grants, 1906-1915

Previous nationality	Number	% of total
Spanish	14769	37.34
Italian	12214	30.88
Uruguayan	2093	5.29
Russian	1525	3.86
Paraguayan	879	2.22
French	854	2.16
Austro-Hungarian	794	2.01
Others	6425	16.24

Source: Argentine Annual (1921) p.11.

Table 12. Naturalised population as % of foreign population, Federal Capital, 1895-1914

Year	Numbers naturalised	% total foreigners	% foreign males of voting age
1895	715	0.2	0.4
1904	5000	0.5	2.3
1909	8000	0.6	2.8
1914	18000	2.3	4.5

Source: Scobie Buenos Aires (1974) p.239 and note 58 p.299.

Between 1869 and 1914 the population of the Interior increased from 889,000 to 2,470,000, at an annual rate of 2.3%, while over the same period the population of the Littoral provinces increased from 847,000 to 5,416,000, at a rate of 4.3% p.a. Immigrants concentrated in urban areas, as well as in the Littoral; the urban population of Argentina (living in settlements of over 2,000 people) was multiplied by eight, while the rural population trebled.[1] By 1914, 36% of the population lived in centres of over 20,000 people, compared with 24% in 1895.[2]

The concentration of foreign immigrants in urban areas was not new (see Tables 14 and 15 after p.14). However, the mass influx was a feature of the 1880s and afterwards. As can be seen (Table 9 after p.12), the two major economic crises stemmed the flow and induced many to return to Europe, even though during the War this frequently meant conscription; 97,000 more Italians left Argentina than entered the country between 1914 and 1919.[3] Immigrants came to Argentina to make good, often intending to return to their country of origin; many, known as golondrinas (swallows), came in their thousands only for the harvest season, when high wages ensured that they could pay their fares with two or three weeks' work, and return to Italy or Spain after a couple of months with a handsome profit.[4]

The immigrants that did settle permanently in Argentina did not hurry to acquire Argentine nationality. In 1914 only 2.25% of foreign born males in Argentina had taken out naturalisation papers, compared with 46% of this group in the USA in 1910.[5] Of naturalised Argentines, seven-eighths

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1. Ferrer op.cit. pp.126-127; see Table 10 after p.12.
2. Cortés Conde & Gallo La formación p.83. In 1895 42% lived in settlements of over 2,000; in 1914, 58% (Alfredo López Historia del movimiento social y la clase obrera argentina (Buenos Aires, Peña Lillo, 2nd ed., 1974), p.191).
3. Willcox (ed.) op.cit. Vol II p.154.
4. About 50,000 came each year in the 1890s, rising to 100,000 by 1910 (Scobie Argentina pp.119-120); another source estimates that 50,000-70,000 arrived each year between 1907 and 1913 (Willcox (ed.) op.cit. Vol II p.150).
5. Scobie Buenos Aires p.239; see also Cornblit 'Inmigrantes y empresarios' in T.di Tella & T.Halperín Donghi Los fragmentos del poder (Buenos Aires, Alvarez, 1969) pp.417-418.

were resident in the Federal Capital and in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe.[1] The figures (see Table 12 after p.12) show that naturalisation was becoming more popular, in the capital at least; perhaps this was the result of the campaigns of the Socialist Party, whose successes in the 1912 elections led several conservative sectors to seek to introduce further limitations and obstacles to the already cumbersome and difficult procedure.[2]

There was little to be gained from naturalisation, particularly before the 1912 electoral reform, even for immigrants who had penetrated the middle class. Comparing Tables 11 and 13, it is clear that the South Americans and Russians had a greater propensity to seek naturalisation than the average; in the former case perhaps there was less resistance to the concept of adopting a new country, and for the Russians (who were in large part Jews), the social and political advantage of adopting a new nationality is obvious in view of the persecution they had left behind them in Europe. Finally, it can be seen that the Spaniards were more inclined to naturalise than the Italians; perhaps they felt some greater affinity with Argentina as an ex-colony than did the Italians, where no political connection existed.

Many immigrants came to Argentina intending to settle on the land, but few were able to acquire the small-holding they sought on the terms they hoped for. By the Great War, the proportion of immigrants of agricultural background who cited this as their occupation was much reduced;[3] this was partly because the majority of war-time immigrants were Spaniards, who were less interested in agricultural work than Italians, but it also reflects

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1. Alejandro E.Bunge Los problemas económicos del presente (Buenos Aires, 1920) pp.89-99.

2. Carl Solberg Immigration and Nationalism (Austin, U.of Texas Press, 1970) pp.124-126.

3. Gino Germani loc.cit. p.324; Gustavo Beyhaut y otros 'Los inmigrantes en el sistema ocupacional argentino' in T.di Tella, Gino Germani & Jorge Graciarena Argentina, socieded de masas (Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 3rd ed. 1971) pp.95-100. It is quite possible that immigrants declared themselves to be agricultural workers falsely, in the hope of acquiring land (Scobie Revolution p.29).

Table 13. Immigration by nationality, 1857-1926, in % terms

Peoples	%	Peoples	%
Italians	47.4	Polish	0.8
Spaniards	32.3	Portuguese	0.7
French	4.0	Swiss	0.7
Russians	3.0	Belgians	0.4
Ottomans	2.9	Yugoslavs	0.3
Germans	1.9	Danes	0.2
Austro-Hungarians	1.7	Czechoslovaks	0.2
British	1.2	Others	2.3

Source: Walter F. Willcox (ed.) International Migrations Vol. II (Washington DC, 1931) p.153.

Table 14. Various nationalities as % of foreign population in Buenos Aires, 1869-1914

Nationality	1869	1895	1914
Italian	47.61	53.06	39.81
Spanish	15.88	23.46	39.15
French	15.21	9.69	3.50
Russian	-	0.19*	3.68
English	3.50	2.00	0.93
Other	17.80	12.60	12.93

Source: Francis Korn y otros Buenos Aires: los huésnedes del 20 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1974) p.161. The 1895 figure for Russians is approximate, referring to the Jewish population recorded by the 1895 census.

Table 15. Foreign population as % of whole, selected areas, 1869-1914

Place	1869	1872	1881	1887	1895	1914
Corrientes (prov.)	6.8				9.2	7.1
Córdoba (prov.)	0.8				10.1	20.5
Mendoza (prov.)	9.4				13.7	32.1
Santa Fe (prov.)	15.6			38.3	41.9	34.0
Buenos Aires (prov.)	19.2		25.0		31.0	34.4
Federal Capital	49.6			52.8	52.0	49.4
Rosario					55.2	
Mercedes, Prov. BsAs			29.9		28.5	22.7
Santa Fe colonies		83.2	57.4			
Córdoba (city)					11.2	22.4

Table 16. Foreign industrial and commercial proprietors as % of total, 1895 and 1914, Buenos Aires

Year	Industrial proprietors	Commercial proprietors
1895	92	81
1914	77	82

Source: Francis Korn y otros Buenos Aires: los huésnedes del 20 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1974) pp. 163, 165.

Table 17. Foreign industrial and commercial employees as % of total labour forces, 1895 and 1914, Buenos Aires

Year	Industry	Commerce
1895	75	72
1914	58	66

Source: Francis Korn y otros op. cit. pp.163,165

Table 18. Foreign-born over 20 years (both sexes) as % of total adult population, 1869-1914

Year	Federal Capital	Provs. Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Mendoza, La Pampa	Peripheral area
1869	67		
1895	74	44	11
1914	72	51	20

Source: Gino Germani 'Mass immigration and modernization in Argentina in I.L. Horowitz and others (ed.) Latin American Radicalism (London, Jonathan Cape, 1969) p.333.

Sources: Oscar Cornblit 'Inmigrantes y empresarios en la política argentina', p.401, in T.S. di Tella & T. Halperin Donghi Los fragmentos del poder (Buenos Aires, Alvarez, 1969); Manuel Bejarano 'Inmigración y estructuras tradicionales en Buenos Aires, 1854-1930' p. 100 in ibid.; E. Gallo 'Agricultural colonisation and society in Argentina' (D. Phil Oxford 1970)pp. 267, 276, 285; Scobie Buenos Aires (1974) p. 263; E. Gallo Conflictos socio-políticos en las colonias agrícolas de Santa Fe 1870-1880 (Buenos Aires, di Tella, 1973) p.3; Albert Sireau Culture et peuplement; évolution du municipe de Mercedes dans la province de Buenos Aires (Paris, Beatrice Nauwelaerta, 1965) pp.44,46; Hilda Iparraguirre Notas para el estudio de la demografía de la ciudad de Córdoba en el período 1869-1914 (Córdoba, Univ. Nacional, 1973).

the difficulty of acquiring small-holdings and the preponderance of the later immigrants' predecessors in non-agricultural sectors.

The impact of mass immigration on the process of modernisation in Argentina has been much discussed. The economic effect was accentuated by the fact that 71% of immigrants were male, and nearly two-thirds of the total were aged between 20 and 60 years.[1] They were concentrated in the secondary (industrial) and tertiary (commercial, transport, services) sectors of the economically active population of the Littoral. In the Interior these sectors comprised mainly artisan manufacture and domestic and public service, so that the native population was dominant, but the former in particular was weakened by competition from imported goods and manufactures from the urban Littoral.[2] In this area, and especially in Buenos Aires, the native population was dominant in public services, education and the like, so that the concentration of the foreign-born in the newer industrial, commercial, financial and transportation sectors was even greater.[3]

The figures in Tables 16 and 17 after p.14 from the censuses of 1895 and 1914 (which should be taken as guidelines rather than absolutes) show a slight decline in this predominance, which very probably reflects the participation of second-generation immigrants (who automatically acquired Argentine nationality).

It is very difficult to make conclusive judgments on the opportunities for upward social mobility offered by Argentine society in this period, though such opportunities were clearly an important motive for immigration. As early as 1892, British authorities warned intending emigrants that conditions were not easy, and that chances for the unskilled who arrived

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1. Gino Germani, loc.cit. p.321.

2. Gustavo Beyhaut y otros loc.cit. pp.100-101, 106-107; Gino Germani loc.cit. p.328.

3. David Rock 'Radicalism and the urban working classes in Argentina, 1916-1922' (Cambridge, Ph.D. 1971) p.25.

without firm offers of employment were few.[1] However, most immigrants were in this category, which was the basis of recruitment to the growing Argentine middle class (the 'middle layers' constituted 11% of the population in 1869, 25% in 1895 and over 30% in 1914).[2] Since such a high proportion of the adult population was foreign-born (Table 18 after p.14), at least some of the growth of the 'middle layers' must have arisen from this group. The high proportion of foreign commercial and industrial proprietors recorded in 1895 and 1914 (Tables 16 and 17 after p.14) would suggest that at least some immigrants 'made good'. However, most of the industrial establishments recorded in the censuses were little more than family workshops, and the average number of employees per establishment is further demonstration of the lowly status of some 'industrial proprietors'.[3] Moreover, Rock's calculations, on the basis of the 1914 census for the Federal Capital, show that the city's working class population constituted 64% of the total, while 72% of the immigrant population should, on the same criteria, be classified as working class. Immigrant workers also dominated the unskilled sectors, of which 82% were immigrants, compared with 71% of skilled workers.[4]

Thus it is obvious that Argentina did not offer a guarantee of social mobility, though it is likely that the opportunities that existed for individual success were better than in Europe. Opportunities did not improve over this period; wages and hence the rate of social mobility were depressed by the arrival of increasing numbers of new workers from the less

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1. General information for Intending Emigrants (London, HMSO, 1892).

2. Germani loc.cit. pp.329, 331.

3. Roberto Cortés Conde 'Problemas del crecimiento industrial' in di Tella, Germani, Graciarena Argentina, sociedad de masas (3rd ed. 1971) pp.74, 82, 84. The number of employees per establishment averaged 6½ in 1895 and 8½ in 1914 over all Argentina; the average for the capital was 8.4 in 1895. In 1914 6% of establishments had over 100 workers, and 17% between 30 and 99 workers; the rest employed fewer than 30 (Julio Godio El movimiento obrero y la cuestión nacional (Buenos Aires, Erasmo, 1972) p.32).

4. David Rock Politics in Argentina 1890-1930: the rise and fall of Radicalism (London, OUP, 1975) Appendix I pp.275-278; Rock 'Radicalism and the urban working classes' (Cambridge, Ph.D., 1971) p.29.

prosperous parts of Europe, from Southern Italy, Spain, the Balkans and the Levant.[1] Moreover, capital concentration and the decline of artisan production made it difficult for individuals to set up in business, just as the growth of large-scale agricultural and livestock production had excluded them from land-ownership.

The railways were a great stimulus to immigration, both directly and indirectly. One of the hopes of statesmen like Sarmiento and Alsina was that immigration would equip Argentina with technical experts; almost all the hierarchy of technicians, skilled workers and management for the railways was imported from Europe. However, there is no substantial body of statistical material which can provide a picture of the role of the immigrant as railway worker or even as railway manager.[2]

It is likely that a higher proportion of railwaymen were Argentine nationals than was general in the working class, once the initial technical skill had been injected, but most of the evidence is impressionistic. The main reason for this conjecture was the national spread of railway staff. Most railwaymen lived in the Littoral; indeed, the establishment of a railway terminal and workshops at Córdoba helped to incorporate the south of the province into this region.[3] However, only about one-fifth of railwaymen lived in the federal capital in 1915;[4] the rest were scattered more broadly than workers in most key industries. By 1910, say, the railways would have been able to recruit locally for skilled and semi-skilled staff, or at least from the families of existing employees in the country.[5]

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1. Scobie Revolution p.29; Rock Politics (1975) p.12.

2. Local managers were usually British or French immigrants, but local boards also included native landowners and patricians. There was little chance of reaching upper management from the ranks of the workforce.

3. In 1903, 96% of permanent way maintenance staff and 70% of workshop staff were natives on the Central Córdoba Railway (Juan Bialet Massé Informe sobre el estado de las clases obreras (Córdoba, Univ.Nacional, 1968) p.274).

4. Godio op.cit. p.32.

5. This was common practice; FCS strikers in 1906 sought the broadening of recruitment of railwaymen's children.

For the lowliest employees, they could and did use the indigenous population of the north-east and north-west; it is reasonable to suppose that some of the internal migrants, who began to assume importance as the artisan industries of the Interior declined, will have found such work.[1] The existence of the State Railways where the immigrant population was low must have boosted the proportion of natives employed in this sector; it is very unlikely, for instance, that the Tafi Viejo workshops employed more immigrants than natives.[2]

The footplatemen's union asserted in 1912 that 60% of its members were Argentines. Despite the points mentioned above, this seems a high figure (though not impossible); it suggests one final speculation, namely that since more footplatmen (and indeed railwaymen) were Socialists or PS sympathisers than other workers, more of these groups could have sought naturalisation than was the norm.[3] It must be stressed that these pieces of evidence are by no means conclusive.[4] It would be rash to make any but the most cautious deductions about the status of native industrial labour or the behaviour of native workers in trade unions on the basis of such flimsy material. These points are introduced here to suggest one way in which the railway industry differed from other areas of expansion in Argentina.

Immigrants were obviously important at all levels of railway development in the period. However, much railway work involved leaving the cosmopolitan Littoral, and the structure of the industry made it absurd to hope for fast upward social mobility from a railway career. On the other

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1. By 1914, 25% of the natives of La Rioja, Catamarca and San Luis lived outside these provinces (Cortés Conde & Gallo La formación ... pp.83, 85; compare Scobie Argentina p.158, Beyhaut y otros loc.cit. p.106).

2. Compare the Andine Railway (later Pacific) in 1903; in the Mendoza area, 65% of employees were Argentine (Bialet Massé op.cit. pp.621-622).

3. See Chapter 5 for full discussion of railwaymen and ideology.

4. The furore over the government's refusal to allow railwayment to transfer their pensions if they decided to retire abroad is a counter-argument to the ideas expressed here; see Chapter 6, p.225.

hand, as is clear from the examination below, employment was fairly secure and reasonably well paid during most of the period. As opportunities for self-advancement contracted, such features took on a new importance.

Working class living standards

Life for the immigrant or the native worker during the period of Argentina's most dramatic economic expansion was by no means comfortable or secure. The mass immigration was intended to alleviate the labour shortage which resulted from this economic expansion, but the flow was not controlled or planned, with the result that surpluses could and did occur. This tended to result in an exodus, and a lessening of the influx, but the inevitable time lag meant periods of considerable economic hardship for workers. Prime employers of immigrant (and migrant) labour, like construction and harvest work, were seasonal (as were some areas of employment on the railways, and many in the docks); hence it is likely that the principal growth areas of the economy provided relatively few permanent jobs.

Reliable statistics for wages and prices in this period do not exist. The National Labour Department (DNT), established in 1907, made consistent efforts to produce statistics for the federal capital, and some material exists to express the cost to the working class of the 1890s recession. The figures should be treated with caution; the averages produced by the DNT from 1914 are distorted by the inclusion of some white-collar workers more properly regarded as middle class, and other figures may be based on single reports of 'typical' wages, which may well be underestimates or represent minimum levels. Table 19 after p. 19 presents wages in moneda nacional, or paper currency, rather than in gold pesos, for the sake of simplicity and consistency; this conceals the depreciation of the currency which occurred from 1889 to 1896 and again during the Great War, which brought price inflation and was of particular

Table 19. Average daily wages for men, Argentina, 1886-1922
($ moneda nacional)

Year	Overall Bs As	General Unskilled Bs As	Skilled Bs As	Railwaymen Drivers	Railwaymen Skilled Bs As	Railwaymen Unskilled Bs As	Skilled Interior	Unskilled Interior
1886	2.25-2.80							
1887								
1888				6.00				
1890	3.45	1.55	3.10					
1891		1.50-3.00	2.00-5.00	4.40-5.60	3.00-5.00	2.00		
1892	3.77	1.00-1.60	2.60-3.50					
1893								
1894	4.03		3.50					
1895	2.40							
1896	2.50-5.50				3.00-3.70			
1897								
1898								
1899		1.80			3.00-3.50	1.70-1.80		
1900	2.50					1.50		
1901		1.25	2.45-3.35			1.50		
1902					2.40	1.80		
1903	2.00-4.00	2.00	2.50-7.00			2.00-2.50	2.50-5.00	1.50-1.80
1904	3.50-4.50			4.00-7.00	2.80-4.80	2.50		
1905						1.60-1.80		
1906					3.60-4.00	2.20-2.50		
1907		2.25-3.35	4.45-5.60		3.00-4.00	2.10-4.00		
1908		6.00 (harvest)			3.00	1.80-3.00		
1909		2.25-2.95	4.45-7.70			2.50		1.50
1910	4.50	2.65-3.35	4.70-6.00					
1911	4.50-5.00			5.50-8.00	3.00-5.00	2.80-4.00		
1912					2.00-3.60			
1913								
1914	3.81				1.80-3.80	2.00-2.40		
1915	3.64					1.40-1.60		
1916	3.66						2.00	
1917	3.70					2.40-3.60		1.20
1918	4.02	2.80-3.30	4.00-7.00		3.60-5.60	3.00		
1919	5.06						3.40-4.20	
1920	6.19				2.20		4.00-7.00	1.75
1921	6.75				5.00-7.60	3.60-4.80	4.20-6.60	
1922						4.00-5.00		

Sources: too numerous to cite. Series Buenos Aires 1914-1921 from DNT Crónica Mensual Aug. 1922 p.901; other useful data from Rafud La vida obrera en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, Proyección, 1976) passim.; Spalding Clase trabajadora (1970) p.41; La Vanguardia, La Protesta passim; Scobie Buenos Aires (1974)p.266.

importance to immigrants sending remittances to Europe.[1] In neither period of devaluation did real wages keep pace with inflation; during the War, indeed, and from 1890 to about 1896, money wages declined in paper terms.

The economic position of the working class did not improve substantially between 1890 and 1912.[2] The various authorities suggest the following pattern.[3]

1880-1889	recovery and stability; optimistic prospect
1890-1896	crisis; severe fall in real wages
1897-1902	unemployment; uncertainty because of slow recovery
1903-1910	economic expansion; optimism; but rise in real wages questionable, because of price inflation
1911-1913	uncertainty; harvest failures; some unemployment
1914-1919	severe inflation, fall in real wages; unemployment
1920-1925	large measure of recovery

The fortunes of railway workers followed a similar pattern. In the period 1885-1892, the gold premium rose faster than both urban and rural wages, causing a decline in real earnings except in skilled sectors and among a considerable proportion of railwaymen, whose early protests and strike activity (1888-1891) had forced employers to pay some if not all their wages according to the gold peso.[4] It is likely that railwaymen suffered more after about 1892, when it was the general recession rather than the acute financial crisis which caused hardship among the working class.

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1. Hobart Spalding La clase trabajadora argentina: documentos para su historia 1890-1912 (Buenos Aires, Galerna, 1970) p.38. See also Warren Dean Remittances of Italian immigrants; from Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and U.S.A. 1884-1914 (New York University, Occasional Papers, 1974). These remittances were much more important in the 1890s than by the Great War, when the practice was dying out.
2. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.42.
3. Julio Mafud La vida obrera en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, Proyección, 1976) pp.213-214; Scobie Buenos Aires p.137; Spalding Clase trabajadora p.42.
4. G.di Tella & M.Zymelman Las etapas ... p.227.

By the end of the century high unemployment was impeding the recovery of wage levels; between 20,000 and 40,000 were unemployed in Buenos Aires, and big demonstrations took place.[1] There is no evidence of participation by railwaymen but it is likely that they were affected, especially as railway expansion in the 1890s was a great deal slower than from 1887 to 1892. During the first decade of this century, the apparent improvement in wages was eroded by inflation of prices and rents.[2] Despite the improvement in money wages shown by the average figures in Table 19, railway wages fluctuated considerably with the profitability of the companies and the state of the labour market; the same is probably equally true of other industrial sectors. Railway strikes seeking pay rises of anything between 10% and 40% illustrate the difficulties of the workers; complaints in 1912, and again during the 1917 general strike, that wages had been stationary since the early 1900s seem to be justified by the data in the table.[3] As far as can be judged, the economic position of the working class was probably at its best in this period from about 1903 to 1906, before the worst of the prewar inflation.

Other factors naturally affected the quality of working class life. Hours of work were substantially lower by the beginning of the war than in the early 1890s. It is not easy to quantify this decline, as the matérial is so scarce and variable, but working days of 10-12 hours were normal in industrial enterprises in the 1890s (reaching 14 hours in some cases during the summer); by 1914 8-10 hours was more usual, with several important trades (like the printers and skilled construction workers) winning an 8-hour day in the decade 1900-1910.[4] Hours in the railway workshops also fell,[5]

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1. Scobie Buenos Aires p.140. The first big demonstration of the unemployed in August 1897 is described in Enrique Dickmann Recuerdos de un militante socialista (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1949) pp.70-75.

2. See Table 20 after p. 24 ; Spalding Clase trabajadora p.40 on rents; Scobie Buenos Aires p.138.

3. See the strikes on FCS in 1906 (La Vanguardia 10 Feb.1906), and Argentine Great Western in 1906 (La Vanguardia 23 Mar.1906); see also El Obrero Ferroviario June 1912.

4. Mafud op.cit. pp.144-145.

5. Even in Paraná, in 1903, the Entre Ríos Railway workshops worked an 8½ hour day (Bialet Massé op.cit. p.299).

but workers concerned directly with the running of the trains often worked enormously long shifts of 16-20 hours, despite national legislation forbidding it. Navvies and maintenance crews also suffered long hours in peak periods. These intolerable conditions were frequently the cause of railway agitation and strikes.

With the more humane hours of work came a reduction in arbitrary factory discipline.[1] Draconian regulations became less common, and some unions intervened with success to establish uniform regulation of labour, as did the printers in 1906.[2] Railway unions began to play a part in the regulation of railway working after the 1917 strike.[3] Even so, throughout this period employers usually dictated conditions of work at will, except where legislation was effective; the harsh discipline of the Vasena works was a major cause of the strike which brought about the Semana Trágica in January 1919.[4]

Housing conditions for most urban workers were very poor, though possibly no worse than in European cities. Much valuable material has been published on the conventillo, the typical home of the working class in central Buenos Aires, and it does not need to be repeated here.[5] In the federal capital, there was a marked trend towards suburban living, facilitated

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1. For examples and further details, see Mafud op.cit. pp.159-161; Pedro Daniel Weinberg 'Para la historia de la clase obrera' in Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología Vol III 1967 pp.101-103; Spalding Clase trabajadora pp.187-189,193-220

2. Spalding Clase trabajadora pp.379-386.

3. See Chapter 3 pp.128, 130, and Chapter 4 pp.163-165.

4. See Chapter 4 pp.141-142. Women, a high proportion of the factory labour force, were both cheaper to employ and (at least before the war) more willing to accept arbitrary discipline (Mafud op.cit. p.150). It is notable that a majority of workers at the Vasena plant were women and minors.

5. Scobie Buenos Aires pp.51-53, 146-155, and passim; Panettieri Los trabajadores (Buenos Aires, Alvarez, 1967) pp.47-53; Mafud op.cit. pp.184-198, 222-225; on 1907 tenants' strike and background conditions, Spalding Clase trabajadora pp.449-496.

by the expansion of tramways and suburban railways.[1] Small lots came within the reach of some skilled workers and white-collar employees during the ten years before the war.[2] Argentine natives tended to move out first (among this group there must have been a high proportion of second-generation immigrants), along with Italians. The Spaniards, Russians and Jews tended to remain in the centre, but ghettoes were rare.[3] It is possible that this suburbanisation helped to satisfy the desire for security and mobility among immigrants and native town-dwellers;[4] at least, the trend may have encouraged the less fortunate worker to have faith in the opportunities Argentina could offer.

Little help with housing came from the state; both national and municipal projects were slow and derisory in proportion.[5] Voluntary organisations did somewhat better; Catholic workers' circles built some working class housing in Córdoba and Rosario as well as Buenos Aires.[6] One of the few housing cooperatives, the Socialist Party's El Hogar Obrero (founded in 1907), had built 130 small houses for its members by 1911 and continued steadily to fight a losing battle against crowded living conditions.[7]

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1. Scobie Buenos Aires pp.160-178.

2. Scobie Buenos Aires pp.178, 183-185.

3. Scobie Buenos Aires pp.200-201, 205; Francis Korn y otros Buenos Aires: los huéspedes del 20 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1974) p.161.

4. Scobie Buenos Aires p.253.

5. Scobie Buenos Aires pp.188-190.

6. Spalding 'Aspects of Change in Argentina. 1890-1914' (Univ.of California, Ph.D. 1964) p.284.

7. Jacinto Oddone Historia del socialismo argentino (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1934) Vol II pp.400-402.

Railwaymen were a special case among industrial workers in the field of housing. While the big enterprises of the Interior, like the Forestal timber company of the Chaco or several of the Tucumán sugar works, often provided accommodation of sorts for their workers, the railway companies made efforts to accommodate their men even in suburban areas. Talleres Banfield is the most striking example; 52 houses had been erected there by 1899, over five years before the workshop was completed.[1] The Great Southern also built houses in Sola and Ingeniero White; they were not unlike their English equivalent, and thus considerably better than the alternatives. Even the State Railways built a colony at Tafi Viejo to serve the workshops established there in 1915.[2]

The companies' aims were not altruistic. During strikes, the occupants of railway housing became aware of the drawbacks attached to an otherwise attractive and cheap route to home ownership. Attempts to evict strikers were thwarted by the courts, but the constraint remained a real one.[3] Railway colonies in suburban districts do not seem to have adopted extremist political or trade union positions; more isolated communities, like San Cristóbal (not strictly a colony) and Tafí Viejo, did show more signs of militancy.[4]

While pre-war living standards were not good for the working class as a whole, the real watershed came with the outbreak of the First World War. The figures in Tables 21 and 22 after p.24 demonstrate the fall in real wages for those able to remain in work, and the great increase in

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1. Spalding 'Aspects of change' p.125. By 1914 Banfield had a population of 14,363 (obviously not all in railway housing) (Argentine Annual (Buenos Aires, Standard Directory Co., 1921) p.11).

2. William Rögind Historia del Ferrocarril Sud (Buenos Aires, 1937) has plans and photographs. On Tafí Viejo, see Chapter 3 p.113.

3. Francisco Agnelli and Juan Chiti La Fraternidad: fundación, desarrollo, obra 1887-20 de junio 1937 (hereafter Fraternidad: cincuentenario) p.308; Fraternidad CD Huelga 1912 circular dated 13 Jan.1912.

4. Compare Clark Kerr & Abraham J. Siegel 'The interindustry propensity to strike' in Kerr (and others) Labor and Management in Industrial Society (New York, Doubleday, 1964) p.118.

Table 20. Prices of basic foods, Buenos Aires, 1901-1912

(moneda nacional)

Item	1901	1912	% increase
Rice 1 kg.	0.28	0.40	43
Sugar 1 kg.	0.27	0.42	55
Beef 1 kg.	0.30	0.32	6
Milk 1 ltr.	0.12	0.17	42
Bread 1 kg.	0.14	0.22	47
Wine 1 ltr.	0.25	0.33	35

Source: Spalding La clase trabajadora (1970) p.37.

Table 21. Indices of cost of living, real wages, and unemployment, Buenos Aires, 1910-1922

Year	Cost of living I (1910=100) Food	Rent	Other	Total	Cost of living II (1929=100)	Real wages (1929=100)	Unemployment %
1910	100	100	100	100			
1911	98	107	103	101			
1912	100	114	108	105			
1913	108	117	110	108	76		
1914	110	101	111	108	76	68	13.7
1915	120	94	127	117	82	61	14.5
1916	118	88	161	125	87	57	17.7
1917	138	90	198	146	103	49	19.4
1918					130	42	12.0
1919					122	57	7.9
1920					143	59	7.2
1921					127	73	
1922					107	84	

Sources: Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (1918) pp. 224-225; G. di Tella & M. Zymelman Etapas...(1967) p.343; Adolfo Dorfman Evolución industrial argentina (Buenos Aires, Losada, 1942) pp.240-241.

Table 22. Real wages as a share of real GDP, 1914-1922

Year	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	192
%	36.5	31.2	27.7	24.0	20.1	27.7	27.6	33.6	35.

Source: Laura Randall An Economic History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century (New York, Columbia U. Press, 1978) p.30.

unemployment, which reached nearly 20% in August 1917. Economic conditions for the working class did not recover to their prewar level until about 1920; even then the wartime devaluation of the peso and its continuing float put them at risk from inflation.[1] Moreover, not all sectors recovered so quickly; despite the strike settlement of 1917, and increasing cooperation between companies and unions, railway wages did not rise so quickly from 1917 to 1921 as other industrial wages.[2] This was especially serious in view of the wage-cuts and short time endured by railwaymen at the start of the war, and in 1922 there were still 12,000 (about 9%) fewer employed by the railway companies than in 1913.[3]

This period overall, therefore, was not one of fast-rising living standards and wide opportunities for upward social mobility for the urban working class. In exceptionally good times, skilled manual labourers in Buenos Aires could earn two or three times the wages on offer in Italian or Spanish cities (or about the rates obtainable in London or Liverpool).[4] On the other hand, many basic commodities, and rents in particular (except during the war), were considerably more expensive in Argentina. Nevertheless, immigrants (and natives) did make their fortunes in these conditions of economic expansion, and it is likely that more did so - and that many more dreamed of doing so - than in European countries. This fact owed something to the motivation which induced people to leave Europe in search of better (or less bad) conditions, and to the social changes resulting from the impact of that immigration.

Political developments

The 'social question' made a considerable impact on the political development of Argentina in this period. This impact was uneven, and may

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1. Sebastian Marotta El movimiento sindical argentino (Buenos Aires, Vols I & II Lacio, Vol III Calomino, 1960-1970) VolIII (1970) p.15.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Nov.1921.
3. See Chapter 3 pp.105-6 ; statistics from Dirección General de Ferrocarriles (DG FFCC).
4. Scobie Buenos Aires p.135.

appear fairly superficial. Even so, by the time the Radical government was elected in 1916, Argentine political leaders had been forced more than once to take account of the mass of workers on whom their continued prosperity (both personal and collective) depended.

A number of useful studies have been written which cover the political developments of this period of Argentine history.[1] In particular, the rise of the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Party) as a mass electoral force has received much scrutiny.[2] The UCR came to power in 1916, under the electoral reform law of Sáenz Peña, which made voting in a secret ballot compulsory for all adult Argentine males.[3] At the first popularly elected administration, Yrigoyen's government has been credited with a more conciliatory attitude to trade unions than its predecessors.[4] Changes were undoubtedly wrought, in particular with regard to the willingness of the executive to recognise union leaders as negotiators. On the other hand, it is important to keep these advances in perspective. As will be seen, the Radicals were by no means consistently well disposed to the demands of trade unions, despite their justification in the economic conditions of 1916-1922.

It would be superfluous here to reconsider the complex political history of this period. Instead, it seems most relevant to consider briefly two aspects of political development; first, the responses of both conservative and Radical governments to the exigencies of social and economic change, and secondly the extent to which immigrants, their

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1. On general development, see Gallo & Cortés Conde Conservadora, and, less useful, Cantón, Moreno & Ciria La democracia constitucional y su crisis. On electoral change, Dario Cantón, Elecciones y partidos políticos en la Argentina, 1910-1966 (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1973). Gino Germani Política y sociedad en una época de transición (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1966) and Rodolfo Puiggrós Historia crítica de los partidos políticos argentinos (Buenos Aires, 1956) may also be useful.

2. Particularly important are David Rock Politics (1975); Peter G.Snow Argentine Radicalism: the history and doctrine of the UCR (Iowa City, U.of Iowa Press, 1965); Rock Rise of the Unión Cívica Radical (Cambridge Latin-American Centre Working Paper, 1971).

3. The law was passed by Congress in November 1911 and first applied in the 1912 elections (López El movimiento social (Buenos Aires, Peña Lillo, 2nd ed. 1974) p.184).

4. David Rock Politics (1975) pp.123-124, and passim.

children, and the working class in general participated in electoral politics. The growth of the labour movement as an alternative political outlet for the working class is not discussed here, since it is one of the main themes throughout this study; the general development of organised labour receives most concise attention in Chapter 7.

There is no doubt that all governments from the 1880s were concerned to see the mass immigration into Argentina absorbed as painlessly and usefully as possible.[1] With the development of working class organisations and socialist political groups in the 1890s, two strains of thinking developed within the conservative élite which were not as antagonistic as they might appear. One, which could be defined as 'constructive', sought to regulate labour organisation and to limit its sphere of action through legislation, arbitration machinery and the like; this was typified by the supporters of Interior Minister Joaquín V. González who produced a National Labour Code in 1904.[2] The code was never enacted, and though it received conditional support from Alfredo L. Palacios, the first Socialist deputy, it was attacked by trade unions as well as employers.[3]

The other strain might be termed 'repressive'; in the period 1902-1910, it succeeded in imposing five states of siege, all but one (that of February-May 1905) a consequence of labour unrest.[4] In 1902, just before the first of these states of siege, the Residence Law was rushed through Congress; it allowed the authorities to deport foreign political and labour leaders and to forbid them entry. It was a direct response to a strike in the Central Produce Market in November 1902, which threatened

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1. Jorge N. Solomonoff Ideologías del movimiento obrero y conflicto social (Buenos Aires, Proyección, 1971) pp.209-252 examines the content of Presidential messages to Congress between 1880 and 1916. It provides a useful summary of the preoccupations of the Executive, but the analysis is not particularly revealing.

2. See Panettieri op.cit.pp.149-154. It was González who sent Juan Bialet Massé on tour of the Interior to investigate working class conditions.

3. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.554; Panettieri op.cit. p.154.

4. The February 1905 state of siege, initially for thirty days, was prolonged through fear of labour troubles in the docks and on the railways; see Chapter 2 p.55.

to disrupt the export trade.[1] The absolute numbers expelled under the Residence Law were not great - La Vanguardia knew of 383 cases by 1916[2] - but if most of these were important labour leaders, the law constituted a considerable weapon against union organisation.

In 1910, after the labour unrest of the Centenary celebrations and the day after an anarchist bomb attack on the Colón theatre, the Law of Social Defence was enacted against all anarchists or others advocating violence. Its provisions restricting the right of assembly were the most onerous imposition on trade union organisations, increasing the already considerable risk of police informers attending union meetings.[3]

It would appear from this account that the 'repressive' element among the political elite held sway until the war. This is not surprising, since some of the most militant groups (like port workers, dockers and stevedores, and to a lesser extent railwaymen) were crucial in the export sector upon which the landowning elite depended for its livelihood. However, there were signs of encroachment from the 'constructive' section, though before 1922 very limited progress was made. The first proposals for protective labour legislation date from the 1890s; the first successful national legislation was the Sunday Rest Law of 1905 and the law regulating the work of women and minors of 1907. Provincial legislatures passed similar laws, but their limited provisions were frequently flouted.[4]

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1. Marotta Historia del sindicalismo argentino Vol I (1960) pp.146-147.

2. Rock Politics p.82. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.556 suggests that 1000 may have been deported, which seems too high a figure. Some thus deported were allowed to return under police supervision (Spalding Clase trabajadora pp.581-583).

3. Text of Law of Social Defence is in Jacinto Oddone Gremialismo proletario argentino pp.334-339. Marotta op.cit. Vol I p.289 refers to the problem of police informers; open union meetings were very rare. La Vanguardia stated that they became the norm among railwaymen in 1917 (La Vanguardia 20 Aug. 1922).

4. Panettieri op.cit. p.149; Spalding Clase trabajadora p.554; Spalding 'Aspects of change' (thesis) pp.130-131.

The influx of PS deputies into Congress after the election of 1912 hastened the efforts already initiated to improve labour legislation, and took the work largely out of the conservatives' hands. Many Socialist projects, like the 48-hour week for factories, an eight-hour day for government and railway employees, regulation of night work and clerical working conditions, and the 5½ day week (or el sábado inglés), came to nothing.[1] However, from 1913 to 1915 several important laws were added to the statute book; the Railwaymen's Pension Fund was established,[2] penalties were set for employers who ignored labour laws, government labour exchanges were established and private employment agencies regulated, the National Low-Cost Housing Commission was founded, and, most important for the working class as a whole, employers' liability for accidents was established.[3] Under Yrigoyen, the railway pensions law was finally completed, as were similar arrangements for other public service and utility employees; conditions of home workers were also regulated.[4]

Thus it is clear that a gradual evolution of government policy towards labour legislation on the 'social question' occurred; much credit for this must go to the PS. Yrigoyen did little to step up the legislative activity already begun on behalf of the working class; in 1919 his major initiative, towards a new labour code, met with concerted opposition.[5]

However, it may reasonably be argued that working class support did not depend on energetic labour legislation; indeed, the Argentine union federations were generally hostile to statutory interference in the

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1. Scobie Buenos Aires p.146.
2. See Chapter 6 pp.223-234 for details of this.
3. López El movimiento social ... pp.206-207; US Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin 510 Mar. 1930 'Labor legislation of Argentina'.
4. Cantón, Moreno & Ciria La democracia constitucional y su crisis (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1972) p.71.
5. See Chapter 4 pp. 154-155.

struggle between capital and labour.[1]

The extent to which the working class was involved in the electoral process is also questionable. It cannot be stressed too often that the proportion of disenfranchised immigrants among the adult population in centres of dense population and hence of key electoral importance was extremely high; 72% of adult males in the federal capital in 1912 did not have the right to vote.[2] Before 1912, overall participation in elections was very low; the turnout averaged 21% of the eligible population in 1910 over Argentina as a whole (and 23% in the federal capital). In 1912, the national turnout was transformed, reaching 69%, with 84% of voters participating in elections in the capital; over the period 1912-1930, 71.16% of electors in Buenos Aires used their vote, while the national figure averaged 60.52%.[3]

The increased participation and in particular the successes of the PS in the Buenos Aires poll of 1912 led conservatives to contemplate restrictions on naturalisation. Conservatives and some Radicals thought that foreign elements were uniting in the PS to threaten the existing basis of national politics.[4] However, as has been seen, naturalised citizens formed a very small proportion of voters, even in the capital; the PS analysed its support in La Boca in 1910 and found that only 9.6% of its voters were naturalised foreigners.[5] This was a high proportion in view

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1. The First and Second Congresses of the UGT advised support for political parties projecting protective labour legislation (López op.cit. p.149); otherwise, national union federations opposed the use of legislation. Railwaymen however became increasingly involved in legislative proposals; witness FOF's support for pensions legislation after only a brief period of intransigence (see Chapter 6 pp.225-229). FORA IX's anti-legalist position lost relevance as FOF and FOM became more involved with legislative regulation (see Chapter 7 pp.256-257).

2. Gino Germani 'Mass immigration and modernisation in Argentina' in I.L.Horowitz (and others, ed.) Latin American Radicalism (London, Jonathan Cape, 1969) p.333.

3. Dario Cantón Elecciones y partidos políticos en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1973) pp.45, 47.

4. In fact, the PS leadership was largely Argentine-born by 1910 (Richard J. Walter The Socialist Party of Argentina, 1890-1930 (Austin, U.of Texas Press, 1977) p.64).

5. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.412.

of the low level of naturalisation, though not so high in view of the fact that the PS was the only political group in the capital urging its sympathisers to acquire citizenship.[1] In any case, studies show that neither the PS nor the UCR owed their strength purely or even largely to the naturalised group.[2]

The electoral struggle centred on gaining the native-born working class vote, which, though in a minority, could determine the political complexion of the city of Buenos Aires.[3] The UCR was highly organised and its members participated keenly in local committees, but the 'bread and circuses' approach only won the party votes from the conservatives in 1916; the PS vote increased too, and it was only because the Socialists were split that the UCR gained control of the capital.[4]

The allegiance of the working class voter was by no means clear. Naturally, some voted Radical and others will have supported the conservative parties; in the federal capital the PS received a good measure of support from labour. There is a suggestion based on rather inconclusive evidence, that a higher proportion of union members were Argentine citizens than of the working class overall.[5] If this was so, they received no guidance

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1. In Santa Fe, the Liga del Sur campaigned for foreign support (though not specifically for naturalisation)(Oscar Cornblit 'European Immigrants in Argentine Industry and Politics' in Claudio Veliz (ed.) Politics of Conformity in Latin America (New York, OUP, 1970) p.240; E.Gallo & Silvia Sigal 'La formación de los partidos políticos contemporáneos' in di Tella, Germani, Graciarena Argentina, sociedad de masas (Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 3rd ed. 1971) p.161

2. Dario Cantón El parlamento argentino en épocas de cambio: 1890, 1916, 1946 (Buenos Aires, di Tella, 1966) p.119.

3. Rock Politics (1975) p.119.

4. See Rock Politics (1975) pp.121-122 on Radical handouts to workers; Rock 'Machine politics in Buenos Aires and the Argentine Radical Party, 1912-1930' in Journal of Latin American Studies 1972, for party organisation.

5. Rubén Iscaro Origen y desarrollo del movimiento sindical argentino (Buenos Aires, Anteo, 1958) p.103 says that 41% of organised workers were Argentines, but quotes no source; Spalding Clase trabajadora p.64 quotes a DNT estimate that 60% of members of anarchist trade unions were foreigners. If more natives (relative to their share of the total working class population) were unionised, this tends to belie the notion that trade unions provided an alternative political outlet for disenchanted workers (see Samuel L. Baily Labor, Nationalism and Politics in Argentina (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1967) pp.10-18).

on how to use their vote from the unions, which mostly remained doggedly neutral. On the other hand, the rail unions, and the footplatemen's union La Fraternidad in particular, strongly encouraged their members to participate in politics. The non-participatory credo, inherited from the anarchists, was not sustained in any large measure by the syndicalist FORA IX: anarchism as a political philosophy and an alternative to electoral politics was espoused by a tiny intellectual minority, and must be distinguished clearly from the anarchism found in the labour movement.[1]

The electoral system which brought the UCR to power did not herald a sudden transformation and modernisation of the political regime. Power remained concentrated in the executive, diminishing the influence of progressive moves from the legislature. Laissez-faire economic doctrines impeded the protection of industries and exposed the industrial working class to unemployment;[2] regressive indurect taxation on essential goods, where consumption did not increase proportionately with income, hit the poor hardest.[3] No party could hope to absorb immigrants fully into political life, either through naturalisation or through interventionist policies designed to improve the quality of working class life, even when they wished to. Hence it is not surprising that the place of the working class in national politics was equivocal in this period, nor that the Radical Party was ambivalent in its attitudes to the growing strength of organised labour.

Summary

The economic development of Argentina between the 1880s and the 1920s, based on the export of primary produce and heavily dependant

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1. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of anarchism in the labour movement.

2. Oscar Cornblit 'European Immigrants ...' in Veliz (ed.) The Politics of Conformity in Latin America (1970) p.247.

3. Scobie Buenos Aires p.142.

on the international economy, proceeded unevenly but resulted in an enormous expansion of agricultural output. By the 1920s Argentina was a world economic power, whereas two generations earlier her international reputation had been insignificant. All this was made possible by the development of railways and financial and commercial facilities, largely provided by foreign capital, and by the development of the ports, especially Buenos Aires. The lopsided economic expansion of agriculture, stock-raising and industry in the Littoral was matched by mass settlement of this area, largely from European immigration which greatly expanded the urban population above all. The organisation of trade unions among the industrial working class began to take hold in the 1890s against a background of conservative hegemony in national politics; the PS achieved some success in the federal capital from 1904, but the UCR remained outside electoral politics until 1912. The Sáenz Peña reform ended a regime of corrupt electoral practices but did not incoporate foreigners into the political process;[1] meanwhile the children of immigrants became involved in politics and even sat in the national legislature,[2] and the second-generation working class vote steadily gained importance.

The union movement, a product of the economic and social changes taking place, remained largely outside the political arena, despite the growing interventionist spirit of successive governments. The railway unions, among the earliest to organise and certainly operating in one of the most vital economic sectors, provide as useful a case as any to elucidate the development of the place of unions in Argentine social, economic and political life.

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1. From 1918 foreign owner-occupiers could vote in Buenos Aires municipal elections, but turn-outs were low (Richard J. Walter 'Municipal politics and government in Buenos Aires, 1918-1930' in Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs May 1974 p.181.

2. 55% of Deputies in 1916 were immigrants or sons of immigrants (Germani 'Mass immigration and modernisation' in Horowitz (and others, ed.) Latin American Radicalism (1969) p.347.

Chapter 2. The early years 1887-1912

This chapter is concerned with the history of the first twenty-five years of organised railway labour, from the foundation of the engine drivers' and firemen's union, La Fraternidad, in 1887 to the establishment of the first enduring general rail union, the Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera, a quarter of a century later. It examines the formation and consolidation of the footplatemen's union, and the efforts made to organise other railway sectors, notably through the Confederación de Ferrocarrileros (1902-1908). The account of the disputes and conflicts with which the various entities became involved demonstrates the problems faced by trade unions in Argentina in these years and helps to explain the responses of union leaders, capitalists and government to the development of organised labour.

The rapid and far-reaching changes in economic and social conditions which took place in Argentina in this period have been examined elsewhere, but a brief recapitulation of some of the relevant points provides useful background to the formative years of organised railway labour. The population of Argentina increased by about two and a third times in the period, to just over seven million in 1912.[1] Railway construction boomed, so that the lines grew almost fivefold in extension, with the greatest activity occurring between 1887 and 1892, and 1907 and 1912.[2] Capital invested in the railways was multiplied by 7 in money terms, with almost half this increase occurring between 1907 and 1912. Railways carried 8½ times as many passengers in 1912 as in 1887, and the tonnage of goods moved increased by 10½ times in the same period.[3] The number of persons

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1. Walter F. Willcox International Migrations (Washington DC, 2 vols., 1929-1931) Vol.I p.539, Vol.II p.147.
2. Alejandro E. Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires, 1918) pp.120-121.
3. Ibid. pp.120-121; 129-130.

employed by the railways grew from 18,960 in 1891 to 122,248 in 1912.[1] One may tentatively extrapolate that about 17,000 people were employed on the railways in 1887, the year of the foundation of 'La Fraternidad de maquinistas y foguistas de locomotoras'.

The foundation of La Fraternidad is associated with a visit from a North American comrade. Perhaps he came specifically to organise a union, though it is not certain; if not, the reasons for a visit to Argentina at that time by an active unionist are obscure.[2] In any case, his legacy seems to have been highly tenuous, though the union was named after its North American equivalents, the Railroad Brotherhoods. The society's first members seem to have come from the Western Railway, at that time owned by the province of Buenos Aires and called the Provincial Railway;[3] from their names, they were largely men of Spanish (or Argentine) and Italian origin. During the next few years the membership lists show that many English and Irish footplatemen were working on Argentine railways and played an important part in the society.[4]

The union was founded on 20 June 1887 at a time of rapid and unprecedented economic expansion, in an atmosphere of great confidence and expectation for future prosperity. However, crisis was fast approaching and when it came in 1890, the depreciation of the currency affected the industrial working class adversely. Labour unrest was the result.

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1. Ibid. p.312; General Information for Intending Emigrants (London, HMSO, 1892) p.20.

2. The visitor was Wilhelm Weitling or William Whiting of Iowa. A German Socialist named Wilhelm Weitling was active in the USA, editing a paper called Die Republik der Arbeiter; it is possible that he visited Argentina and founded La Fraternidad (Agnelli and Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.25; Patrick Renshaw The Wobblies (New York, Anchor, 1968) p.17 and note.)

3. Ricardo M. Ortiz El ferrocarril en la economía argentina (Buenos Aires, Problemas, 1946) p.30. The Provincial Railway was sold to a British consortium in 1890.

4. Three union presidents had British names; Ricardo Dallison (1896, 1898), Isaac F. Harvey (1899, 1905-6), N.E. Mitchell (1906). Dallison (FCCA) and Mitchell (FCP) later became managers; Mitchell was disciplined for his sympathy with the union in the 1907 strike and joined La Fraternidad as a propagandist. Dallison became an enemy of the union. Two long-serving members of the CD before 1910 were named Enrique Briggs and Patricio Fagan (1900-1905). In 1899, at least 144 out of 711 members had British names; in 1904, 267 out of 2255.

La Fraternidad acquired 203 members by September 1887, 140 or so from the Provincial Railway.[1] In 1888 the men of the Buenos Aires and Rosario Railway failed to gain their demand of pay in gold, though they achieved a partial success in the following year.[2] In December workers on the Provincial Railway agitated for increased wages, leading to company reprisals against La Fraternidad. Some activists were transferred, which merely caused the union to establish a broader geographical base of support.[3]

In 1889 a railwaymen's society at Sola (the Great Southern Railway's main workshops) organised a strike for pay in gold currency; they failed, despite initial support from La Prensa, but they did extract a wage rise. This union prospered for a time, with many members and even a weekly paper called La Unión Obrera. Anarchist disruption was blamed for the demise of both union and newspaper in 1893.[4] In March 1890 the footplatemen of the Provincial Railway struck because payment of their wages was three months in arrears; this fact probably reflects the parlous financial state of the province, and the strike failed to get the two sacked delegates reinstated.[5] This strike, ensuing police persecution, and the sacking of the president, had a very serious effect on the union, and it seems that it went underground and lost in large measure the organisation that had been established; reorganisation took place in 1895-1896.[6]

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1. Agnelli and Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.29.

2. E.Gallo and R. Cortés Conde La República conservadora (Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1972) p.86.

3. Agnelli and Chiti, Cincuentenario (1937) p.34.

4. Augusto Kuhn, 'Apuntes para la historia del movimiento obrero socialista en la República Argentina', Nuevos Tiempos No.2, 20 May 1916.

5. Manuel Fernández La Unión Ferroviaria a través del tiempo (Buenos Aires, 1948) p.58. One, José Molinari, was a principal figure and elder statesmen in La Fraternidad throughout the first thirty-five years of its life, holding the presidency for 2 years (1889-1890) and sitting on the CD for a total of 10 years, including the crisis years 1917-1919.

6. Agnelli and Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.34, 242; Fernandez Ferroviaria (1948) p.58.

The strikes of this period included all railwaymen, but the only effectively organised group were the footplatemen. Their demand for pay in gold - because of the serious devaluation of the paper peso from 1889- displays a considerable grasp of events;[1] other craft and trade union groups who struck at this time confined their claims to pay increases rather than seeking to guard themselves against future inflation. During the 1890s it was the matter of hours rather than wages which attracted most attention from trade unions.

The Eight Hours' Movement of 1896 and drivers' liability: contrasting priorities

In 1896 a strike broke out which was quite distinct from those discussed above, or even from the 1891 strike and seven-week lock-out in the FCS workshops.[2] The movements of August-December 1896 were the most comprehensive, the longest and the most alarming to the governing classes so far; they broke out not in pursuit of increased wages, but of the eight-hour day, a demand first aired in Argentina by the Socialist group Vorwärts which organised the First of May demonstration of 1890.[3]

The railway workshops at Tolosa (FCO)[4] and Sola (FCS) were the centres of a lengthy movement, which included 20,000 workers at its height from these and other mechanical workshops in Greater Buenos Aires.[5]

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1. Some of the railwaymen succeeded in winning pay in gold currency but the sources cannot agree as to which.

2. Review of the River Plate 29 Aug. 1896; Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.59. The former source describes this action as a total failure, while Fernández refers to a 23-day strike which succeeded in preventing the FCS from sacking one-third of the staff and reducing both wages and hours of rest.

3. On the May Day celebrations, see Jacinto Oddone Historia del socialismo argentino (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1934) Vol I pp.123-137. Socialist influence is indicated in one of the strike demands, for transformation of the railway workshops into workers' cooperatives (RRP 22 Aug. 1896).

4. The Tolosa workshops were bought by the FCS in 1900 (RRP 14 July 1900).

4. Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.63. Both the Vasena metal works and the Mihanovich shipping company - centres of future disorder - suffered strikes at this time (La Vanguardia 22 Aug. 1896).

The strike of fitters and mechanics affected the workshops of the Western (Tolosa), Southern (Sola), Central Argentine (Rosario), Buenos Aires and Rosario (Campana) and Pacific (Junín) Railways; the Ensenada, Córdoba and Rosario, and Western of Santa Fe Railways were affected less severely. The strike had violent aspects, involving acts of sabotage and attacks on black-legs and (English) managers.[1] It began at Tolosa, where the men were organised in a union; delegates saw the management on 8 August, delivering a forty-eight hour ultimatum because they were reluctant to take strike action. They demanded an eight-hour day (instead of the prevailing ten hours), for the same pay; an end to piecework; double time for overtime; and no Sunday working.[2] On 10 August all 740 workers struck and the union sent delegations to the other shops mentioned above. Both Socialists (notably Adrián Patroni) and anarchists addressed the first strike meeting; the next day, the 800 men of the Sola (FCS) workshops were out too.

The Sociedad de Obreros de Ferrocarriles of Rosario (FCCA) was also involved in strike action linked to the general agitation.[3] This movement, and others which started in Córdoba, Santa Fe, Tucumán and other centres of the Interior did not last long, for the tendency of other groups to join the striking railwaymen and press their own claims had dissipated scant resources.

The Socialist party argued with some justification that it would have been better if all efforts had been concentrated on achieving a victory for the railwaymen. The strikes that were sustained in the capital were those of the mechanics, the railwaymen, and the bakery workers (which last were powerfully organised). Strikes of telephone and gas workers, typographical

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1. Review of the River Plate (hereafter RRP) 17 Oct. 1896, 24 Oct.1896.

2. Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.62; La Vanguardia 15 Aug. 1896. The Tolosa union was the Sociedad de Mejoramiento Social de Trabajadores: it was apparently linked with the cooperative run there by Socialists. See also Chapter 5 p.194.

3. See Chapter 5 p.194.

workers, bricklayers, and shoe and sandal makers had all collapsed.[1] By late September the railways had succeeded in reopening their subsidiary workshops, where most maintenance could be handled, and were therefore in a strong position to hold out in the main centres. The men also wanted to bring the Central Uruguay Railway's workshop in Peñarol out on strike, which suggests that work may have been done there from Argentina; there is no record that the Uruguayans joined the strike.[2]

By November the railway strike was confined to Junín, Sola and Tolosa; the first was the hardest struggle because the reprisals of the Pacific company (hereafter FCP) were exceptionally severe. Funds were alarmingly short; the mechanics from most private firms had already been forced back to work through hunger. The Socialists blamed the indifference of the rest of the working class for the fact that all but the most militant were trickling back to work.[3] By the end of the month only the Sola workshop remained on strike; the organisation, based on enthusiastic meetings in their Barracas headquarters, was superior to that elsewhere.[4] The Junín group admitted defeat and entrusted its possessions to the local Socialist Centre until such time as it could reorganise. The tenacity of the Sola movement depended a great deal on the committed activity of the ringleaders and of PS and other left-wing militants in Buenos Aires. The local businessmen, who had remained willing to allow the strikers credit, tried to prevail on the FCS to concede a nine-hour day, but the managers stood firm and they had begun to recruit blacklegs in Italy; at least one group of these refused to come when they found out they were to be used to break the strike.[5]

By December it was all over. La Vanguardia took the chance for a political statement:

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1. La Vanguardia 12 Sept.1896.
2. RRP 5 Sept. 1896, 26 Sept. 1896.
3. RRP 7 Nov. 1896; La Vanguardia 14 Nov. 1896.
4. Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.63.
5. RRP 31 Oct. 1896; La Vanguardia 28 Nov. 1896.

> 'The strikers and the organising committees had an exaggerated faith in their strength, without comprehending that in strikes one has to struggle not only with the bosses, but also with the workers themselves who, through ignorance, avarice and even hardship, often take the part of the capitalist.
>
> 'However, in the best of circumstances, a strike is a very painful and difficult struggle, in whose place a class-conscious proletariat must prefer political action. Strikes may be used in propitious times, and should be strengthened with all the resources and energy of a fuller organisation, stronger and better able to generate enthusiasm; in other words, political organisation, directed at putting an end to capitalist domination.' [1]

Afterwards the recriminations began. The strike committee, it was alleged, had made off with part of the funds, and the anarchists blamed the socialists for this, even though the PS produced the accounts for public perusal.[2] An anarchist manifesto claimed that two hundred subscription lists had gone astray; they attacked Ramón Potau of Cúneo's mechanics and foundry workers' union for abandoning his job in the electrical works to take on the direction and propaganda for the movement, paying himself $5 a day on excursions to Córdoba and Rosario for expenses which were already met by the local unions, and accused Patroni of being bourgeois.

> 'There is nothing surprising about our pacific conduct in the last strike. We were fed so many inconsistencies, they tried to make us swallow so many dressed-up lies with a dialectic which seemed to give them a light veneer of truth, that they turned us from men capable of responding as is necessary to the arrogance of the railway companies into mannequins, automata with initiative only to applaud our disinterested leaders.'[3]

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1. La Vanguardia 6 Dec. 1896.

2. La Vanguardia 6 Dec. 1896; RRP 5 Dec. 1896.
The principal negotiators, Cúneo and Patroni, were Socialists. Much less is known of the anarchist participants, and they are difficult to identify. La Vanguardia often omitted to state the activists' ideological positions; their subsequent careers are usually difficult to follow, since increasingly organised persecution (especially after the 1902 Residence Law) encouraged anonymity in the working class press.

3. Varios mecánicos de la última huelga, 'A los obreros huelguistas de Sola'; Nettlau archiv 1896-1897, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

A blacklist was begun as a result of the strikes, and according to La Vanguardia all British companies in South America boycotted the activists.[1] Conditions tended to worsen rather than improve, notably in the always contentious field of contract work.[2] The attempts of strike leaders who had lost their jobs to revitalise the men's grievances, and to draw into their orbit the new workers from Italy (whose rumoured anarchist and socialist, inclination had no foundation in fact) did not meet with much success; the failure of the movement had been very costly.[3] Socialist pleas to keep up the organising work seem to have gone unheard; the organisations of 1896 seem to have sunk without trace, although some of their leaders, like Vicente Rosáenz and Francisco Cúneo, emerged as important figures in subsequent labour agitation.[4]

Meanwhile La Fraternidad remained aloof from the political ferment in the Argentine working class during the 1890s. This was partly the result of the union's weakness after the struggles of 1888-1890, from which it had barely recovered by 1896, when the eight hours' movement began. Moreover, the footplatemen had secured some measure of protection from inflation (though it is not clear whether it was pay in gold currency or the shortage of

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1. La Vanguardia 5 June 1897.

2. La Vanguardia 10 April 1897.

3. RRP 12 December 1896, 23 January 1897; the Italian contract workers did complain of low pay and poor conditions.

4. Vicente Rosáenz, PS later syndicalist; delegate coopers' union to Federación Obrera Dec 1895; member of the left-wing splinter of PS called F.O.Socialista Colectivista favouring more economic-trade union activity and less electoral-political, delegate to its only Congress Nov.1899; delegate PS 4th Congress July 1901 (Las Heras); member PS executive committee; later railwaymen, FCCA; 1916-1917 propagandist of FOF on FCS; August 1917 Strike committee, FCCA; Sept.1917 Strike committee, general rail strike, FOF. Francisco Cúneo, PS, mechanic; 1896 important strike speaker, negotiated with Interior Minister and Police Chief; Mar.1906 addressed strikers Banfield workshops, FCS; 1914, 1916 addressed Fraternidad anniversary meetings; June 1917 delegate to Tafí Viejo (FCCN) strike,negotiated on it with Public Works Minister Torello. PS Deputy, and held many PS offices; but always closely associated with labour, and railwaymen in particular.

skilled men which contributed most to their relatively privileged position).[1] At this stage, the union's members were clearly differentiated from the mass of railway workers, partly on account of their skills and perhaps also because many footplatemen were still recruited from Northern Europe, and from Britain in particular, on technical grounds. Even so, the railway companies were so hostile to union activity that they failed to differentiate between unions, and feared that the engine drivers would join the 1896 strikes.[2]

This fear was fuelled by the fact that La Fraternidad had been active during the 1890s, but strictly on behalf of its own members. Engine drivers were liable for accidents which occurred while the train was in motion under the Railway Law of 1891 (codified in 1894). In view of the large numbers of level crossings (built by the companies in the interests of economy, and inadequately guarded for the same reason), the harshness of the law was unwarranted. This liability, and the arrest and detention of drivers who were allegedly responsible, lay behind several disputes in the decade 1888-1898.[3] Sometimes a short strike was effective, as it was on the FCCA in June 1896.[4] Late in 1897 an English driver, whose case (and the general principle behind it) was energetically taken up by the Review of the River Plate, was detained for six weeks before being released.[5] One of the reasons for the driver's long detention was the failure of La Fraternidad's members to resist returning to work, 'induced partly by persuasion, partly by threats, and partly by the weak-kneed conduct of some of their number'.[6]

Despite the contrast between the fortitude and courage of the railway workshop staff in 1896 and the lack of militancy of La Fraternidad, the detentions grew less frequent. After the 1890s judges and police preferred

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1. In any case from 1896 the peso appreciated, which would have worsened the position of workers paid in gold just as it damaged exporting interests, which was why the government returned to a fixed exchange rate in 1899 (A.G.Ford The Gold Standard 1880-1914: Britain and Argentina (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962; compare RRP 22 Aug. 1896).
2. RRP 29 Aug. 1896.
3. See Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) pp.57-58; RRP 12 Jan.1895, 16 Mar. 1895.
4. RRP 27 June 1896.
5. RRP 8 Jan. 1898, 29 Jan. 1898.
6. RRP 8 Jan. 1898.

not to press charges against engine drivers for accidents for which they could hardly be blamed. In 1899 the union noted that protests about unjust detentions had diminished considerably since changes in the judicial procedure.[1] A railway bill of 1902 underlined that innocent drivers were not to be detained after accidents, though it never became law.[2]

Organisation in the construction sector: the Pringles navvies' strike, 1901-1902

Railway organisations do not feature large in the agitation of the late 1890s. Records - such as they are - do not mention any railwaymen involved in the unemployed movement of 1897-1900, nor were they to be found in the preliminary organisation of the new federation FOA.[3]

The next major movement of workers on the railways occurred in the construction sector. This is interesting in itself, as the important trade unions of this early period were generally inactive in this department. This is astonishing in view of the amount of railway construction taking place, but less surprising when it is noted that the men were contracted through middlemen who led the gangs. The work was usually short-term, in remote and isolated areas, and the workers highly mobile, both geographically and between the various contractors.[4] Moreover, men recruited were either native born labour, as in the North-West, or very new immigrants, who were more likely to be poor and disillusioned small-holders manqués than men with experience of labour organisation in Europe. The agitation of 1901-1902, on the Pringles extension of the FCS in the south of the province of Buenos Aires

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1. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1899. An agreement of 1883 apparently protected footplatemen from detention except where there were strong indications of guilt; the union wanted the Supreme Court to enforce this accord. (Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1900).

2. Proyecto de Ley General de FFCC de la República, Title II Article 154, p.82 (Buenos Aires, Roma, 1902).

3. See Chapter 5 p.195 for involvement of Rosario railwaymen in FOA, 1901.

4. Living and working conditions for navvies differed little from country to country. For the British case, see Terry Coleman The Railway Navvies (London, Pelican, 1968) especially Chapter 5.

was organised by anarchist leaders, many of whom came from Rosario. When the first strike began in June 1901, the men demanded improved living conditions, pay punctually each month, and a wage rise (at this time they received a maximum of $1.50 per day); two months later the trouble restarted, with 2,000 men involved over the company's attempts to renege on the previous wage deal.[1] The settlement had provided that the navvies should earn $3 a day for nine hours' work in winter and eight in summer; they did not succeed in winning pay for days lost through the strike.[2] When they signed up, the men understood they would earn $3 or $4 a day, but had found later that the work was by the piece, and that the company profited further through the monopoly of the company shop. Poor conditions in the Interior were highlighted in this movement, showing how wise it was for workers to remain in the federal capital.[3] A demonstration took place in Buenos Aires to protest at the sacking of about 800 of the Pringles men as a consequence of the second strike.[4]

In January 1902 a new strike broke out, as another 150 men had been laid off; La Vanguardia's Bahia Blanca correspondent thought it was also because the 'workers' employees', two anarchists from Rosario, were being prevented from travelling among the gangs encouraging them to organise.[5] The intervention of the PS, he thought, would be unwise, though now the anarchist 'parasites on the proletariat' were in difficulties it was likely they would try and involve them. The anarchist organiser Ferrarone, travelling with the leader Ovidi, tried to pass himself off as a Socialist, much to that party's indignation.[6] By this time (March 1902) the company was recruiting elsewhere,

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1. On recruitment from agencies and through contractors, see La Vanguardia 21 Aug.1901, 8 June 1901, 18 Aug. 1901; RRP 31 Aug. 1901.
2. RRP 31 Aug. 1901.
3. La Vanguardia 31 Aug. 1901.
4. La Vanguardia 19 Oct. 1901; La Protesta 19 Oct. 1901; RRP says only 400 were sacked (19 Oct. 1901).
5. RRP 25 Jan. 1902; La Protesta 14 Dec. 1901; La Vanguardia 1 Feb. 1902.
6. The PS objected to the strikers paying Gori $500 for his unsuccessful efforts at arbitration, though he donated the money to La Protesta. They also drew attention to the activities of the anarchist Ivaldi, who absconded with the funds he was adept at raising for the movement.

and obtained 150 labourers from Entre Ríos and Corrientes to continue with the most urgent work, the building of the new mole in the port of Bahía Blanca.[1]

These strikes failed, but they have some interesting features. First, the involvement of anarchists from as far away as Rosario; secondly, the use of the leading anarchist theoretician, Gori, as negotiator, albeit unsuccessfully, in 1901;[2] and thirdly, the rivalry between the anarchist organisers and the Socialist Centre of Bahía Blanca, whose support for the initial struggle soon waned. This sort of rivalry was unusual,[3] but perhaps less surprising in view of the divisions which took shape within FOA in this period. The organisation the anarchists had tried to establish does not seem to have lasted and the work of construction in the area was soon completed.

The first struggle of the traffic department, 1904

The period 1902-1904 saw a number of railway strike movements, most of which were short-lived, small-scale and insignificant, in contrast to the high level of labour unrest generally; most of these occurred on the so-called Amalgamated Companies.[4] The disputes related largely to wages, hours and conditions. The companies negotiated wage increases which they subsequently broke or which were unacceptable to the workers; it is notable that the capitalists were at least taking some steps to conciliate the workers, though as yet they recognised no collective bargaining rights. In the economic climate of these years they were in a position to show magnanimity.[5] The rationalisation of the two companies' plant and

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1. La Vanguardia 23 Mar. 1902, 5 Apr. 1902; RRP 15 Mar. 1902.
2. For more on Pietro Gori's role in the strike, see Chapter 5 p.196.
3. See Chapter 5pp.196-200.
4. These were the Buenos Aires and Rosario and Central Argentine Railways, whose effective merger took place during these years though it was not legally completed until 1908.
5. According to the PS leader Mario Bravo, between 1894 and 1904 the number of employees on the railways had increased 64%, the annual per capita wage bill had increased 57%, but the companies' profits had increased by 200% (El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1906).

administration created valuable savings for the companies, but caused some hardship to the employees, whose plight was acknowledged by the Review of the River Plate.[1]

Moreover, the railways' headquarters were in Rosario, which was a main centre of anarchist activity at the time and suffered a number of quite violent working class manifestations; the companies were afraid of trouble but determined not to yield to pressure. However, the propaganda activity of the Confederación de Ferrocarrileros, newly organised as a resistance society in 1903,[2] alarmed railway managers, especially as there was intensified unrest in all labour sectors. In July 1903 alone, the Confederation recruited 132 new members from the Amalgamated Companies, nearly one third of the total recruitment for the month; this largely resulted from the visit of Antonio Zaccagnini, the PS Secretary of the Confederation.[3]

In May 1903 the railways' signalmen were defeated after a two-month strike in which several were arrested and sacked.[4] But the major dispute, which began in the federal capital, did not occur until February 1904, after much preparation and organisation.

The Amalgamated Companies offered some groups of their workers a bonus of 25 ¢ a day during the harvest months of January, February and March, which they rejected in favour of a more permanent improvement in conditions.[5] As the Confederation maintained, this was the baptism of fire for the union; it was also the first important strike of traffic personnel on Argentine railways.[6] The men sought shorter hours (they asked for a maximum

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1. RRP 18 Oct. 1902 laments the closing of the Campana shop (of the Buenos Aires and Rosario Railway), and loss of FCCA jobs at Victoria, while emphasising that rationalisation was inevitable.

2. For an explanation of the term 'resistance society' see Chapter 7 p.258.

3. This was despite the opposition of the local pointsmen's brotherhood (La Fraternidad de Cambistas), which refused to let Zaccagnini address a meeting in their offices and would not contemplate the merger of the two organisations (El Ferrocarril 5 Aug. 1903).

4. La Vanguardia 28 Mar.1903, 23 May 1903; the abuses were so many that they even prompted Dr Bialet Massé to complain to the companies and to the DG FFCC (La Vanguardia 4 Apr. 1903).

5. El Ferrocarril 9 Jan. 1904; La Vanguardia 30 Jan. 1904.

6. El Ferrocarril 5 Feb. 1904; Martín S. Casaretto, Historia del movimiento obrero argentino (Buenos Aires, 1947) Vol I p.52.

of twelve hours a day, which gives an indication of how bad conditions were) and a permanent rise of $10 a month, ten days' annual paid holiday with free passes, and the implementation of the new Article 18 of the Railway Law (on hours of work, revised on 8 October 1903). They asked for a decision before 20 February.[1]

The guards and signalmen were offered a rise, which they refused; while the manager, Mr Loveday, was absent in Europe the Companies refused to negotiate and instead gave out half a month's wages to all as an interim bonus to try and avert conflict.[2]

The strike began on 26 February 1904; 14,000 men came out, and 4,000 of assorted trades demonstrated in Rosario at the weekend.[3] The Minister of Public Works, Dr Emilio Civit, a patron of La Fraternidad and sometimes sympathetic to workers' causes,[4] suggested government-sponsored arbitration, but the men declined this and presented their case in detail, receiving a favourable response from the press.[5] The expanded demands included abolition of contract work, improvements in working conditions, and no obligation to join the Companies' friendly society.[6]

The Companies refused to recognise the Confederation as negotiators, but their intense propaganda during January and February had had results.[7] The men had presented the first detailed set of claims since 1896; the union was able to organise its own strike committee, instead of relying on outsiders; and the Minister of Public Works himself, even if he was trying to make political capital out of his attitude, had implicitly recognised the union

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1. La Vanguardia 30 Jan.1904; El Ferrocarril 5 Feb.1904; RRP 6 Feb.1904.
2. La Vanguardia 30 Jan. 1904.
3. La Vanguardia 5 Mar. 1904; Casaretto op.cit. Vol I p.53.
4. Civit also tried to gain politically by taking a moderate line in the Argentine Great Western strike of 1907; but the railwaymen hated him after his part in the Amalgamated Companies' strike, according to the Confederation (El Ferrocarril 1 Oct. 1904).
5. El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904.
6. El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904; RRP 27 Feb. 1904.
7. RRP 27 Feb. 1904; El Ferrocarril 5 Feb. 1904.

by offering arbitration. However, the footplatemen's support was lacking, despite an appeal to the CD from the Fraternidad sections of Córdoba, Villa María, Tucumán and La Banda (all of which, it must be admitted, were distant from the important concentrations of footplatemen on the line).[1] The failure of La Fraternidad to support the movement caused much bitterness, and the Socialist-dominated UGT - which theoretically held no brief for the non-aligned Confederation, but whose leaders were close to those of the rail union - addressed an appeal to the CD, asking 'are you accomplices in management avarice, or loyal to the working class cause?'[2]

The strikers had to handle other reverses. Fake telegrams announcing the strike's conclusion were sent to selected individuals, and an entire circular was falsified; goods trains were run completely empty to make it seem that the services were normal; troops were obliged to act as level crossing keepers and labourers.[3]

> 'Troops were brought in from San Lorenzo, and the stations and all approaches, and the lines on all their length through the town were very strongly guarded ... On Saturday night there was a large meeting of the men at which the usual class of violent speeches were delivered, but the tone generally was hardly so enthusiastic as might have been expected, and it was a significant sign that all the women waiting outside looked very miserable'.[4]

The movement was very orderly, anarchists spending more time attacking the Confederation than carrying out the violent acts they threatened.

The strike weakened after some ten days, since Mr Loveday proved able on his return to replace the strikers with new staff. The Minister of Public Works persuaded the men to accept arbitration but the companies

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1. La Vanguardia 5 Mar. 1904.

2. Letter of 5 Mar. 1904, quoted in El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904. There is no evidence that footplatemen broke ranks to join the strike, though some wished to, even though they too were affected by the disagreement on interpretation of the new Article 18 of the Railway Law, an important grievance in the dispute (RRP 5 Mar. 1904, El Ferrocarril 1 Sept. 1904). Contrast the footplatemen's behaviour in the FCPSF strike later that year (see p. 51 below).

3. El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904.

4. RRP 5 Mar. 1904, dateline Rosario 2 Mar. 1904.

claimed it was inappropriate since the strikers had been replaced.[1]

On 16 March, the Confederation capitulated.[2] In its declaration, the Rosario meeting

> 'reaffirms its complete faith in the ideals the Confederation defends; calls once more on the comrades of the whole republic to foster the organization of all the railway trades, and criticises bitterly the partial, unjust conduct of the government, which, forgetting the duty inherent in the mission entrusted to it by the nation, rides roughshod over laws and entrusts the country to the hands of foreign enterprises which shamelessly exploit the commerce, industry and workers of this land. [The meeting] 'declares likewise that, despite the passive violence of the government and companies, it did not want to have recourse to a general railway strike because the national interest is sacred to the children of labour, and thanks the other comrades for the cooperation given and offered in this crisis.'[3]

The Companies, who could not afford to pay the increased wages the men sought, could however give the police of the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe $15,000 for services rendered. This understandably outraged the union.[4]

The defeat of this strike was the start of intensified propaganda activity by the Confederation.[5] After all, there was encouragement to be had from the effort;

> 'If, before the strike, we had maintained that our strength was such that it could paralyse two railway lines for nearly a month, and keep the comrades disposed to do the same again, we would not have been believed - even our own comrades themselves would have denied it.'[6]

The secretary Zaccagnini naturally took on most of the work, along with his paid assistant and fellow-Socialist José M. Lemos, but they were not lone 'professional agitators' as the capitalist press would have it. The Amalgamated Companies' strike, and subsequent conflicts, were run by

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1. RRP 12 Mar. 1904.
2. El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904; La Vanguardia 2 Apr. 1904.
3. El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904.
4. Casaretto op.cit. Vol I p.53; El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1904.
5. RRP 2 Apr. 1904, 21 May 1904.
6. El Ferrocarril 1 June 1904.

committees of strikers, not directed by bureaucrats.[1] The participation of a number of bona fide railwaymen is shown by the acts of reprisal of the companies; they left many unemployed, whose hardship had to be relieved by subscriptions run by the Confederation.[2] The anarchists who claimed that the strike's failure was a consequence of PS leadership made a paradoxical denial of their own important contribution to strike action, whether successful or not. Their federation FOA offered help in the dispute, and at the same time La Protesta published an attack on the Confederation.[3] The polemic which followed the strike, the first of several, was very bitter.[4]

The hey-day of the Confederation, 1904-1907

The table provides an indication of the nature and number of the major strike movements which took place between the Confederation's first strike and the footplatemen's dispute of 1907. In general, it is clear that strikes centred on demands for improved wages and conditions; it should be noted that the companies were expanding fast and profitably in these years, and that many companies were prepared to make concessions of this nature.[5] The demand for an eight-hour day featured prominently, demonstrating the extent to which Argentine railwaymen were in touch with international labour issues.

Other features of the railwaymen's strike effort at this time include the considerable length of most conflicts. The table excludes lightning or very localised troubles, but it is plain that the workers embarked on strikes

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1. Articles by Zaccagnini in La Vanguardia 2 Apr. 1904 and 9 Apr. 1904, reprinted in El Ferrocarril 15 Apr. 1904 and 1 May 1904.

2. El Ferrocarril 15 July 1904; by this date $681.35 had been collected and there is no further news of it.

3. Letter from Confederation president Tellechea to FOA 3.3.04 in El Ferrocarril 15 Apr. 1904.

4. See Chapter 5 p.197.

5. A number of agitations and negotiations had achieved results; at Liniers and Caballito (FCO), Banfield and Sola (FCS), Traffic department of the Great Western; on the FCP movements at Junín (where police intervened) and Palermo got results (RRP 26 Nov. 1904; El Ferrocarril 1 Mar. 1906).

Railway strikes in Argentina, 1904-1907

Date	Railway	Location/trades, departments	Reasons/demands	Length of strike	Comments/Result
21 Nov-4 Dec 04	FCPSF	All traffic, footplatemen	8-hour day workshops, 20% rise; pay rises guards, pointsmen	14 days	Backed by footplatemen despite orders CD; inspired by anarchist Federación Obrera Local, but Confederation in charge later. Successful strike.
early Dec 04-early Jan 05	FCP	Junín; began foundry, spread to workshops	8-hour day; end to contract work; better conditions for apprentices and labourers	c. one month	Meetings probably held PS Centre; Confederation weak on FCP. Some police provocation. Dispute lost; original strikers dismissed.
14 Dec 04-end Jan 05	FCCN	San Cristóbal, Tucumán, Jujuy at first; spread to whole line, then shrank to S. Cristóbal	8-hour day, 20% rise	6 weeks	Violence/troops involved; trouble with non-striking Fraternidad. Catholic Workers' Circle of Tucumán provided blacklegs. Strike organised by Confederation and anarchists; failed. S. Cristóbal boycott
29 Jan 05-5 Feb 05	FCS	Began Bahía Blanca; then general but not capital	8-hour day, 5-30% rises	7 days	Strike making considerable progress, mostly under Confederation auspices, when Radical revolution brought imposition of state of siege
June 05	FCO	Liniers workshop	Free Labour Assn. workers used	unknown	Probably anarchist-inspired; result not known
Oct 05	FCS, FCCA +	Rosario, Bahía Blanca, and elsewhere	Solidarity with port workers and stevedores on general strike	various (few days)	Curtailed by state of siege, though anarchists tried to continue on FCS
15 Feb 06-10 Apr 06	FCS	Talleres Banfield (new workshop), some from Sola	15-25% rise; better apprenticeships open to all, not just sons of skilled; 25% on pice rates	55 days	Police involved, many arrests. Uneasy cooperation Confederation-anarchists; PS help with meeting places, deals with government. Largely successful
Mar-mid Apr 06	GOA	Mendoza workshop	15-40% rises	3 weeks	Provincial Governor intervened in settlement; Fraternidad very hostile. Fairly successful.
22-24 June 06	FCC	Liniers workshop	10-25% rises; 48-hour week; better pay for apprentices	2 days	Sit-in. Successful.
9-16 Sept 06	FCS	Permanent way men Pl. Constitución, B. Blanca	8-hour day	8 days	Men joined Confederation en masse; important new area of recruitment. Strike failed.
Oct-Nov 06	FCS	Permanent way staff, several areas	Wage rise; 8-hour day	unknown	Men resolved to organise more thoroughly company-wide, meanwhile accepting 20¢. per hour rise.
12 Oct-Nov 06	FCO	Liniers workshop; solidarity Greater Bs As, Bragado	Began over unfair dismissal	6 weeks or more	Strike became lock-out; arrests, troops, blacklegs. Anarchist, but some money from Confederation. Unsuccessful - most strikers dismissed.
20 Nov 06-end Jan 07	FCPSF	Workshops, traffic, permanent way	End piecework; overtime for work public/religious holidays; better conditions apprentices; 8¢. per hour rise	75 days	Initiative from F.C. Local. Involved other trades, workshops, and was backed by shopkeepers. Generalised late Jan: police repression, bomb scares. Failed.
Nov 06-Jan 07	FCCC	Córdoba workshop	8-hour day; 10% pay rise	5-6 weeks	Autonomous organisers, Obreros Unidos del Ferro-carril. Aid from local IS who organised local [illegible] strike of 5 days in Córdoba. Failed.

for long periods and in very difficult conditions (since there was no question of strike pay, and the first sizeable fund amassed by the Confederation to aid strikers was that collected during the 1906 FCS strike).[1] Moreover, increasing repression from police and security forces was added to the financial problems of strikers, as experience of labour troubles grew more frequent and more alarming to the government. Conditions and repression were likely to be particularly severe in areas remote from the federal capital, especially on the State-owned Central Northern Railway (FCCN). The effect of the states of siege is considered in more detail below; despite apparently exceptional persecution, the rail unions, and in particular the Confederation, recovered their position to a considerable degree in between these periods. This is testimony to the resilience and energy of their leaders, and to the capacity of their members to retain interest in fighting for improvements, which was a consequence of the level of success the men's claims achieved. A much higher proportion of railway strikes at this time were successful than those of other trades,[2] but these settlements were probably not permanent. The railway companies allowed market forces to determine their wage policy, often granting an increase during the harvest period so they would not lose unskilled labour, and cutting wages and hours in a recession or slack period.

A number of the events between April 1904 and May 1907 require comment. The salient feature of the 1904 strike on the French-owned Santa Fe Provincial Railway (hereafter FCPSF) was the unilateral decision of Fraternidad members to support the strike against central union policy. They rebelled about a week after the strike began, and notified the CD of their decision, an act of defiance in itself.[3] Only a month before the CD, apparently in anticipation of indiscipline, had renounced all responsibility

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1. La Vanguardia 31 Mar. 1906, 7 Apr. 1906; $4000 was collected in four weeks.

2. Sebastian Marotta El movimiento sindical argentino Vol I pp.187-207, 245-258; Jacinto Oddone Gremialismo proletario argentino (1975 edition) pp.205-212, 225-243.

3. La Protesta 29 Nov. 1904.

for the fate of its members while involved in activities sponsored by other associations.[1] In this case they even forbade the footplatemen to use their branch office for strike meetings, and suspended the sections concerned.[2] The rest of labour and the PS greeted the rank and file's action wtih delight.[3]

Like La Fraternidad, the Confederation had not been consulted before its members followed the anarchist Federacion Obrera Santa fecina, though it reacted differently, according to the CC's account:

> 'The Confederation did not abandon itself to a damaging critique at this time, and proceeded to make amends for the involuntary oversight. The movement broke with the agreement of the section of FORA. The Confederation did not oppose or consider opposing it, because it respected the wishes of the Santa Fe comrades and did everything appropriate to support and assist the strikers.'[4]

The reactions of the two unions testify to the distance between them, while the participation of footplatemen suggests that this distance was greatest between the central directorates, in the case of Santa Fe at least.

The Confederation's undogmatic and practical approach to trade union activity was shown once more in the case of the FCCN strike. It was lengthy and unsuccessful, and La Vanguardia was almost certainly correct in saying that

> 'Many workers maintain that the strike was inopportune, and precipitated lamentably by exalted elements, whose intention is to train the workers in revolutionary gymnastics'.[5]

The Confederation still wished to salvage something from the disaster, and it organised a boycott of the workshops at San Cristóbal by the workers, publishing this aim widely. The idea that the Confederation had the prestige

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1. Fraternidad CD Actas y Circulares 1904, Circ.7, 21 Oct.1904. Apparently the union took a more tolerant attitude to indiscipline by October 1905, when some footplatemen joined the general strike from the Buenos Aires and Rosario Railway (Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.245).
2. Fraternidad CD Actas y Circulares 1904, Circ.13, 25 Nov. 1904.
3. El Ferrocarril 15 Dec. 1904.
4. El Ferrocarril 5 Dec. 1904.
5. La Vanguardia 21 Jan. 1905.

and following to make such a policy worthwhile demonstrates the important role of rail unions as leaders of the working class in remoter areas, where other trade union bodies were isolated or at best formed part of that very loose federation, the anarchist FORA. Of 300 men who had worked in thes workshops, effectively the only industrial employment in the town, only thirty remained, thanks to a grant of $500 from the Confederation to help the rest leave the area and find work elsewhere.[1] Most likely the railway was soon able to replace these workers, but a serious attempt to withdraw labour had been made.

The strike on the FCS in January-February 1905 is inextricably linked with the Radical revolution and ensuing state of siege. It fast became generalised outside the federal capital, gaining important support from the provincial station masters.[2] Organisation was in the Confederation's hands, with support from anarchists and offers of solidarity from UGT.[3] The government of President Quintana - a railway lawyer - was notably partial to the company; 33 prisoners were taken in four days.[4] The British capitalist press praised the action, saying that

> 'The government has, we are pleased to be able to record, at last acted in a proper manner in connection with this strike'.[5]

There was scarcely time for the struggle to develop before the state of siege was imposed, ostensibly because of the Radical revolution of 3-4 February. On the night of the revolt, troops went out by train and intercepted some Radicals expected from Bahía Blanca, a risky enterprise since the telegraph lines had been cut and the traffic managers had no idea which tracks were in use.[6]

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1. The money might have been even better used if the Tucumán and San Cristób sections had not been so disorganised in their finances (La Protesta 22 Jan.1 La Vanguardia 28 Jan. 1905; El Ferrocarril 15 Feb. 1905,3 Aug. 1905, 15 Aug.1
2. El Ferrocarril Suplemento 2, 31 Jan.1905.
3. La Vanguardia 4 Feb. 1905; El Ferrocarril 15 Feb. 1905. The nature of th offer was unclear; the Confederation remained aloof, sending greetings to the Congress scheduled for April 1905 (it was eventually held in August).
4. El Ferrocarril Suplemento 2, 31 Jan. 1905.
5. RRP 3 Feb. 1905.
6. Arturo H. Coleman Mi vida de ferroviario inglés en la Argentina, 1884-194 (Bahía Blanca, privately published, 1949) pp.77-80.

During the state of siege the Confederation's paper continued publication clandestinely, providing the only working class source of news for the period.[1] It appears that the state of siege curtailed a movement in full flight; a meeting of delegates summoned by the Central Committee decided to call it off, but agreed that individual sections should make partial settlements where possible.[2] This suggests that there was a possibility of making some gains from the movement; however, there is no record of these, if any, and by the end of the state of siege the railwaymen were so discontent that almost immediate unrest and disruption was expected, despite the decapitation of the organisation. The detention of Zaccagnini on 7 February (on the warship Maipú, along with the editorial board of La Protesta)[3] and his subsequent discharge in Montevideo disrupted the union's internal organisation, as did the exile of the president José Tellechea and the secretar Ernesto Colombo.[4] The only effective leader who escaped the attention of the police and immigration officials (the expulsions were all a result of the Residence Law), was José M. Lemos, Zaccagnini's assistant, who managed to hold weekly meetings of surviving committee members throughout the three mnnths' state of siege.[5]

It does appear that the Confederation was the object of a concerted persecution, the result of 'a tacit agreement between the capitalists, the government and the police, to destroy the already robust labour organisation of our country'. The Radical revolution had no connection with labour unrest, but the working class, and the Confederation in particular, bore the brunt of the reprisals. The whole of the remainder of the Central Committee, including José M. Lemos, were arrested on 25 April during a clandestine meetin

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1. La Vanguardia apparently appeared but does not survive in any collection.
2. El Ferrocarril 15 Feb. 1905.
3. Fernando Quesada, 'La Protesta, una longeva voz libertaria', Todo es Histor No 82, March 1974, p.86.
4. El Ferrocarril 1 Mar. 1905.
5. El Ferrocarril 1/15 May 1905.

they were held a week and the April issue of El Ferrocarril, almost certainly containing material commemorating the First of May, was confiscated. The committee suspected treachery from within the union[1].

When in March 1905 the state of siege was extended, the Review of the River Plate explained the extension in this way;

> 'It is now generally known that the prolongation of the state of siege for a further period of sixty days was done not so much from political motives as to prevent a general strike on all the railways, docks, etc., which would have been declared a few days after the raising of the first period. Had this been brought about it would have played havoc with all the grain that is awaiting shipment at the stations and at the ports. By an extension of sixty days this difficulty will be overcome, and Congress will then be asked to modify the penal code in those parts relating to strikes. The professional agitator has become a greater curse to the country than the revolutionary politicians'.[2]

When the state of siege was lifted in May 1905, there was a natural caution before taking up the struggle anew, despite the provocative sacking of many members of the union by the FCS, including some officials.[3] Even so, the First of May had been marked by stoppages in the workshops of Junín and Bahía Blanca, regardless of the state of siege.[4] The Confederation had been hit hard by the persecutions under the state of siege, but it remained stronger than its rivals; however, the enthusiastic growth of the society had levelled off, and its founders were discovering the problems of involving the mass of membership in active and responsible tasks.[5] Some officials were not fulfilling their duties, and the National Council of 29 July 1905 urged renewed vigour, granting an amnesty for individuals and sections whose membership had lapsed during the

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1. Ibid.
2. RRP 10 Mar. 1905
3. El Ferrocarril 3 Aug. 1905.
4. La Vanguardia 13 May 1905.
5. El Ferrocarril 15 July 1905. The problem was compounded by the government's apparent readiness to use its repressive powers under the Residence Law.

disorganised months of repression.[1]

Outside the year 1905, the intrusion of Free Labour Associations - agencies which recruited groups of workers on behalf of employers' associations, rather than company unions - on the railways is not recorded. These groups had little success; they tended to appear where the railway met the port, for example on the Riachuelo, causing the men of the FCO at Liniers to strike for their removal.[2] This particular group was made up of Argentine citizens only, and the workers were warned not to be duped by the employers' attempts to arouse national rivalries and divide the working class.[3]

The temporary ascendancy of the Free Labour Associations among the port workers and stevedores, where they met with considerable success, was the cause of a strike of these sectors in Rosario in October 1905.[4] This triggered off a more generalised movement, including some railway groups. Yet again the government imposed a state of siege. The strike of railwaymen was perhaps tactically unsound, as La Vanguardia said:

> 'the stevedores' strike will succeed more easily with the railways running, for the accumulation of merchandise on the tracks is prejudicial to the railway companies and they will intervene on their own account to get the conflict solved'.[5]

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1. Not all groups were welcomed by the Confederation. A Banfield group that applied for membership had its request shelved (El Ferrocarril 3 Aug. 1905); however, a society of office employees of the Amalgamated Cos. was eagerly received (El Ferrocarril 15 Sept. 1905, 1 Oct. 1905; La Vanguardia 9 Sept. 1905).

2. RRP 23 June 1905.

3. El Ferrocarril 1 June 1905.

4. For further details of Free Labour Associations in this period, see Hobart Spalding La clase trabajadora argentina: documentos para su historia 1890-1912 (Buenos Aires, Galerna, 1970) pp. 354-362. The Catholic workers' organisations also did well in the ports until 1906 (ibid. pp.503-504).

5. La Vanguardia 3 Oct. 1905.

However, the Confederation expressed its solidarity with the railwaymen; as so often, the proper channels were ignored by the men and the union's approval came only after the event. Discontent was so widespread that the Confederation had had to issue a circular denying the rumours of a projected transport strike on 25 September.[1]

> 'The state of siege [declared in October] has been declared principally against our organisation, against the Confederation',

the periodical's bulletin announced.[2] However, this is by no means clear; the main movement took place among the port workers, and the adherence of railwaymen (including some footplatemen) came later, after much soliciting from the stevedores.[3] It is true however that the union's offices and officials were again harrassed by the police. Perhaps this had something to do with a strike called by FORA to protest against the state of siege and promoted among railwaymen by the anarchist Ferrocarrileros del Sud; the Confederation supported it for a token forty-eight hour demonstration, as did UGT, though they did not back it indefinitely as the anarchists desired.[4] The manifesto advising the return to work issued by the Committee on 13 November could not be printed; it came a month after the beginning of the state of siege, suggesting that the strike movement had had some effect.[5]

The 55-day strike at Talleres Banfield in 1906 is illustrative of two further developments in railway labour disputes. The first concerns solidarity; this strike was the first instance of workers from another railway company (the Amalgamated Companies) refusing to do maintenance work diverted from a striking workshop.[6] This sort of solidarity later became commonplace, and was an important counter to the close cooperation between railway managers, especially among the British companies.

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1. El Ferrocarril 1 Oct. 1905.
2. El Ferrocarril Boletín, December 1905.
3. El Ferrocarril 31 Jan. 1906.
4. Marotta op.cit. Vol I p.205.
5. El Ferrocarril Boletín, December 1905.
6. La Vanguardia 28 Feb. 1906.

The other matter concerns the involvement of PS parliamentarians in negotiations on behalf of the railwaymen; the use of the Socialist centre of Barracas al Norte for meetings by the men of Sola (FCS) in particular was already well-established. Socialists secured the release of three detainees on the strength of a powerful resolution passed at an election rally in the third city ward.[1] Five weeks into the strike, the men requested intervention by Justo, Palacios and Zaccagnini with the Minister of Public Works, Ingeniero Tedín, and his mediation was secured by the three PS representatives, though a few days later he broke his promises. This step was often to be repeated; meanwhile La Nación announced that the state should not permit such deals.[2] Socialist activity of a very different kind was apparent in the strike at the end of the year on the Central Córdoba Railway, where the Confederation was weak.[3] The local Socialists, however, established a strike committee, and even organised a general strike.[4] The Córdoba general strike lasted five days, and was halted by the police closure of the Socialist Centre.[5] The extent of PS involvement in the practical organisation of workers' defence and the general strike was exceptional, suggesting a level of militancy locally which is particularly interesting at a time when the party was riven with disputes over syndicalism.[6]

The progress made during 1906 was hesitant but should not be discounted on the grounds that most of the strikes were unsuccessful. The movements among construction workers show the diversification of union influences into this notoriously unorganised sector, at a very important stage in railway building. The staff of the permanent way and telegraph

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1. La Vanguardia 20 Feb. 1906
2. La Vanguardia 27 Mar. 1906; La Nación 28 Mar. 1906; El Ferrocarril 1 Apr.1906 The first PS deputy, Alfredo Palacios, was returned for La Boca in 1904.
3. El Ferrocarril 1 Mar. 1907; La Vanguardia 27 Nov. 1906.
4. La Vanguardia 13 Dec. 1906.
5. La Vanguardia 22 Dec. 1906.
6. See Chapter 5 p.208.

departments constituted 39% of the whole in 1905, and 27% in 1907.[1] The proportion of employees engaged in construction and maintenance out of the total railway labour force was never again so large; the men had sufficient consciousness to recognise their own strength, even if they could not succeed in harnessing it, and the Confederation scored a coup when the labourers decided to organise in that union.[2] Towards the end of the year, on the FCPSF, it was over-confidence rather than lack of organisation that defeated the strike. The men refused an offer of an 8% rise and gradual reinstatement of the strikers, insisting on pay for days lost through the strike, an attitude that was unrealistic even if the company's success with recruiting new staff had been very limited.[3] The movement became confused with the general strike in progress at the time, and the rail strike collapsed with the general strike in Santa Fe.[4]

The end of the strike, and the sacking of its leaders, signalled another bout of recriminations from the anarchists and from the Confederation, which was accused in La Protesta of causing the capitulation; the union responded by claiming that the anarchist daily suppressed evidence to the contrary.

Efforts at working class unity, 1907

The extent of the differences between the anarchists and the Confederation came to the fore in the events surrounding the 'national' general strike of January 1907. This strike was called by UGT and FORA together, in an attempt at rapprochement, in solidarity with the workers of Rosario; furthermore, the movement almost certainly became confused with the anarchist-inspired general strike in Santa Fe in support of the workers

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1. El Ferrocarril 1 July 1907; Estadística de FFCC en explotación 1907, Ministerio de Obras Públicas/Dirección de vías de comunicación, pp.218-221.
2. La Vanguardia 7 Oct. 1906.
3. La Vanguardia I8 Jan. 1907, 20 Jan. 1907, 24 Jan. 1907; La Protesta 24 Jan. 1907.
4. La Protesta 27 Jan. 1907, 8 Feb. 1907; El Ferrocarril 1 Feb. 1907.

of the FCPSF.[1] The general strike committee asked the Confederation to join the movement; the CC replied that a strike of the traffic department was pointless if it was confined to Buenos Aires, and that the sections would have to be consulted before taking any action.

The movement was neither very popular not very successful.[2] In the railwaymen's case, an assembly of 600 workers at Banfield on 24 January decided against supporting the strike, despite the efforts of the leaders of the Ferrocarrileros del Sud. The resolution is worth quoting at length. The workers resolved

'First: Not to support the general stoppage because we consider the reasons put forward do not justify a measure of this nature. The Rosario strike, while it deserves the sympathy of every worker, does not demand the support of the workers of Buenos Aires. If they declare a general strike, far from benefiting the cause of their comrades in Rosario, they will provoke extreme resolutions on the part of the government and the authorities. These will tend to suffocate the workers' movement through force and rigorous action.
Secondly: The general strike in Buenos Aires does not respond to the desires of the immense majority of workers, since this aspiration has not manifested itself collectively from the trades. Instead, the strike declaration is more the work of councils and committees which can in no way arrogate to themselves the right to interpret the sentiments and desires of working people, feelings which can only show themselves through the consciousness and will of each member of the working class.
'Thirdly: Considering furthermore that the lack of preparation and organisation among the workers is still a significant obstacle to these movements being carried through effectively, we do not believe that this 'revolutionary exercise' is appropriate, the more so when a general strike confined to Rosario could produce the results which the workers engaged in the dispute which began the present movement seek.
'Considering these brief points, we do not support the present general strike, without prejudice to our willingness to go on general strike if the circumstances and other events demand it.'[3]

This attitude in the Banfield section of the Confederation echoed that of the union's Central Committee and infuriated the anarchists. The anarchist leaders declared a strike unilaterally but were not followed by

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1. La Protesta 24 Jan. 1907; El Ferrocarril 1 Feb. 1907. The strike originated in a dispute between the municipality of Rosario and local cabbies and drivers over work permits and licences. For details see Sebastián Marotta, El movimiento sindical argentino (Buenos Aires, Lacio, 1960-1970) Vol I pp.253-255.

2. El Ferrocarril 1 Feb. 1907. Abad de Santillán's estimate (La FORA, Buenos Aires, Proyección, 2nd ed., 1971 p.150) that 150,000 workers struck, 80,000 from the federal capital, seems very high.

3. El Ferrocarril 1 Feb. 1907.

their members; very few stopped work at Banfield and none at Sola. By the time they came out, the Rosario troubles were on the point of solution.

> 'We are convinced that the general strike had no practical object. The events in Rosario served as a pretext for those who for a long time have struggled tenaciously and unsuccessfully to try and induce the workers to declare a general strike as a precious "revolutionary exercise".'[1]

The Confederation issued a strong declaration when its National Congress pledged its support for the Unity Congress of UGT and FORA of 1907,

> 'mandating its delegates to sustain the neutrality of the workers' organisation in political questions, thus banishing the practice of all political as well as antipolitical propaganda, and so placing the unions in the extraparliamentary sphere.'[2]

The failures of the Unity Congress (28-31 March) was a great blow to the Confederation, which sent two delegates;[3] it was also attended by delegates from the Ferrocarrileros del Sud and autonomous groups from Mendoza (where the Confederation's section, behind with its dues, had seceded), and Bahía Blanca.[4] The Confederation backed the proposals of the Socialist Jacinto Oddone,[5] defeated by the anarchist majority's insistence on the retention of the commitment to anarchocommunism which dated from 1905.[6] After the vote the Confederation's identification with the Socialist-syndicalist dominated UGT became still closer, and that body sought its adhesion only ten days after

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1. Ibid.
2. La Vanguardia 19 Feb. 1907 (resolution of National Congress of 16 Feb.1907).
3. With at least 15,000 members the Confederation was the largest of the 150 unions attending (see Chapter 7 p.251 and Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) p.159).
4. La Protesta 3 Apr. 1907.
5. For details see Jacinto Oddone Gremialismo proletario argentino (Buenos Aires, Líbera, 2nd ed. 1975) pp.279-287.
6. El Ferrocarril 1 Apr. 1907. The vote was close and only just over half the delegates took part. The Confederation said that many PS and syndicalist unions abstained because they had no mandate on political questions; this course was apparently suggested by Juan Cuomo of the shoe operatives.

the Congress. The matter went to the National Congress but the Confederation remained unaligned.[1]

Two momentous railway strikes, 1907-1908

The year 1907 was a turning point in railway organisation. Two vital movements took place. Their repercussions were first, the realisation that La Fraternidad was a combativeunion that could be extraordinarily effective in strikes. Secondly, the six month lock-out and strike of the Banfield and Sola workers destroyed the Confederation, leaving most railwaymen without effective union organisation for four years.

The movement of the footplatemen was the first national strike of any trade in Argentina. This fact is often obscured by reference to the inchoate anarchist-inspired outbreaks of 1901, 1902, 1904 and 1905, none of which was the national general strike they all claimed to be.[2] Admittedly, a strike of one solitary trade is less spectacular than the disorganised, chaotic movements mentioned above; but it caused a tremendous stir among capitalists and organised labour alike.

The agitation began on the Argentine Great Western Railway , by then about to complete its merger with the Pacific Company. At the same time, the workshop hands of Mendoza were striking for a wage increase, but these actions were not and should not be linked; the strike of the traction department overshadowed the dispute in the workshops, which dragged on for three months and met with no success in the end.[3]

The GOA's manager, Villalonga, refused to consider the footplatemen's claim for a promotion scale based on seniority, rather than the caprice and favouritism of the management. The men also sought wage increases of around 10%, and rationalisation of the pay scales.[4]

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1. La Vanguardia 18 Apr. 1907; El Ferrocarril 1 May 1907.
2. It is clear from a careful examination of all the standard accounts (Marotta, Oddone, Abad de Santillán) that the nature and scope of these strikes has often been exaggerated, notably in the manifestoes and statements of the protagonists themselves.
3. La Vanguardia 16 May 1907; Boletín, Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, No.3, 31 Dec. 1907.
4. RRP 24 May 1907; La Vanguardia 16 May 1907.

The strike began on 15 May,[1] and the railway companies immediately lobbied the Minister of Public Works, fearing the spread of the trouble. The Undersecretary to the Minister offered to arbitrate but the men refused, and the footplatemen of the Pacific, Southern, Buenos Aires Western and Amalgamated Companies announced that if no solution had been reached by 28 May, they too would join the movement.[2] Meanwhile, the Minister of the Interior, who could have forced the companies to capitulate on account of the interruption of services (a violation of the railway law), did nothing, preferring to suppress the findings of the newly-established National Labour Department (the Departamento Nacional de Trabajo, or DNT) because they were too favourable to La Fraternidad.[3]

The Confederation's support was whole-hearted, if vague and somewhat surprised. Nobody had expected much action from the footplatemen;

> 'it dissipates all fear that we might have harboured in the past as regards the healthy energies the locomotive men possess'.[4]

About 18,000 men were idle when the other companies' footplatemen joined the strike on the appointed day; about 3500-4000 of these were footplatemen, and the rest from traffic departments and locomotive sheds.[5] Trains that did run were staffed by inspectors or by incompetents, and the Confederation for bade its members to cooperate with these.[6]

Arbitration was imposed by the government on 2 June; the general strike had lasted five days. Government leniency characterised the settlement. There is some truth in the bitter analysis published in the Review of the River Plate:

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1. The union had promised to grant five days' grace when they submitted their demands on 14 May (La Vanguardia 17 May 1907).
2. RRP 24 May 1907; La Vanguardia 21 May 1907, 26 May 1907.
3. La Vanguardia 26 May 1907.
4. El Ferrocarril, Suplemento 28 May 1907; circular dated 26 May 1907.
5. RRP 24 May 1907.
6. El Ferrocarril, Suplemento 28 May 1907.

> 'The responsibility for the action no one wanted. [sic] The Minister for Public Works passed it on to the Minister of the Interior, and he in turn quickly got rid of it to the new Labour Office. That was the climax. From that moment the professional agitators grew bolder. The Labour Office with its record of achievements confined to interviews with the detective department and collection of statistics from charitable institutions of the City, is viewed with undisguised contempt by the labour organisations.' [1]

However, the settlement was the result of arbitration imposed on the men, fearful of the government's threats to move in military personnel, to strip the union of its legal status (a move instigated by the implacably hostile Mr Loveday), and to legislate to outlaw railway strikes.[2]

The deal, published on 6 June, was partly favourable to the workers, conceding improved wage scales (granting more than the men had asked for in some cases), recognising delegates from the sections as negotiators and promising not to effect reprisals. The company retained the right to promote in its own way, allowing for inequitable advancement and favouritism, and the wage rises did not cost the company much (there were about 350 footplatemen on the GOA, and their previous wages were lower than the norm).[3] However, the importance of the movement does not rest on its results, even if they were relatively impressive. The strike cost La Fraternidad $18,000, which tells a great deal about the financial strength of the union, and helped other labour organisations to recognise the importance of this aspect of organisation.[4] The strike increased the already exceptional coherence of the union. It opened its doors to the contract workers who had come out on strike with them and excused them the entry fee; it expelled all who had betrayed the strike, while warning against any irregularities or personal

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1. RRP 31 May 1907. The Director-General of the Railways, Ing.Schickendantz, felt obliged to renounce his honorary membership of La Fraternidad, and the union discontinued the election of honorary members from about this time (El Ferrocarril 14 June 1907; RRP 24 May 1907).

2. La Vanguardia 1 June 1907.

3. La Vanguardia 16 May 1907, 6 June 1907; El Ferrocarril 14 June 1907; RRP 7 June 1907.

4. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1907-1909 p.11. To recoup this loss, the CD asked for one day's wages from each member; they raised nearly $8,000 in this way (Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 1907, Circ. 9, 28 June 1907; La Vanguardia 10 Dec. 1910).

interests entering into this 'delicate and grave measure'.[1] La Fraternidad asserted its role as defender of its members' interests against those of capital for the first time, acquiring its 'citizenship rights' in the labour movement, as the Confederation put it on the older union's twentieth anniversary.[2] It steadily developed a reputation for responsible, restrained, but combative action.

The other conflict of 1907 was longer, bloodier and less successful for the working class. The FCS owned the port works of Ingeniero White. A strike of the hands employed in construction work, and company reprisals, led to a number of killings. The workshop hands of the FCS declared a 24-hour protest strike, which the company transformed into a lockout in Banfield and Sola.[3] The motive was apparently to starve out the leading militants; meanwhile,

> 'the manager is conspiring against the welfare of the country and its citizens in condemning 3,000 labourers to vagrancy'.[4]

After a month, the company decided to reopen the workshops, planning to dispense with 10% of the workforce (including, naturally, the 'agitators').[5] By this time, the men constructing grain elevators and steel moles at Ingeniero White had yielded, and were being reinstated gradually.[6] The workshop men declined to start work again, claiming that all or none must be reinstated and demanding pay for working days lost. Signs of unrest in other parts of the FCS' territory, like Quilmes, Tolosa and Bahía Blanca emerged as the company's intransigence became clear.[7]

The subscription lists were sent out and appeals made for financial help. The two-year-old Unión Ferrocarrilera del Uruguay assisted its Argentine comrades with $1,100 in gold pesos; La Fraternidad's CD voted $1,000

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1. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 1907, circulars 6 and 8, 10 June 1907 and 28 June 1907; also circular 14, 12 Oct. 1907.

2. El Ferrocarril 1 July 1907.

3. On the causes of the general strike called by FORA, see Marotta op.cit. Vol I p.256-257; Oddone Gremialismo (1975) pp.240-243; La Vanguardia 2 Aug.1907; William Rögind Historia del Ferrocarril Sud (Buenos Aires, 1937) p.379.

4. La Vanguardia 8 Aug.1907, 11 Aug.1907

5. La Vanguardia 22 Aug.1907; El Ferrocarril 1 Sept.1907.

6. RRP 16 Aug. 1907.

7. La Vanguardia 24 Aug.1907, 1 Sept. 1907.

from funds, and its members collected at least another $1,600 in subscriptions. La Vanguardia's subscription raised $3,810 by the end of November, by which time a total of over $20,000 had been collected. The Confederation's own section gave generously, as did other railway groups; about $800 was collected from Rosario members alone.[1]

The strike had support from much of the Argentine working class. Its importance rested not only on the particular demands of the workshop men but also on the extent of solidarity from the whole proletariat. The efforts to outlaw or constrain organised labour, through legislative coercion (the Residence Law) or 'constructive' regulation (like the 1904 moves for laws governing labour unions, or the 1907 projects for compulsory government arbitration) were running strongly in the country. Capitalist resistance (for instance the selection of personnel, blacklists and lock-outs) continued regardless, with assistance from government through the occasional provision of forces to keep order and safeguard property, and to harrass the workers a little. The FCS Banfield-Sola strike aroused such sympathy among the working class (even if material contributions were kept small by poverty, lack of organisation or internal strife in organisations) because it seemed to be a chance for the workers to succeed against the strength of capital which was so evident, with or without active government support. Furthermore, most unions had been severely affected by the ideological upheaval of 1905-1907, in particular the effects of the emergence of the syndicalist current. Meanwhile, the rail union was comparatively strong: it had a sense of financial underpinning, though it must be stressed that it was never explicit, from the footplatemen; the railway worker's job was specialised and difficult to farm out to other workshops, since most of the few possibilities had at least some union organisation; and solidarity

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1. El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1907, 1 Dec. 1907; La Vanguardia 11 Oct. 1907, 28 Nov. 1907.

within the movement was good, with both anarchists and Confederation members acting in concert (at this optimistic stage).

Thus the railwaymen had backing from other working class groups. Morale was good as the harvest grew closer and the condition of rolling stock and locomotives deteriorated.[1] Optimism continued despite (or perhaps because of) aggressive police activity.[2] The company lobbied for harsh treatment of the strikers, and the Socialist Deputy Palacios saw the City Chief of Police, Falcón, to deliver complaints; the Police Chief claimed not to have ordered violence and promised to release all detainees forthwith.[3] Two weeks later, however, on 9 October, the police stormed a strike meeting of workers from Sola, held as usual in the Socialist Centre in Barracas; of the 200 present, 34 of those not able to escape quickly enough were detained.[4] The next day the Strike Committee issued this statement;

> 'The police hordes, instruments of the capitalists, fell on our meeting rooms yesterday like wild beasts; they fulfilled their barbarous mission, obeying the designs of the railway company to whom they lend their services, and once more the mob has satisfied its brutish instincts on defenceless workers ... Yesterday's attack is merely the crowning of the infamous activity which the police bandits have carried out during the strike.'[5]

The offices were kept closed for ten days, and reopened after Palacios' insistence;[6] La Fraternidad's headquarters were also guarded against strikers by police.[7] Falcon told the PS representatives Mantecón and Giménez that he had declared war on the railwaymen, and Deputy Palacios' complaints to the Minister of the Interior were swept aside, despite the clear breach of the constitutional right of assembly.[8] It is possible that the hard line of the authorities was

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1. El Ferrocarril 1 Nov.1907, 1 Dec.1907; La Protesta 3 Oct. 1907; La Vanguardia 31 Aug. 1907, 12 Sept. 1907. Workers in the locomotive sheds assisted either by striking outright or refusing to do work outside their normal maintenance duties.
2. La Vanguardia 8 Sept. 1907
3. La Vanguardia 19 Sept. 1907, 21 Sept. 1907, 26 Sept. 1907.
4. El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1907.
5. Ibid.
6. La Vanguardia 18 Oct. 1907
7. La Vanguardia 10 Oct. 1907
8. La Vanguardia 11 Oct. 1907, 12 Oct. 1907

the result of an alleged plot, instigated by the combined railway managers headed yet again by Loveday, to provoke a strike of traffic and footplate employees and thereby force government intervention.[1] Whatever the facts in this case, it is undeniable that the Ministers of the Interior and of Public Works were much influenced by the representations of the English managers.

Time was not on the strikers' side and blacklegs had begun to be a problem, but the company was short of skilled labour.[2] In November a committee of Buenos Aires trade unionists was established to propagandise for the strikers and in particular against the free labour associations.[3] Some 350 men were working by the end of October but only a handful were skilled; two-fifths of the company's locomotives were out of use.[4] This caused concern in commercial circles, since there had been difficulty in moving the harvest quickly in recent years, and the crop prospects for 1907-1908 were exceptionally good.[5] The government tried to prove that there was enough rolling stock, but the matter was taken up in Congress for the railwaymen by Palacios.[6] He cross-questioned the Minister of Public Works on 18 December, but the Chamber of Deputies was profoundly indifferent to the question and the action was more symbolic than effective.[7] The

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1. El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1907; La Vanguardia 5 Oct. 1907. The alternative version is that Avellaneda, the new Minister of the Interior, asked Loveday to brief him and reassure him that a general rail strike was not imminent (RRP 4 Oct. 1907).

2. La Vanguardia 19 Oct. 1907. Apparently some workers were provided by an Italian society.

3. Many of the scabs lived in the conventillos, and it was hoped to influence them through the anarchists organising the tenants' strike (El Ferrocarril 1 Dec. 1907). For details of the tenants' strike see Spalding La clase trabajadora (1970) pp.449-496.

4. La Vanguardia 27 Oct. 1907, 1 Nov. 1907.

5. RRP 13 Dec. 1907. Locomotives which should not have been in use were allowed on the tracks by partial national inspectors.

6. La Vanguardia 10 Dec. 1907.

7. RRP 13 Dec. 1907.

likelihood of problems with the transportation of the harvest was ignored by the bourgeois press who throughout this movement took the part of the employers.[1]

With Palacios' attempt to draw Congress into the dispute, the working class made use of its parliamentary voice for the first time in an effort to influence the course of a strike. The significance of this was not lost on the PS, but its ineffectual result caused the trade union movement to give the matter little attention.

In the new year the police again occupied the Socialist Centre in Barracas, where daily meetings had been held (as in Banfield) throughout the dispute, except during the closure of 9-17 October.[2] Propaganda activity was redoubled against blacklegs and the committee worked hard to maintain morale. Impatience grew, however, as did desperation; on 17 January 1908, the day the strike committee finally yielded to the National Labour Department and sought their intervention, a bomb exploded in a train carrying blacklegs in Barracas.[3] It was never discovered who was responsible. The conflict was by now back in official hands. The DNT's secretary, Dr Alejandro Ruzo, gave the FCS forty-eight hours to explain its refusal to settle by arbitration; the company replied (late) that they had 1,400 workers already and no conflict existed.[4] They did not explain how they could manage without the usual 4,000 or more, and the strikers reaffirmed their faith in the strike committee, at a meeting authorised by Police Chief Falcón, who seemed to think the trouble was over.[5]

To all intents and purposes, it was; men began to return to work on 28 January, and after nearly six months the movement was called off. The DNT claimed it could not impose arbitration if the company denied the

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1. La Vanguardia 5 Dec. 1907; El Ferrocarril 1 Dec. 1907 says La Nación published details on rolling stock available that were false.
2. La Vanguardia 4 Dec. 1907, 8 Jan. 1908; RRP 10 Jan. 1908.
3. La Vanguardia 18 Jan. 1908. The DNT first offered the men arbitration on 23 December (Boletín, DNT, 31 Mar. 1908, p.76).
4. La Vanguardia 19 Jan. 1908; Boletín, DNT, 31 Mar. 1908, p.76.
5. La Vanguardia 25 Jan. 1908.

existence of a dispute, and the FCS reinstated only 900 of the 1,600 who presented themselves for work.[1]

The defeat of the workers of Sola and Banfield was massive. To its credit, the Confederation published the views of Luis Grüner, a Socialist employed in the DNT. His account, despite its anti-anarchist flavour, provides quite a balanced view and is worth quoting at length.

'The railwaymen of the Southern sustained a prolonged and stoical resistance with great courage and bravery; but in the midst of their misfortune they did not encounter the help they needed. The country's working class, overwhelmed by an almost total lack of organisation, could not furnish the solidarity required by the imperious needs of our comrades in exploitation. The feeble aid they received, altruistic in the highest sense, fell far short of the large amount hoped for, to fortify homes which were bereft of everything. The systematic persecution of the police authorities which organised outrages, attacks, taunts and a string of cynical abuses which occurred each day, fulfilled a fundamental role against the resistance of the proletariat. The pre-eminence of the capitalists, the intrigues of the entrepreneurs who put into practice all imaginable sophistry, unleashed a storm which could hardly be calmed, sweeping up in a cyclone of hatred and revenge all the most basic rights of man. On top of such infamy we must add the stupid and cretinous activity of part of the anarchist element, with the newspaper La Protesta at its head; these were the prime detractors of themovement without even recalling, in their shame, that they with their clamorous propaganda suggested the railwaymen should strike in the first place, in support of a general strike which, if it was just, did not embody any practical and beneficial end for the working class.'[2]

The strike cost the working class $40,000 in contributions to the strikers. Some groups were critical that a general rail strike had not been called, but three visits from the strike committee to the workshops of Ingeniero White, where the trouble started, elicited no promise of support for such a movement.[3]

The Banfield-Sola strike was the start of the Confederation's decline. El Ferrocarril ceased publication with the June 1908 number. The sections began to dissolve. The office furniture of the Bahía Blanca section was deposited with the local Socialist Centre.[4] In August, the remains of the

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1. DNT Boletín 31 Mar. 1908 p.84. Ironically, most of the rest- including those rejected as 'disruptive elements'- found work quickly at the newly-established workshops of the French Compañía General de Buenos Aires, where they continued active, to judge by the later militancy of thatcompany's workers (El Ferrocarril 1 June 1908).

2. El Ferrocarril 1 Feb. 1908.

3. Ibid.

4. La Vanguardia 30 June 1908.

Confederation moved to the Socialist Centre in Barracas where such enthusiastic strike meetings had once been held. The attempts to organise the Compañía General proceeded haltingly, with the provisional secretary being sacked, and the company showing signs of taking a hard line with the workshop hands.[1]

By the end of 1908 10,000 new labourers had been taken on for further construction by the FCO, FCS and Buenos Aires and Rosario Railway.[2] Even so, the Great Southern

> 'is effecting economies with its workforce, reducing the number of workers employed in the workshops, dictating onerous work obligations, increasing the hours of service and imposing all sorts of regulations which turn the employee into the slave of this capitalist force.'

The men appeared apathetic; the Ferrocarrileros del Oeste called a meeting to dissolve the union because of the lack of interest and funds.[3]

The Compañía General continued with its persecution of union activists; they even sacked a member of La Fraternidad, J.M.Bazán, who complained with union support to the Minister of Public Works and the Director of Railways about the company's regulation forbidding all 'collective claims'.[4] At this time a number of leading railway managers were associated with a body called Unión Protectora del Trabajo Libre, but there is no other evidence that any free labour association was strong on the railways.[5] The Central Argentine Railway pursued labour activists through the Residence Law wherever it could, and frequently 'transferred' other leaders to remote parts of the network; this last tended to spread ideas rather than destroying them.[6]

The footplatemen's new militancy: La Fraternidad 1910-1912

In 1910 isolated strikes and protests grew more frequent and concerted. Matters came to a head in the French company of Santa Fe, but there were signs

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1. La Vanguardia 29 July 1908, 3 Dec. 1908
2. La Vanguardia 20 Dec. 1908.
3. La Vanguardia 24 Feb. 1909.
4. La Fraternidad 1 Sept. 1909; La Vanguardia 5 Sept. 1909
5. La Vanguardia 19 Aug. 1909.
6. La Vanguardia 2 Nov. 1909

of reawakened activity elsewhere; in April 1910, a paper called Hacia la Luz appeared, from the former headquarters of the Ferrocarrileros del Oeste, addressing itself to the need to organise railwaymen on the FCO, FCS and FCP.[1]

The trouble in Santa Fe concerned abuses of the railway regulation on hours of service, and the company's insistence on a contract for footplatemen which obliged them to renounce La Fraternidad. Such contracts had been declared illegal by the DNT in 1907, and since 1909 the government had been dealing with La Fraternidad as recognised representatives of the engine drivers and firemen.[2] Five FCPSF men were sacked, four of whom had served the company for over fifteen years and the fifth for thirteen and a half years.[3] La Fraternidad held several meetings with the Minister of the Interior, Gómez, and the Director of Railways, and called an extraordinary assembly of delegates for 29 and 30 November. The assembly decided that a strike on the FCPSF should begin on 8 December, and resolved to extend the stoppage to all railways on 12 December if the company did not yield.[4] La Fraternidad met the company, but without success; the local manager, M.Algrin, was condemned by Gómez for his intransigence, and even the Santa Fe police were less than assiduous in their surveillance for the company.[5]

At the last moment, Gómez forced the company to withdraw its disciplinary circular and to reinstate four of the five men.[6] The view of other railway managers on this deal was expressed in the Review of the River Plat

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1. La Confederación 15 Mar. 1910.
2. La Vanguardia 6 Nov. 1910; see Chapter 6p.235.
3. La Fraternidad 1 Oct. 1910; RRP 18 Nov. 1910.
4. RRP 2 Dec. 1910; La Fraternidad 1 Dec. 1910; Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1910 p.6.
5. La Vanguardia 30 Nov. 1910, 7 Dec. 1910. Algrin had recently arrived from Algeria, which was adduced by the union as a reason for his tough line.
6. The fifth, Antonio Estevez, was to be employed on exactly the same terms in Santa Fe by another company (probably the State Railways) receiving different treatment since he had actually contracted with the FCPSF not to join the union (La Vanguardia 9 Dec. 1910; La Fraternidad Suplemento 10 Dec.1910)

> 'although they are pleased that no strike took place, yet on the other hand they do not look with pleasure on the action the government adopted; they consider it to be the thin end of the wedge of the Government interfering in the internal administration. Although they consider that the circular was not a proper one to have been issued, and one which was bound to have caused friction between the employees and the company, yet even so they do not think that the Government had the right to act as they did. It is doubtful if the Government would have intervened at all in the matter if the French Company had shown a little more toleration towards its men. The company's action, however, placed very vital interests of the country at stake, and for the general good it was necessary for Government to act as they did.'[1]

The employers were right; La Fraternidad was justifiably proud of its success and put pressure on the government to speed up work on the projected general railway regulation.

Early in 1911 trouble began on the FCP where the railway regulation was also being abused.[2] La Fraternidad promptly took up the matter of interpretation with the DG FFCC. The men of the old GOA, now merged with the FCP, worked to rule, and the company demoted, suspended or sacked the offenders; by late February some 100 men had been dismissed.[3] The Minister of the Interior finally decided in the men's favour, and the diagrams (work schedules) sought by the unions were to be introduced on 15 March.[4]

The situation worsened as the year progressed. The details of the negotiations between government and union have been set out elsewhere,[5] and the strike which began at midnight on 5 January 1912 had long been awaited. A detailed account of the strike has surprisingly not been written (except by La Fraternidad's hagiographers), for it was the longest and most comprehensive national movement yet seen in Argentina.

When the representatives of La Fraternidad presented their negotiating paper to the Heads of the Traction departments of each railway on 15 November

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1. RRP 16 Dec. 1910.
2. La Vanguardia 31 Jan. 1911.
3. La Vanguardia 18 Feb. 1911, 19 Feb. 1911, 21 Feb. 1911.
4. La Vanguardia 28 Feb. 1911. The question of pay for wages lost by men sacked or demoted remained; the government wanted to impose arbitration, but the FCP resisted this successfully (La Vanguardia 3 Mar. 1911, 24 Mar. 1911, 26 Mar. 1911).
5. See Chapter 6 pp.235-239

1911, the companies wanted to deal collectively with the union; they were anxious to avoid disagreements in their own ranks by acting together, and by involving the government, which in their eyes had 'hitherto adopted an impartial attitude in dealing with labour disputes of this character'.[1] On 1 December the companies issued a joint statement rejecting the union's claims abruptly; this was the date originally fixed for the strike to begin, but instead the matter was submitted again to the sections.[2]

By 16 December, La Fraternidad had heard from all its sections that they would strike if no settlement resulted from the negotiating committee's conferences with the employers and with government.[3] Rumours from Santa Fe and Córdoba that the footplatemen were already striking turned out to be false;[4] other sections criticised the slow progress of the talks, urging the CD to speed up the settlement, suggesting that some groups were less anxious to strike.[5] La Prensa went so far as to suggest that the CD was pressing the reluctant negotiating delegation into unwelcome militant action. Given the character of the CD, this seems improbable, and there is no internal evidence of a power struggle. However, the CD went into permanent session on 18 November 1911, and the minutes kept were fragmentary, so the possibility of dissention of this sort cannot be utterly ruled out.[6]

Some evidence of disagreement within the company camp would be expected, but the evidence for it is lacking. In any case, such disagreement was likely to be about concrete offers, rather than the methods or principles of the negotiation. The case of the union was different, however. There were some sections who were dissatisfied with the conduct of negotiations. The rumours of localised stoppages were almost certainly based on a more militant attitude among members in Córdoba and Santa Fe, bearing in mind

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1. Statist 6 Jan. 1912.
2. Marcelino Buyán, Una avanzada obrera (Buenos Aires, 1933) p.86.
3. La Prensa 16 Dec. 1911.
4. La Prensa 18 Dec. 1911.
5. La Prensa 25 Dec. 1911.
6. La Prensa 29 Dec. 1911; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 1911-1912, 18 Nov. 1911.

the narrowly-averted strike on the French railway the year before. The section of La Banda (Santiago del Estero) resolved to start strike action if the railway managers presented a united front in the negotiations;[1] they did not carry out this threat, although there was as usual a good deal of collusion among the employers- not something that came under much attack from the union.

La Fraternidad was at least united in its claims, for a national pay and promotion scale (based on seniority alone), and a new government regulation of the hours and conditions of railway working. During the first week of January 1912, the peacemaking devices of both sides were exhausted. On the second day of 1912 the Minister of the Interior proposed arbitration; La Fraternidad refused, saying that

> 'The CD maintains that the attitude of the trade is a natural consequence of that assumed by the companies, who have mistakenly interpreted the conciliatory acts which the representatives of the workforce have continued to make. It is our duty to declare, Mr.Minister, that the CD is the first to regret the events that have been provoked, especially when one considers the good will with which the trade as a whole has from the start accepted official mediation to resolve this conflict by means of conciliation.'[2]

A manifesto giving the union's reasons for resorting to the strike was circulated nationally a few days before it began, and central and local strike committees were activated. The strike began at midnight on 5/6 January, except that all trains in transit were taken to their destination. The strikers were to maintain order and to avoid creating tension between them and the troops and extra police which the Government would make available; they should ignore rumours and unauthorised circulars (of which there was a fine crop) as the work of enemies, and resist any threatening behaviour towards strike breakers and be sure not to cause wilful damage to any trains that were run.[3] The company historian of the FCS whose attitude to strikers

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1. La Prensa 18 Dec. 1911.
2. Quoted in Buyán op.cit. p.91.
3. La Vanguardia 5 Jan. 1912. La Fraternidad was rightly afraid of provoking the use of the reactionary legislation at the government's disposal (Report of La Fraternidad's strike committee in Documentos Huelga p.1).

was generally very hostile, wrote approvingly of the men's conduct:

> 'The strikers did not for one moment cease to observe perfect order in the conflict, the presence of armed forces proving unnecessary, since the men fortunately displayed praiseworthy cultivation and restraint'.[1]

There were isolated allegations of resolutions demanding sabotage from Santa Fe, bomb incidents and damage to property, but the overall picture is of the utmost restraint.[2]

Estimates of the numbers who struck from 6 January vary, but it seems from union sources (which were widely accepted in the press) that 10,000 to 11,000 men stopped work, about 8,000-8,500 being firemen and drivers and the rest engine cleaners, other maintenance men and provisional firemen.[3] It was noted that 80% of the strikers were Argentine nationals; thus a much higher proportion of footplatemen were natives than of the working class as a whole.[4]

On 8 January the government suspended the regulations governing examination and qualification of drivers, and ordered the companies to give first priority to the transportation of agricultural goods and machinery.

> 'The freedom thus acquired by the companies enabled them to obtain drivers of sufficient competence in numbers that permitted a continuous increase, day by day, of the passenger trains, and the partial resumption of the goods service. Experienced drivers have come from Chile and from the Oriental Republic, and many men in this country, formerly drivers, who had retired on pensions, or had engaged in other work, resumed their former employment, all being attracted by the very liberal remuneration offered by the companies.'[5]

The competence of the blacklegs was in doubt; La Fraternidad's strike committee described the government's action as 'an attack on public safety'.[6] A week later they claimed that

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1. William Rögind Historia del Ferrocarril Sud (Buenos Aires, 1937) p.490.
2. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga dated 19 Jan.1912.
3. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga; La Vanguardia 7 Jan. 1912, Caras y Caretas 13 Jan. 1912. All these outside groups were of workers who aspired to a career on the footplate.
4. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912. See also Chapter 1 pp.17-18.
5. Economist 24 Feb. 1912; report dated 25 Jan. 1912.
6. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912; strike committee circular of 8 January 1912.

> 'the scabs who are driving constitute a public peril. These services benefit our cause rather than damaging it, since as we say they merely wreck the rolling stock.'[1]

The government attitude was blatantly partial, since the Minister of Public Works, Dr Ezequiel Ramos Mexía, railway lawyer and well-known supporter of foreign investors in Argentina, had succeeded in dominating his more hesitant Cabinet colleagues, notably Dr Gómez of the Interior Ministry.[2] Ramos Mexía caused protests from papers as established as La Prensa and La Razon when he referred to the strikers as 'pirates'; La Tribuna claimed that

> 'Sr Ramos, with the strange prehistoric theories that he professes, constitutes a national danger'.[3]

It was Ramos Mexía who persuaded the Cabinet meeting of 23 January to give the railway companies till 15 February to resume their legal obligations to furnish a service - a total of 38 days' grace;

> 'The government puts the interests of a handful of foreign shareholders above the general interest and the safety of travellers'.[4]

As La Vanguardia pointed out, it was puzzling that the companies needed a month to normalise the services if, as they claimed, they had succeeded in acquiring 60% of the staff they needed in only twelve days.[5] The speed with which strike-breaking began to occur is hard to ascertain. The press agreed that night services were virtually impossible to run until the very end of the strike. By 12 January, the companies had 363 engine hands at work; four days later the total was 1131; La Fraternidad maintained that these figures referred only to engine drivers, in which case the companies had almost a quarter of the staff they required only ten days

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1. Ibid. strike committee circular of 14 Jan.1912.
2. La Vanguardia 8 Feb. 1912; RRP 26 Jan.1912.
3. Quoted in Buyán op.cit. p.106.
4. La Prensa 24 Jan. 1912; La Vanguardia 25 Jan. 1912.
5. La Vanguardia 20 Jan. 1912.

after the strike began.[1]

It seems that the early threats and decrees had little effect on the number of strikers; the decree of 8 January set a deadline of 12 January for the return, and it was repeated in company circulars in almost every locality. Indeed, picnics were held by Fraternidad sections throughout the country to celebrate the expiry of this ultimatum.[2] The lure of high wages coupled with the fear that the companies might recruit enough scabs to enable them to dispense with former employees had not yet weakened the movement. The FCO offered $25 a day to drivers, while the FCP was prepared to pay $50 a day to drivers and $25 to firemen.[3]

The union tried hard to ensure that foreign contract workers, mostly British, were persuaded to support the movement; it is hard to measure their success. While the Review of the River Plate commended

> 'the wisdom of the management in having a goodly number of British engine-men as a stand-by for emergencies',[4]

claiming that they were maintaining the service of the FCCA, the men issued manifestoes (in Spanish and English) praising the solidarity shown by the contract drivers in the tradition of British organised labour.[5] The companies chartered a fast ship to carry strike-breakers recruited in Europe.[6]

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1. RRP 19 Jan. 1912; Fraternidad Documentos Huelga. Sectional records are isolated. Victoria, a suburban section of FCCA, recorded that 108 out of 139 footplatemen struck (almost three-quarters) for the duration of the strike; of the 31 strike-breakers, only 12 had belonged to La Fraternidad. Victoria was probably a typical or better-than-average section; at Güemes/ Resistencia, a remote and scattered section in the north-west where support for the strike was notably bad, 47 Fraternidad members worked during the strike. There is no record of how many footplatemen or union members were covered by this section, but it was unlikely to be more than 100; so at least half of the men here broke the strike (Fraternidad Documentos Huelga; Report of Strike Committee p.3; Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.306).

2. Caras y Caretas 13 Jan. 1912, 20 Jan. 1912 (photos); Buyan op.cit. p.102.

3. La Vanguardia 7 Jan. 1912. La Fraternidad's claim, which the companies refused to entertain, was for a maximum wage of $300 a month, or less than $12 a day. Wages for scabs declined as the strike wore on.

4. RRP 12 Jan. 1912.

5. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912 dated 8 Feb. 1912, 22 Feb. 1912.

6. Caras y Caretas 13 Jan. 1912.

La Fraternidad responded by writing to its counterparts throughout the world urging them to express their solidarity with the Argentine union and to discourage their drivers from accepting blackleg contracts; a driver from the FCS on leave in England said that the appeals had met with success there.[1] Antonio de Tomaso, for the PS, sent a telegram to the Uruguayan PS leader Dr Emilio Frugoni asking him to publicise the need to avoid yielding to the companies' enticements.[2] The union in San Juan issued a manifesto maintaining that the recruits from Europe and from neighbouring countries would have nothing to do with the work once they discovered what it involved.[3] The companies claimed, as has been mentioned, that men from Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay were working; La Fraternidad asserted that very few had come, and added that it was an absurdity for the companies to seek workers from these countries so short of technical expertise.[4]

Reporting on the efficacy of the stoppage was biassed for propaganda purposes on both sides. The Government decree of 23 January (establishing that full services had to be resumed by 15 February) maintained that the companies had, on average, 70% of the staff they needed.[5] However, the DG FFCC's information came from the companies, who put out details of provisional services in the most favourable possible light, which La Fraternidad refuted in manifestoes and statements. The managers began recruiting scabs from their own workshops in November 1911 through leaflets which emphasised betrayal by the footplatemen in past strikes. An example put out on the FCP read like this:

> 'Workers, we must take revenge and replace them if a strike occurs; thus they will reflect, realise that they are workers too, and join us, so that united we may gain collective improvements'.[6]

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1. La Vanguardia 8 Feb. 1912; Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912 27 Jan.1912
2. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912.
3. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912 dated 22 Jan. 1912
4. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga; Boletin (no date, but post-strike). They added that the total number of experienced footplatemen from these three countries could only make an insignificant impression on the needs of Argentina.
5. Economist 24 Feb. 1912; report dated 25 Jan. 1912.
6. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912, dated November 1911.

This attitude was not supported by genuine workers' publications, such as the bulletin issued by the elusive Hacia la Luz group on the occasion of this strike. Referring to the Banfield-Sola strike of 1907-1908, the group asserted that

> 'if in that movement there was inconsistency and a lack of solidarity from those who today are struggling so courageously, is it for us to perpetuate the error?'[1]

The syndicalists thus were prepared to abandon their former hostility to the union for the sake of railwaymen in general. In February 1912 the companies tried to create a reaction against the union, urging the men to free themselves from the tyranny of the parasites leading La Fraternidad, so that they too would suffer hardship instead of living off the subscriptions of the genuine workers.[2]

Aside from this propaganda, the strikers contended with the closure of sectional offices (including those as important as Rosario, San Martín, Tucumán and Ingeniero White), detention of activists, and threats about security of tenure in tied housing;[3] the companies tried everything to demoralise the men and obtain strike-breakers. They succeeded in acquiring men who damaged the locomotives; La Vanguardia published a running total of engines out of action, showing that the FCS, FCCN (State Railways), FCO and FCP suffered heaviest in this respect.[4] Furthermore, accidents did take place as La Fraternidad had warned. A major incident occurred right at the end of the strike in Constitución station, the Buenos Aires terminal of the FCS, injuring many but killing none; it was described as

> 'a bloody catastrophe in honour of the Minister of Public Works'.[5]

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1. Boletín de 'Hacia la Luz' in Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912, no date but before 18 Jan. 1912.
2. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912, dated 10 Feb. 1912.
3. La Vanguardia 27 Jan. 1912; Report of Fraternidad Strike Committee pp.2 and 4; on housing Buyán op.cit. p.93, La Vanguardia 1 Feb. 1912.
4. La Vanguardia 28 Jan. 1912.
5. Caras y Caretas 3 March 1912.

The company tried to conceal the scale of the accident (as in other cases), but it is obvious that there had been incompetence and that standards were lax. The culprit was one instance of a driver who had arrived from abroad to take advantage of the wages offered to strike-breakers.[1]

In February the situation became more acute; the harvest, which had been about two weeks late, was now ready for transportation. The government's failure to secure a swift resumption of services angered commercial interests. From the point of view of the population in general, the lack of transport had caused food scarcity and price rises, but the extent and distribution of these problems is not clear. The Corn Exchange suspended transactions, insisting on fulfilment of contracts. The Central Produce Market was operating at 10% of its usual turnover.[2] The Rosario Chamber of Commerce petitioned the National Chamber of Deputies, where the government line was under attack, denying the companies' allegations that services were normal and offering the mediation of their President in the dispute.[3] La Fraternidad agreed, but negotiations foundered on the refusal of the railway representatives to consider the claim for wholesale reinstatement of the strikers. On 13 February a delegation from the union saw President Sáenz Peña:

> 'No other solution to the strike had occurred to the President of the Republic than to advise the footplatemen to submit resignedly to the impositions of the companies, and to return to work higgledy-piggledy, "in numbers sufficient to cover existing vacancies"'.[4]

Commercial interests in the capital saw that goods services were being sacrificed to passenger services to convince the public that conditions were normal, and a demonstration planned for 4 February was forbidden by police.[5] Even the public became so angry at the poor service between the

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1. The train was driven by William Bowles, a worker from South Africa, who had arrived in Argentina since the start of the strike. He may or may not have had an Argentine driver's licence; he had either ten months or 8 years experience (Caras y Caretas 3 Mar. 1912; Economist 30 Mar. 1912 (report dated 27 Feb. 1912)).

2. La Vanguardia 9 Feb. 1912, 11 Feb. 1912.

3. Buyán op.cit., pp.138-141 on Dep.Agote's interpellation of Minister of the Interior; Report of Fraternidad strike committee pp.5 and 8; La Vanguardia 11 Feb. 1912.

4. La Vanguardia 14 Feb. 1912.

5. La Vanguardia 2 Feb. 1912.

capital and La Plata (FCS) that they broke train windows and slashed seats.[1] Commercial associations from all over the country protested to the Ministers of the Interior and Public Works.[2] The Commercial Defence League of Buenos Aires complained to the President and on 26 February the League's spokesman, Dr Quirno Costa, led a union delegation to see Sáenz Peña. A settlement was finally reached on the basis of a gradual reinstatement of strikers, guaranteed by the President and reinforced by a thorough inspection and review of the footplatemen currently employed by officials of the DG FFCC. Discussion of the problems which had given rise to the strike, and a decree on working regulation were promised.

The men had gained the right to their jobs back without victimisation, but the question of the pay scale and the regulation remained unsettled. Moreover, the jobs were not immediately available, and the companies avoided reinstating officials of the union where possible, even though the agreement was that this delicate operation was to be conducted strictly on the basis of seniority and hardship.[3] The examination of existing staff was obstructed by the companies and almost certainly not impartial. In these circumstances the settlement was not much of a victory, moral or actual, despite the judgements of sympathetic groups and the press.[4]

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1. La Vanguardia 3 Feb. 1912. One train from Buenos Aires to La Plata during the strike took 5½ hours instead of the usual 1 hour (La Confederación 15 Jan. 1912).

2. La Vanguardia 24 Feb. 1912; groups protested from Rosario, Tucumán, Córdoba, Jujuy, Leones, Paraná, San Nicolás, Salta, Mendoza, BellVille, Corrientes, Río Cuarto, Junín, La Rioja.

3. On 15 February the footplatemen produced a proposal which advocated the reinstatement of all footplatemen on short time, until full examination of the blackleg staff had weeded out incompetents, and workers from other departments could be restored to their former jobs. They calculated that a 28-day month would accommodate all eligible personnel until natural wastage brought the situation back to normal. The scheme was rejected out of hand (La Vanguardia 16 Feb. 1912).

4. See Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912 for letters of congratulation from students, freemasons, etc; La Vanguardia 28 Feb. 1912.

The union itself was in danger; $150,000 had been spent from funds, and a further $350,000 had to be borrowed. Paid-up membership of about 7,000 plummeted to only 200 by March 1912.[1] The strike committee later acknowledged the desperate need to reach an end to the conflict.

'Fatigue and despondency began to show themselves in a disquieting fashion. Entire sections demanded an end to the situation. With every day that passed, the likelihood of maintaining unity grew more remote. Defections, isolated at first and then in groups, demonstrated that resistance would be possible only for a limited time. Requests for funds increased and it was impossible to satisfy the claims fully, as the common fund was very depleted.

'Other trades were silent after the first declarations, and remained mere spectators; the bosses took blacklegs from the workshops continually. Having forgotten their fear of reprisals they accepted the unworthy role, spurred on by ambition and huge wages. A disastrous service made the situation daily more critical. After the first popular manifestations of protest these were unfortunately not repeated. The pleas of our propagandists found no echo; public action, so necessary, lacked nerve. It was impossible to let things go on. Every moment brought the strike committee distressing reports. The end had been reached, and with resources exhausted we proceeded in the likelihood that sections would have dispersed, which would have been the beginning of the end, the irremediable defeat.' [2]

The predicament of the union at the end emphasises its isolation, a feature of the movement which deserves some attention. Sympathy and moral support were all La Fraternidad received from other working class organisations and parties; since both union and men were one of the most well-off sectors of Argentine labour, financial backing could not perhaps have been expected.[3] The Socialist party was perhaps the most loyal ally, exemplified in the statement of the party's executive on 11 January. It praised the intelligent conduct of the strike, saying that it demonstrated the futility of the government's repressive legislation. The decree of 8 January was another instance of attempts to change a social process with profound historical causes by means of repression.

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1. Buyán op.cit. p.173.

2. Report of La Fraternidad Strike Committee p.5.

3. La Vanguardia 21 Jan. 1912; a driver claimed that 90% of men could support themselves for 6 months, and La Fraternidad could look after the rest. La Vanguardia 4 Feb. 1912 tells of 150 drivers with real estate worth $1.8 million, prepared to let Fraternidad's CD use it to raise more money rather than capitulate. So some at least were not poor.

> 'This decree is not only an act of servility towards foreign capital, not only a betrayal of the country - whose inhabitants and possessions may suffer from the manifest incapacity of staff recruited quite unscrupulously - but it also involves a hostility towards the workers which merits the most forceful condemnation. The persistance of workers' movements, despite states of siege, residence law and social defence law, despite the obstacles in the way of the exercise of fundamental civil liberties - has not taught our rulers anything.' [1]

The party put La Vanguardia at the union's disposal, and the paper provided important information to balance the capitalist propaganda. Other Socialist Centres added their votes in support of the movement, including the women's section.[2]

Union involvement was slight. The month of January also witnessed an important strike of port workers in Buenos Aires, a movement quite independent of the footplatemen, whose eventual defeat came about as a result of internal divisions in the organisation.[3] The desirability of cooperating in some way with the footplatemen at harvest time would seem obvious, but the machinery did not exist. The Sociedad de Resistencia Obreros del Puerto de la Capital (one of the port workers' unions) warned La Fraternidad of a notorious blackleg; the Centro de Maquinistas Navales (part of FOM, the Maritime Workers' Federation) expelled another, who had broken the footplatemen's strike, from their midst; the carters ordered a boycott of a restaura teur in Barracas al Norte because he supplied the railway company (probably the FCS or the Compañía General) with food for the blacklegs. This was the extent of union assistance; notes of encouragement came also from the turners, boilermakers and foundry men of Junín and a tailors' society in the capital.[4]

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1. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912 dated 11 Jan.1912; shortened version La Vanguardia 12 Jan. 1912.

2. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga 1912; La Vanguardia 16 Jan. 1912, 18 Jan. 1912, 19 Jan. 1912, 1 Feb. 1912.

3. La Vanguardia 1 Feb. 1912.

4. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga dated 9 Jan. 1912, 15 Jan. 1912, 12 Feb. 1912; 8 Mar. 1912; La Vanguardia 16 Jan. 1912.

The most telling lack of support was, of course, from among the railwaymen, although the publication of Hacia la Luz already mentioned was not alone in exhorting railwaymen of other trades not to hinder the footplatemen. The strikers of the Fraternidad section of Bolívar/25 de Mayo (on the FCS) went as far as to urge their union to cooperate with the federations CORA and FORA, and to form a mass trade union with the principles of the class struggle to guide it. These resolutions were undoubtedly very left-wing in terms of La Fraternidad, but they presaged the future difficulties of labour organisation on the railways.[1]

Conclusion

The contrast between the claims of La Fraternidad in 1912 and the modest pretensions of the union twenty years earlier reflect in one small sphere the growth in strength and standing of the organised working class. It is true to say that the struggles of the footplatemen concerned the rights and obligations of the trade in law; La Fraternidad did not, unlike the bulk of Argentine unions at this time, explicitly assert union power as an extra-legal social and economic force. However, there is a great difference between their attempts in the 1890s to modify drivers' liability in accidents and the battle to construct a national working regulation and pay norms on the union's own terms. The demands in 1907 and 1912 for promotion on the basis of seniority alone demonstrate La Fraternidad's eagerness to arrogate to itself a crucial management function.[2]

General railway organisation also made advances, though these were more halting and before 1912 remained impermanent. The status of the

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1. Fraternidad Documentos Huelga: 'A los compañeros - necesidad del momento'.

2. Trade unions prefer wage and promotion structures based on seniority rather than on merit, partly because these tend to eliminate the arbitrary personal element from promotions, and partly because they allow the union some part in job regulation; unions of skilled workers gain much more from the latter than general unions. On the second point, see H.A.Turner Trade union growth, structure and policy (London, Allen & Unwin, 1962) pp. 111-112, 262; Richard Hyman The Workers' Union (London, OUP, 1971) p.202 and pp.174-181.

Confederation as the largest union in Argentina cannot be denied on the grounds that it eventually collapsed. Moreover, it was successful outside either FORA or UGT; this puts a different perspective on the rivalry between the two federations, which has tended to monopolise the attention of their historians to the exclusion of developments in autonomous unions. Despite its setbacks and ultimate failure, the Confederation was notineffective as a resistance society. Many disputes occurred over the workers' attempts to defend themselves against reverses, although some were undertaken as part of efforts to make advances. For instance, the hours of work demanded of railwaymen in the workshops department were reduced by the constant agitation which began in 1896, assisted by a national trend towards shorter working hours which was largely inspired by labour organisation.[1] The 1896 strike lasted four months, while that of 1907-1908 on the FCS (which broke the Confederation) lasted almost six months. Lengthy strikes were common in all trades;[2] of those on the railways, only that of 1906 on the FCS can be regarded as successful. Often these long strikes were held to be continuing only because the original strikers had been replaced by blacklegs; production or services may have been resumed quite quickly.[3] The importance of blacklegs depended on the level of skill of the strikers, many of whom were not easily replaced, especially as the railway workshops became as locally self-sufficient as the traction and traffic departments and imports of railway machinery declined. Moreover, a sense of solidarity could increasingly be found or activated among possible strike-breakers either from outside the company or from other departments within it.

As consciousness and solidarity increased, so did the self-sufficiency of the unions; the role of external figures like Gori and politically committed organisers like Zaccagnini was fading by 1912, though ideological

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1. The reduction of working hours in the traffic departments was less easily achieved.
2. The ten-month strike of Tandil quarrymen in 1908-1909 is a rare case of a successful long strike, and its gains were not enduring (Marotta op.cit. Vol II pp.21-22).
3. See the strike at Liniers (FCO) in Oct. 1906 as an instance of this (summarised in Table after p.50).

considerations continued to obstruct unity. This is not to say that the labour question was ignored by those outside the working class. Government was forced to respond with vigour, sometimes in a constructive and accommodating spirit but more often with measures designed to eliminate and repress the influence of trade unions. The unions, despite setbacks and failures, had won some status and taken the first steps towards de facto recognition by 1912. The economic interests of all sectors of the ruling class and much of the commercial bourgeoisie depended in particular on the smooth running of the railways and the docility of railway labour.

Traditionally, the day before the start of the 52-day strike of footplatemen is the date of the foundation of the union which was heralded as the necessary complement to La Fraternidad for the success of future movements - the Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera. The consequences and aftermath of La Fraternidad's unhappy strike settlement form part of the story of the development of its sister and rival union.

Chapter 3. The struggle for coherence, 1912-1918

The efforts of past decades and the lessons of the footplatemen's defeat in 1912 bore fruit in the establishment of a strong and permanent general railway union in Argentina. This union, the Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera, grew in only five years to become the most important labour organisation in the country, and its dramatic growth is the main concern of this chapter. It took place during a period of grave economic hardship for the working class, in which the trade depression which began in 1913, and was exacerbated by the 1914-1918 war, brought about severe unemployment and considerable inflation. The railway sector was particularly badly hit by the reduction in overseas trade; the workforce was reduced by almost 20% from the peak of 1913 and many more railwaymen were on short time with reduced wages.[1] Considerable labour unrest was the result, culminating on the railways in the general strike of September-October 1917, in which both the strengths and the weaknesses of the railway trade unions were revealed. The election of the Radical government in 1916 did not result in far-reaching concessions to the aspirations of organised labour, despite the fears of conservatives and capitalists; in the economic crisis of the Great War the government did not have the capacity to act thus even had it wished to.

Against this background of change, very different from the steady growth of the prewar years, organised labour in general and the railway unions in particular sought to test one of the working-class maxims most favoured in Argentina - 'unity is strength'. The vicissitudes and ultimate failure of the 1916 railway unions' Solidarity Pact highlighted the still volatile condition of labour organisation.

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1. See Chapter 1, pp. 24-25.

The aftermath of the footplatemen's strike

La Fraternidad suffered badly from the strike settlement. It stipulated that the strikers were to be reinstated gradually, in strict order of seniority (though in some areas, if not all, preference was to be given to employees with large young families, according to the union's wishes).[1] This did not occur, and the government connived at company infringements, sending biassed inspectors to test the blackleg footplatemen for drivers' certificates and allowing the companies to prevent this task being conducted expeditiously.[2] The FCS and the FCP evicted tenant strikers awaiting reinstatement,[3] and the Santa Fe company, once again showing exceptional hostility towards the union, tried to oblige all the strikers it took back to sign away their right to join La Fraternidad.[4]

La Fraternidad's CD took trouble to ensure that it was in command of all details relating to section-by-section readmission.[5] They issued instructions explaining how the sections could enforce the agreement for themselves, and warned against recriminations and disputes with blacklegs before all the strikers had been reinstated and blame could be properly apportioned.[6]

The speed with which reinstatement took place varied considerably from company to company. The big companies like the FCP, FCCA and FCS were comparatively quick to employ their old staff,[7] and because of this the overall national picture was not too discouraging; the unusually high volume of traffic in 1912 also obliged the companies to take on hands, whereas in less busy times they might have resisted the need to take back strikers. By 6 March about 40% of the men were back overall, by 27 April about three-quarters were in work, and by 24 May some 80% were

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1. Fraternidad CD Circular 28 Mar.1912, in Huelga 1912.
2. La Vanguardia 8 Mar.1912; Fraternidad CD Circulars 6 Mar.1912 and 7 May in Huelga 1912.
3. La Fraternidad 1 May 1912.
4. Fraternidad CD Circular 28 Mar.1912 in Huelga 1912.
5. Fraternidad CD Circulars 27 Feb.1912 and 18 Mar.1912 in Huelga 1912.
6. Fraternidad CD Circular, 2 Mar.1912, in Huelga 1912.
7. La Vanguardia 8 Mar. 1912.

reinstated.[1] Ramos Mexía claimed for the Ministry of Public Works that 95% of drivers and 65% of firemen had been taken back by early June, three months after the settlement.[2] In round figures, this still left 200 drivers and over 1500 firemen out of a job; the better opportunities for drivers are to be explained by the greater skill needed for their work, and the examination which (in theory at least) they had to pass.

On other companies conditions were much worse. The most recalcitrant were the FCCN, Central of Buenos Aires and Córdoba and Rosario Railways.[3] These railways were the smallest (apart from the FCCN), most remote (apart from the Central Buenos Aires) and least organised of all. Another offender was the FCO (at Haedo and Caballito in particular) which is surprising in view of La Fraternidad's long establishment on the railway and the central location of these two large sections.[4] The worst offender of all was the FCPSF. The railway claimed to have a fully-staffed traction department at the end of the strike, and reinstatement was very slow indeed - it was not complete over five years later, at the outbreak of the national railway strike of September-October 1917.[5]

Some of the companies seemed determined not to readmit strikers, despite La Fraternidad's efforts.

> 'The prime end of the struggle maintained by the companies has been none other than to destroy that organisation, so that now they do not hesitate to commit the most flagrant dishonesty, the most blameworthy betrayals, with the hope of being successful in the end in their task.'[6]

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1. Fraternidad CD Circular 6 Mar. 1912, in Huelga 1912; La Vanguardia 27 Apr. 1912, 24 May 1912.
2. La Vanguardia 5 June 1912.
3. La Vanguardia 3 Mar.1912; Fraternidad CD Circular, 6 Mar.1912, in Huelga 1912.
4. In mid-March in Haedo, 20 drivers and firemen were working and 66 still waiting. (La Vanguardia 1 Mar.1912, 14 Mar.1912).
5. By the end of May, only 6 out of 80 firemen who had worked in Santa Fe had got their jobs back; a month later, 100 footplatemen out of 156 were still out of a job in Santa Fe section, which was probably the best organised on the line and that most likely to conduct impartial examination of drivers (La Fraternidad 1 May 1912; La Vanguardia 7 June 1912).
6. La Vanguardia 10 Mar. 1912.

Even those companies who needed to take back most of the strikers to resume normal working tried to exclude the most notable activists. The following list of union militants, who had either sat on the CD or taken part in the presentation of the men's demands in November 1911, indicates the nature and extent of the companies' discrimination, despite the men's seniority and the fact that all had families.[1]

Railway	Section	Name	Years of service	Number of children
FCS	Sevigné	Juan Grosso	21	4
FCS	Constitución	Felipe M. Santos	15	3
FCS	Las Flores	Juan (?Francisco) Poderoso	15	3
FCCA	Villa María	Ignacio Oliva	24	1
FCCA	Villa María	Nicolás Roldán	14	6
Central	Lynch	Pedro Rousseau	11	3

Source: La Fraternidad Jan-April 1912; memo of CD to Sáenz Peña 24 Mar.1912.

It is testimony to the resilience of La Fraternidad that the period of recovery from this general strike (which was by no means over by June 1912 when this detailed account ends) did not prevent it from pressing its claims repeatedly to both Minister of Public Works and President.[2] As La Vanguardia put it, abandoning the earlier view that the footplatemen had triumphed morally, and inconsistent with its own favourable attitude to arbitration and the like,

> 'they have paid dearly for the ingenuous trust they placed in the action of the government and the excessive confidence in their own strength'.[3]

The establishment of FOF

The severe setback and consequent weakness of La Fraternidad probably contributed to the union's tolerant attitude to the early development of the

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1. Santos and Rousseau sat again on the CD, and Poderoso remained active for the remainder of the decade, but it is uncertain how long elapsed before their reinstatement. Nothing is known of the rest; it is possible, if improbable, that they were all at the end of their careers by 1912.

2. La Vanguardia 23 Mar.1912, 29 Mar.1912, 11 Apr.1912, 23 Apr. 1912 provides examples.

3. La Vanguardia 5 June 1912.

Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera. At this stage it made no attempt to influence the thinking or the method of organisation of the new union, which was founded by only ten men who met at Talleres Banfield (FCS) on 5 January 1912.[1] Their first act was to express solidarity with the footplatemen's strike. As the Socialist Victor Huergo wrote in a review of railway labour organisation four years later,

> 'This fact, which indisputably had not the slightest influence on the outcome of the traction department's dispute, does on the other hand help us to comprehend the thoroughgoing spirit of solidarity which moved the founders of FOF'.[2]

The organisation began its propaganda work with the aid of CORA, the syndicalist federation whose offices at Montes de Oca 972 were available to the founders and whose speakers appeared frequently for the federation.[3] The seamen's union FOM accommodated the central committee at its headquarters in La Boca, which also housed the main sections of the FCS, FCCA and FCP;[4] in September 1913 FOF moved to Méjico 2070, where many syndicalist unions were based.[5]

In March and April meetings were begun in the capital.[6] The interests of La Fraternidad were aroused; they told La Vanguardia, investigating the damage of the general strike, that railway workshop hands had constituted 60% of the blacklegs in the strike, and therefore

> 'La Fraternidad will support any action leading towards organising these trades and forming a federation of the various departments of railway employees and workers, if they seek to organise themselves with the aim of struggling collectively for the defence of the interests of the trade'.[7]

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1. Manuel F.Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) pp.117-118; Francisco Rosanova in La Organización Obrera 1 May 1918. The earliest most solid bases of the union were thus Talleres (FCS), Liniers (FCO), and Buenos Aires (Cía Gral) section
2. La Vanguardia 1 Jan.1916.
3. La Confederación 1 May 1912, 1 May 1913.
4. At this stage the central committee consisted of founders, rather than elected members and was largely anonymous until 1914. The Flores Socialist Centre accommodated another group (most likely that of Liniers) and the syndicalist paper La Acción Obrera provided a fourth rent-free office in the capital (El Obrero Ferroviario July-Aug.1912; La Vanguardia 1 Jan.1912; La Organización Obrera 1 May 1918).
5. La Vanguardia 12 Sept.1913.
6. La Vanguardia 3 Apr.1912, 10 Apr.1912; La Confederacion 1 May 1912.
7. La Vanguardia 25 Apr. 1912.

In June 1912 the first issue of El Obrero Ferroviario, FOF's newspaper, was published.[1] Its first issues showed the variety of opinion to be embraced in the new union, and from the start the editors encouraged constructive critiques, instead of attacks on existing organisations.[2]

The PS wasted no time in producing a critique of something referred to as FOF's 'statutory proposals'.[3] There were two maingrounds for criticism; first, the revolutionary tone of some of the proposals. La Vanguardia quoted Article 18 which read;

> 'The way in which strikes will be fought will be through direct action by the interested parties themselves, casting aside past errors so as to avoid long drawn out conflicts needing financial backing, which bring the dire consequences of weariness, exhaustion, and defeat. Arms of combat will range from pacific petitions to the general strike, when expedient'.

The Socialist criticism of this article was that it advocated revolutionary action, while such action could not be taken without reference to the state of the trade union, the type of work to be affected by a strike, and so on. This seems to be a curious interpretation of what was a rather flexible and undogmatic approach to modes of action; it reflected the PS preoccupation with the dangers of syndicalism rather than the actual content of the article adopted.

The second ground for attack from the PS concerned the attempt, which they saw as putting the cart before the horse, to set up a federation with statutes and aims without reference to existing railwaymen's societies.[4] It was valid, if not particularly useful, to point out that a federation of railwaymen's organisations could hardly exist before its component parts had been established. However, the particular criticism was also almost certainly the result of the PS's disquiet that the control of the new organisation

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1. It was edited by Jose Morgoni, one of FOF's first activists, and initially 10,000 copies were printed (Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.118). Morgoni committed suicide in February 1913 because of the pain he suffered from an industrial accident sustained in the La Plata (FCS) workshops, which had made him deaf and for which he could not afford treatment.

2. El Obrero Ferroviario June 1912.

3. La Vanguardia is the only source in which these proposals survive and it is possible, if unlikely, that the PS daily was referring merely to the various opinions and manifestoes which had been produced so far.

4. La Vanguardia 19 June 1912.

was in the hands of the syndicalists, in the name of CORA and FOM, instead of those of the Socialist-dominated society, based on the traffic departments, called the Liga Ferroviaria Argentina.

La Fraternidad's General Assembly of Delegates acquiesced to the request from FOF that three delegates from the new body should attend their meeting in July 1912.[1] This assembly passed a resolution as follows:

> '[La Fraternidad] accepts in principle the formation of a Railwaymen's Federation on the basis of autonomous entities, which in future can be extended in turn to the other transport trades, working on both land and water'.[2]

The delegates from FOF urged the formation of a committee to organise the new federation. This went some way towards meeting the PS's objection to the lack of cooperation with the existing railwaymen's associations; the footplatemen designated six members for the committee.[3] However, an argument developed almost at once. Shortly after the committee's first meeting, La Fraternidad issued a manifesto on the need for unity, noting that

> 'From among La Fraternidad a committee has been named to take charge of preliminary work and it has already held some meetings, exchanging views at the same time with delegates of related groups, to set out the lines of work to be undertaken'.[4]

On 30 July FOF made public its desire to disassociate itself from this manifesto, which, it alleged, had been written and printed before the first meeting of the unions.[5] At the same time they emphasised that they were not rejecting La Fraternidad's help. La Fraternidad's defence was that it had indeed prepared its manifesto and printed a small quantity in anticipation of the first joint discussions, but that

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario July-Aug.1912.
2. Motion formulated by the Fraternidad delegate for Talleres (FCS) (La Vanguardia 7 July 1912).
3. Letter from CD Fraternidad to CF FOF, 15 July 1912, in El Obrero Ferroviario July-Aug.1912. On 18 July La Fraternidad, the Liga Ferroviaria Argentina, FOF and a Quilmes group 'Sociedad recreativa de los ferroviarios de Quilmes' met for inconclusive preliminary discussions.
4. La Vanguardia 27 July 1912.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario July-Aug. 1912; La Vanguardia 7 Aug. 1912.

> 'the important, essential point that must prevail over insignificant points of detail is that the working class is cooperating, and uniting to form the entities upon which the future railwaymen's federation will be based'.[1]

This altercation, minor in itself, was symptomatic of the jealousies which developed as FOF gained strength; the syndicalists were afraid of undue influence, while La Fraternidad was liable to take a proprietary attitude to FOF.

These petty rancours did not impede the federation's growth. Organisation of sections proceeded apace, with assistance from CORA and La Fraternidad. Financial assistance as such was the only area in which La Fraternidad did not help, and it was probably too penurious to do so after the strike.[2] Lists of sections which emerged during FOF's first year in existence are plentiful, but the level of organisation in some so-called sections was so low that they proved highly ephemeral. In some places, where robust organisation could be expected, difficulties developed; for instance, Talleres Banfield (FCS) was apathetic and disorganised through the latter half of 1912, and in Bahía Blanca self-interest and political propagandising threatened the section's existence.[3] In Rosario there were various groups on the different railways but the largest, of 300 men from the FCCA, took a dangerously independent line, establishing itself under the name Federación de Obreros Ferroviarios and advocating the organisation of sindicatos por ferrocarril.[4] Rosario was never a secure base of support for FOF, except during the periods of the union's greatest militancy.

In September 1912 Francisco Rosanova, a hatter by trade and a key figure from CORA, was appointed secretary to FOF as the workload became too much for volunteers.[5] He travelled on many very productive propaganda tours, the

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1. La Fraternidad 15 Aug. 1912. The PS also condemned the 'legalistic' arguments of FOF (La Vanguardia 7 Aug. 1912).
2. Agnelli and Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.385.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario Nov. 1912, Mar. 1913.
4. El Obrero Ferroviario Sept. 1912; La Vanguardia 12 Feb. 1912; for explanations of sindicatos por ferrocarril see Chapter 5 p.200 and Chapter 7 p.267-270.
5. La Vanguardia 1 Jan.1916.

first perhaps to Mendoza in December 1912.[1] Sebastián Marotta, leading syndicalist and later secretary to FORA IX, spoke in Haedo (FCO) and at the founding meeting of the Victoria (FCCA) section, both near the federal capital. This was the beginning of long and fruitful cooperation between FOF and syndicalist leaders in meetings and propaganda tours.[2]

These intense propaganda activities produced a ferment of discussion on the best way to organise the young federation, and in this context the 'bases of fusion' were produced, to hasten the establishment of a proper federation and to take advantage of the initial success in the drive for organisation. The 'Bases' were produced by the mixed committee, in the broadest terms they could.[3] The aim of the union would be

> 'to maximise the efficacy of railwaymen acting collectively, grouping them on strictly trade-union /i.e. non-political/ grounds for the advancement of the moral, economic and professional interests of its members' (Article 2);

the body, organised by trade in the traffic, traction, workshops and permanent way departments, was to

> 'have as its aim the defence and improvement by all legitimate means of the living and working conditions of its members, outlawing any political, ideological or tendentious school, and in addition will patronise its members' technical education and education for collective consciousness and action /educación societaria/' (Art. 5).[4]

FOF answered critics who maintained that Article 2 was too inward-looking by saying that 'education for collective consciousness and action' mentioned in Article 5 meant quite the opposite in modern labour organisations.[5]

Article 4 laid down that each trade organisation

> 'will be organised on a unitary and autonomous basis, according to the regulations fixed in its respective statutes as approved in the trade's assemblies'.[6]

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario January 1913.
2. La Vanguardia 28 Aug. 1913. Note that one of Marotta's tours for FOF involved him in the strike on the FCS at Ing.White; this was criticised by some workshop hands who resented the use of railwaymen to extend the influence of syndicalism without thought for the possible divisive consequences (La Vanguardia 1 July 1913). FOF was not a member of CORA; it joined FORA in March 1915 when CORA had decided to enter the anarchist federation en masse so that the problem of choosing between two rival entities had been overcome (see below p.104).
3. El Obrero Ferroviario November 1912.
4. La Vanguardia 19 Oct. 1912.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario November 1912.
6. La Vanguardia 19 Oct. 1912.

This article caused the most dispute of all. FOF expressed a desire to see the greatest level of autonomy possible at all stages in the organisation, but maintained that

> 'we must bear in mind that one section will not be able to declare a general strike by itself, because this would not be autonomy but dictatorship'.[1]

The PS daily published an extensive defence of the article which, it said,

> 'has not pleased the syndicalist and anarchist elements who are accustomed to judge the labour movement in a simplistic and dogmatic way'.[2]

The footplatemen noted that

> 'a rational and essentially practical standard has ruled the study of the 'bases'. Leaving aside fancifulness, it went straight to the point which is the establishment of a powerful workers' organisation, guaranteeing it as a matter of course a long and fruitful life'.[3]

FOF, however, made it quite clear that the 'bases' of the federation were to be settled definitively by its first congress; 'in a word, our federal statutes will be the work of the delegates'.[4] It was concerned to preserve its independence, and in any case it suited both railway leaders and other interested groups to lay aside their concern and put their energy into other areas.

Premature strike movements, 1913

The work of organisation and the growth of FOF brought with it the beginning of company reprisals. At the same time, some of the larger sections began to take strike action on their own account. A strike over victimisation broke out in Junín on 16 January 1913, after two militants had been sacked, while in Pergamino the FCCA yielded after a strike demanding the reinstatement of two deputy station masters and another worker for union activity.[5]

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario November 1912.
2. La Vanguardia 5 Nov. 1912.
3. La Fraternidad 1 Nov. 1912.
4. El Obrero Ferroviario November 1912.
5. La Vanguardia 29 Jan. 1913; El Obrero Ferroviario Feb. 1913. Victimisation continued; by mid-March the FCCA had suspended 32 men in Pergamino and 7 in San Martín (La Vanguardia 13 Mar. 1913). Union delegations to government were frequent but fruitless; the few recorded local successes (e.g. at Maldonado (FCP)) did not set precedents.

La Fraternidad's CD took up these dismissals with the Railway Directorate (DG FFCC) and the National Labour Department (DNT) on the grounds that the companies were violating the constitutional right of association. Nine men had been sacked (seven by the FCCA) and most of these were in senior positions.[1] This seniority confirms the impression that throughout the efforts to organise general railway labour, the militants held the better jobs, and were not the most oppressed of the workforce - a phenomenon found in other countries and in other trades.

Two of the strikes in 1913 stand out. In mid-June, five hundred men of the FCS in Ingeniero White walked out over the sacking of a boilermaker, Zugasti, who was sectional secretary, and another member.[2] Detentions followed, with a strong police and military presence in the movement.[3] By the time FOF's delegate Sebastián Marotta reached Ingeniero White, six days after the strike began, it was petering out and was sustained only by extreme elements; it had had full support for only two days.[4] San Sebastián and Bazán of the footplatemen tried meanwhile to effect a settlement in Buenos Aires, but by this time Marotta had advised a return to work.[5]

No sooner had this abortive conflict collapsed than the workers of the FCP struck over the suspension of two union activists.[6] An earlier strike with the same immediate cause had been successful. It began in Rufino, spreading quickly to Laboulaye, Villa Mercedes, and Justo Daract. The company at once recruited scabs, both locally and in Buenos Aires; the police gave them protection and arrested many strikers. The PS Deputy Mario Bravo tried, with little effect, to intervene with the San Luis Minister of Government over police partiality, and La Fraternidad

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1. Three were deputy station masters, one the station master's secretary at Pergamino (an important centre), and one in charge of goods handling at Retiro (capital) (La Fraternidad 1 Feb. 1913).
2. La Vanguardia 19 June 1913.
3. La Vanguardia 21 June 1913.
4. El Obrero Ferroviario Aug. 1913.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario Aug. 1913; La Vanguardia 26 June 1913.
6. La Vanguardia 29 June 1913.

telegraphed its protest against using police as recruiting agents.[1]

Almost all the sections joined the strike during its first fortnight, and the Fraternidad sections of Justo Daract and Villa Mercedes asked the CD what that union's position should be.[2] The PS newspaper reproduced the footplatemen's view that these movements were a natural expression of the desire for improvements and indicated a spirit of solidarity, but that they were too dangerous to be tolerated from the point of view of organisation.[3] La Fraternidad began negotiations with the DG FFCC; its position on the movement and all partial movements had been given in a circular published only a month before, where the men were warned to curb their enthusiasms and recognise the impracticable aspects of section-by-section disputes.[4] However, it circularised the FCP sections to ascertain whether they were prepared to strike, putting into practice the principles of consultation and democratic decision so often expressed.[5]

By the end of July, the strike was collapsing. Junín, a crucial section, had oscillated over its final late decision to join the strike in a way which suggests that the section was aware of the pitfalls mentioned by the PS and the footplatemen (there was a strong connection with the former); it also implies that the strike was supported by a narrow majority overall.[6] After eight days on strike they returned to work (on 29 July) and a week or so later the rest of the strikers yielded, after 50 days. Four hundred lost their jobs through 'selection' in Junín, and in smaller centres too most of the strikers' jobs had been taken over by blacklegs.[7]

This strike, like the other partial movements of 1913, caused tension between FOF and La Fraternidad. FOF appeared convinced that the FCP could have

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1. La Vanguardia 6 July 1913, 8 July 1913.
2. La Vanguardia 6 July 1913.
3. La Vanguardia 11 July 1913.
4. La Vanguardia 17 July 1913; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares Circular 16, 16 July 1913.
5. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares Circular 19, 16 July 1913. La Fraternidad certainly did not 'foment' the strike, as RRP (25 July 1913) suggested. When the company threatened a lock-out, FOF unilaterally planned a general strike on the FCP or even nationally; La Fraternidad did not recognise this scheme (La Vanguardia 22 July 1913).
6. La Vanguardia 10 July 1913, 15 July 1913.
7. El Obrero Ferroviario Aug.1913: La Vanguardia 8 Aug.1913.

been beaten with the assistance of the footplatemen, who delayed almost three weeks before deciding to reject the federation's appeal for solidarity. La Fraternidad answered with an account of its vital part in the organisation of FOF, at central and sectional levels, saying that most of the sections which called these strikes were merely groups of enthusiasts, and implying that the majority of strikers felt the struggle failed through lack of information and poorly-organised solidarity. FOF reacted badly to the imputations of incompetence in the senior union's response.[1]

However, the strikes had been a failure and the FOF leaders were aware of this. In October 1913 FOF's secretary declared that the union was not in a fit state to join in FORA's general strike scheme, though the Bahía Blanca section became involved.[2] The FCP still aimed to sack active unionists, and the men came out again in November over the removal of those who had joined the general strike in Bahía Blanca. The movement ended in disorder and demoralisation in a wave of corruption and company manoeuvring.[3] Even La Fraternidad was having difficulty in inducing the companies to receive their officially approved delegations, known as claims committees (comisiones de reclamos).[4] These committees were still dealing with cases of men who had not worked since the 1912 strike.[5] At their General Assembly of January 1914, La Fraternidad's representatives from the FCS were not granted leave to attend until the union had approached the Minister of Public Works.[6] The new minister, Dr. Manuel Moyano, had a background as a railway lawyer - like his notorious predecessor Ramos Mexía - and was similarly disposed towards the rail unions.[7]

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1. La Fraternidad 15 Aug. 1913.
2. La Vanguardia 21 Oct. 1913, 25 Oct. 1913.
3. La Vanguardia 30 Oct. 1913, 1 Nov.1913, 5 Nov.1913, 13 Nov.1913; El Obrero Ferroviario Jan. 1914.
4. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares Circular 24, 27 Oct.1913; La Vanguardia 30 Nov. 1913.
5. A telegram to Vicepresident de la Plaza from a Rosario meeting of delegates from railways in Santa Fe province requested the reinstatement of 98 men still redundant on the FCPSF (La Vanguardia 7 Dec.1913).
6. La Vanguardia 27 Jan. 1914.
7. La Vanguardia 5 Mar. 1914.

The Liga Ferroviaria Argentina: a Socialist challenge to FOF

FOF had established over eighty sections by the beginning of 1914, according to a very hostile report by the Ministry of the Interior, who described the union as

> 'this novel corporation run by elements with advanced ideas and by professional agitators'.

It was to find itself in competition for the next two years with a small but tenacious organisation called the Liga Ferroviaria Argentina.

This organisation was the image of La Fraternidad in aims and structure, but since its foundation in 1909 had been almost inactive; indeed, its representation on the Mixed Committee (on organisation) was a recognition of the society out of proportion with its real importance. The union began to reassert itself in 1914, despite an announcement the year before that it was to fuse with FOF and the 'Recreativa de Quilmes'.[1] The reason for this change of tactic is not clear, but the LFA was so closely bound to the PS that it is probable that the party's unease over the structure, leadership and programme of FOF was the motive for setting up in competition. The leaders of LFA were Adolfo M. Jiménez and José M. Lemos (once secretary of the Confederación Ferrocarrilera); its headquarters (until December 1915) were in Vieytes 1455, the home of the Socialist Centre of Barracas and the last resting place of the Confederation.[2] In 1914 manifestoes were produced praising the League's mode of organisation,[3] and urging railwaymen to join it; the Socialist Centres of the Interior were circulated and asked for details of potential members, for the strength (only about 300 members in the second half of 1914) of the League was concentrated in Buenos Aires and on the FCS.[4]

In May 1914, Amérigo J. Baliño (the PS editor of La Fraternidad's periodical) produced an article claiming that the organisation of the traffic

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario January 1913.
2. La Vanguardia 15 June 1913.
3. It was organised a base múltiple, for which see Chapter 7 pp.258-261.
4. La Vanguardia 10 Feb. 1914, 4 Sept. 1914, 19 Apr. 1914; El Obrero Ferroviario January-February 1915 (report of CF to 1st Congress).

department was being conducted through LFA, whereas FOF consisted exclusively of workshop personnel.[1] This was manifestly not the case, although so far most of the strike activity of FOF members had been confined to the workshops, the latest instance being on the FCCA among the workshop carpenters of Rosario in March 1914.[2] FOF replied angrily, but LFA retaliated with denials of FOF's statements about the activities of the Mixed Committee which was certainly at its least effective in 1914. However, it should be noted that LFA's withdrawal on 30 September 1914 from the future FOF congress was a major reason for that inactivity.[3]

La Fraternidad's attitude to LEA was benevolent but not much more; it assisted in the distribution of a broadsheet, but certainly expressed no preference for the League over FOF except to point out the similarity of LFA's and La Fraternidad's statutes.[4] Such official impartiality was greatly to the credit of the footplatemen's organisation, despite Baliño's misrepresentation of FOF, which can hardly have been other than deliberate.

The Socialists were less circumspect, and the attitude of LFA on political impartiality was far less strict than La Fraternidad's. Jiménez urged members to vote Socialist in 1914, and late that year the Federación Socialista Bonaerense (the association of PS groups in the province of Buenos Aires) advised its members to join LFA rather than FOF.[5] A serious incident resulted, with the League asserting that FOF was politically biassed and not sufficiently organised to make a joint congress worthwhile, a curious opinion in view of the League's electioneering and its small size.[6]

The editors of La Vanguardia supported LFA, asserting that trade union autonomy did not imply that trade unions could not take political action as and when they wanted.[7] If this was the case, the objection raised by LFA to

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1. La Vanguardia 1 May 1914, reprinted in La Fraternidad.
2. La Vanguardia 24 Mar. 1914.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario January-February 1915.
4. La Fraternidad 15 Dec. 1914, 1 May 1915; Fraternidad CD Memoria 1914 p.9; La Vanguardia 28 Jan. 1915.
5. La Vanguardia 19 Mar. 1914.
6. La Vanguardia 2 Feb. 1915, 5 Feb. 1915, 7 Feb. 1915.
7. La Vanguardia 7 Feb. 1915.

a contribution from FOF's Bolívar section to La Protesta seems, as Rosanova pointed out, somewhat superfluous; Jiménez's contention that advising members how to vote was proper when many had requested guidance and voting was compulsory certainly contravened the definition of non-intervention and autonomy adopted by La Fraternidad.[1] This dispute was of considerable importance to PS policy to the unions, and to trade unions' attitudes to autonomy.[2]

The rivalry between FOF and LFA reached its height around the beginning of 1915; the Socialist-dominated group refused to attend FOF's first congress in March that year and in April it started to publish a monthly periodical, Liga Ferroviaria, in an attempt to intensify propaganda.[3] Meetings continued, sometimes held jointly with La Fraternidad (but never with FOF) on the pensions issue in particular, and were addressed by big name speakers.[4] Nevertheless, the union was not making much headway - at the end of 1915 it had 483 members - whereas FOF continued to prosper; the League's attacks faded as FOF's first and second congresses underlined its dominant moderation and lack of dogmatism, so that by 1916 La Vanguardia confined itself to general exhortations to railwaymen to join one of the available unions.[5] On 2 June 1916 LFA was absorbed into FOF (two of its committee members joining FOF's council) and the rivalry was at an end.[6]

Unity in adversity, 1916

A number of factors aided the unification of railway labour which had success in 1916, with the fusion of FOF and LFA, and the Solidarity Pact made in August between La Fraternidad and the general union. The experience

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1. La Vanguardia 5 Feb. 1915, 7 Feb. 1915, 14 Feb. 1915.
2. This matter is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 pp.206-213.
3. La Vanguardia 1 Jan. 1916, 23 Apr. 1915.
4. La Vanguardia 28 Oct. 1915.
5. La Vanguardia 1 Jan. 1916, 20 May 1916.
6. La Vanguardia 3 June 1916.

of FOF's first two congresses was certainly instructive.

The CF's report to the first congress on the work of unification stated only that

> 'Unfortunately, our efforts in this direction did not achieve the desired success, though it is beyond doubt that they contributed by soothing much bitterness and banishing many prejudices which, until a short time ago, divided the various railway departments into irreconcilably hostile bands.'[1]

Its account of the dealings with the other unions was measured and unbiassed, and the statutory resolutions passed were unexceptionable, notably on the matter of sectional autonomy and strike action; it was agreed that

> 'The sections cannot on any account initiate a strike movement without the authorisation of the CF and the majority of sections'.[2]

At the second congress it was agreed that two-thirds approval from all members in a referendum was needed to call a general strike.[3] The CF's report of March 1916 took a very firm line against the divisionist elements of San Cristóbal, San Juan, Mechita and Liniers who attacked FOF and FORA IX's rejection of anarchocommunism.[4] This evidence of intent to take indiscipline seriously was praised by the PS;

> 'The assembly developed in a thoroughly civilised and cultivated fashion, and at all times the delegates showed that they were united to discuss serious business, to which they had to devote the energy and thoughtfulness which they found in the sectional assemblies of which they were the authentic representatives'.[5]

The federation, then, had taken its place at the forefront of the newly non-political FORA IX; the first congress had resolved (by a margin of one vote, that of the PS Guillermo Aguirre Bengoa reluctantly following his mandate) to join FORA.[6] Railwaymen once more were involved with labour unity

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario January-February 1915.
2. La Vanguardia 9 March 1915.
3. La Vanguardia 23 Apr. 1916.
4. El Obrero Ferroviario Mar. 1916. The San Cristóbal railwaymen attended the inaugural meeting of FORA V in May 1915 (Oddone Gremialismo (1975) p.370).
5. La Vanguardia 24 Apr. 1916.
6. El Obrero Ferroviario Mar. 1915. The decision of CORA members to join FORA en masse was the reason behind the FOF decision to renounce their autonomy (Marotta op.cit. Vol II pp.166-176).

from the start.[1] FOF had suppressed the extravagance of its anarchist components, some of whom defected from FORA IX and FOF, and was adopting practicable aims and organisation. These included the setting up of a national Transport Workers' Federation, which, if premature, was evidence of FOF's preoccupation with unity rather than ideological purity.[2]

These steps were taken in a context of savage company cutbacks and economies, brought about as a consequence of the disruption and severe curtailment of overseas trade on the outbreak of war which resulted in reduced railway traffic receipts.[3] The harvest of 1913-14 had promised well, but floods had destroyed much and made it impossible to transport the rest by rail.[4] The dividends paid in 1914 reflected the slack trade and decline in earnings since 1912-1913 as is plain from the table.

Dividends (%) on ordinary shares, 'Big Four' companies, 1910-1920
(dividend year ran from June to June)

Company	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
FCP	3	3½	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	2	5
FCS	7	7	7	7	5	4	4½	4	2	3	7
FCO	7	7½	7	7	5	5	4	3	2	4	7
FCCA	6	6	6	6	5	5	4	1	2	2	6

Source: Argentine Annual (Buenos Aires, Standard Directory Co., 1921) p.116. For ratio of expenses to receipts, compare note 3 p.118.

The companies' economies brought enormous hardship and, at least in the province of Santa Fe, caused chaos in the grain markets, with cereals overflowing in elevators and storehouses and laden goods waggons marooned at the junction of Villa Constitución (FCCA).[5] Men were put on very short time, or demoted to save wages.[6] The government authorised the companies to reduce

1. Rosanova had attended the Unity Congress of 1912 for FOF, and several sections had sent delegates (La Vanguardia 1 Dec.1912, 3 Dec.1912).
2. La Fraternidad 1 July 1915.
3. Economist 27 Mar.1915 (report dated 26 Feb. 1915).
4. Statist 11 July 1914.
5. La Vanguardia 25 Sept. 1914.
6. On the FCS, each man lost 5 days a month (later 7), and at La Bajada (Cía Gral) engine cleaners lost 7½ days a month, reducing their wage from $60 to $45 a month (La Vanguardia 18 Sept.1914; El Obrero Ferroviario Sept.1914, Nov.-Dec. 1914). The FCP put its Caseros workshops on a 3-day week, and the Argentine North-Eastern planned to close its Concordia works which employed 55 people (La Vanguardia 26 Sept.1914, 24 Nov.1914).

services because the war made it difficult and very expensive to import the usual enormous quantities of coal; shortages of coal were exaggerated so that the companies could penalise footplatemen who allegedly wasted it, and efforts to convert to wood fuel (already used by most lines in some districts) were desultory at first.[1] Not only the traffic and workshop departments were hit, therefore; indeed many footplatemen (especially on the FCO, Midland and Cía Gral) had been on short time since the previous year, even during the busy periods - a clear case of discrimination.[2] By the end of 1914 the severe pro rata reductions in work were easing, but discrimination in the cuts went on.[3] The company reports of 1914-1915 congratulated themselves on their ability to make great economies through

> 'the reduction to a minimum of all unnecessary renewal and repair work'.[4]

These conditions of hardship helped to unite the rail unions, though resistance to the cuts was lamentably uncoordinated within La Fraternidad, let alone between the unions.[5] All were united against the war, in any case, a sentiment which was strengthened by the highly provocative decision of British- and French-owned companies to dismiss all their employees of 'enemy' origin, even those of long standing, and especially union activists.[6]

Affairs like these were the pressing grievances of all railwaymen in Argentina during the years 1914-1916, without distinction of trade; general

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1. La Fraternidad 15 Sept.1914; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares Circular 40, 18 Aug. 1914.
2. Fraternidad CD Memoria 1913 p.9.
3. Fraternidad CD Memoria 1914 p.8.
4. Statist 24 July 1915, report of Great Southern Railway.
5. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares Circular 39, 18 Aug.1914.
6. It is not clear what happened to these unfortunate German- and Austrian-born staff (some of whom, like the PS and FOF activist Juan Wilhelm of Rosario (FCCA), were naturalised Argentines); Wilhelm was back working for the FCCA by 1917. In 1916, 400 were sacked from the Rosario-Pérez workshops (La Vanguardia 2 Aug. 1916, 7 Aug. 1916). La Fraternidad succeeded in having some of its members placed on the State Railways (Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1916 p.5). Another tactic of these companies was to force all their employees of Allied nationality to return to Europe to fight (La Organización Obrera 1 May 1915; La Fraternidad 1 May 1916).

economic hardship (especially fear of unemployment and inflation) combined with these to foster a pragmatic approach to claims. A final galvanising and unifying force was the whole campaign for acceptable pensions legislation and some of the products of this battle,[1] especially the amarillo union named Asociación Ferroviaria Nacional.

The footplatemen's strike of 1912 had given birth to a society run by strike-breakers, who were excluded from La Fraternidad until the end of the year.[2] Reforma Ferroviaria claimed to have 1200 members in April 1913, when it was derided by the unions and working class press for expressing an opinion on the government's regulation proposals.[3] It was established as a deliberate counter to La Fraternidad, and when that organisation's resilience and capacity for recovery became clear La Reforma began to fade, though in 1915 it acquired personería jurídica and in October 1917 it denounced the national rail strike.[4]

The Asociación Ferroviaria Nacional (National Railway Association) was more of a threat. It originated in January 1916 at a meeting of less than a hundred employees which took place on company property and approved the statutes unread.[5] During the first six months of 1916 it grew very fast, gaining members through a low subscription of 50¢ a month and attractive benefits; by September it claimed 12,600 members.[6] The companies had patronised groups known as 'railway circles' for some time previous to this foundation, and it was an overt attempt to ensure increased company representation on the board of the future pensions fund - the representation of AFN on this board was one of its statutory aims.[7]

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1. See Chapter 6 p.227.
2. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 1914, Circular 25, 27 Apr. 1914.
3. La Vanguardia 11 Apr. 1913; RRP 18 Apr. 1913; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 1913, circulars no dates.
4. RRP 5 Oct. 1917; La Vanguardia 1 Jan.1916.
5. La Vanguardia 18 Jan.1916.
6. Fraternidad CD Memoria 1916 p.2; La Fraternidad 1 Sept.1916.
7. La Fraternidad 15 Feb.1916, 15 Mar.1916. The companies began publishing a journal in 1912, but its nature and function are obscure.

FOF, newly united with LFA, produced a powerful manifesto against AFN in June 1916, and a month later they joined with La Fraternidad to condemn it:

> 'most of the members they get they obtain by force or violence, and many bosses, using or abusing their position, put pressure on staff to make them join the brand new society'.[1]

The working class published further damning evidence of the company connection, about which AFN's paper El Ferroviario (distributed by company mail) was understandably reticent;[2] for instance, some companies were now preventing bona fide trade unions from meeting on company property, which in railway colonies often made it virtually impossible to hold assemblies. Meanwhile, AFN had the use of any offices they wanted.[3]

On 15 November 1916 the PS's executive committee investigated AFN, and recommended that Socialists should not join it; if they were obliged to do so they should publicise the fact widely.[4] However, the organisation subsisted, despite what La Fraternidad estimated as a 50% drop in membership after the unions' campaign of 1916,[5] and when the Board of the Pensions Fund was finally established the body chosen to represent those railwaymen who were not footplatemen was AFN.

The steps towards unity and improved organisation did not occur unchecked by problems within the two main unions, aside from outside influences. Both La Fraternidad and FOF had difficulties from time to time in raising a quorum for committee meetings; this suggests a certain amount of company obstruction of trade union activities as well as some apathy within the organisations.[6]

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1. La Vanguardia 7 July 1916.
2. La Fraternidad 1 Sept.1916.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario Nov. 1916.
4. La Vanguardia 31 Jan. 1917.
5. La Fraternidad 15 Apr. 1917; Fraternidad Memoria 1916 p.2.
6. The periodic inactivity of the inter-union committee on organisation is further evidence of apathy (La Vanguardia 8 July 1914; El Obrero Ferroviario Aug. 1915; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares March 1914 to CD members and sections sending delegates to the CD).

The FOF had trouble raising the consciousness of workers in Buenos Aires, whereas the railwaymen of the Interior were eager to organise;[1] at the other extreme were the activities of the Santa Fe section which rebelled against the centralism of FOF as established at its first Congress and tried to set up a rival Comité de Relaciones (Coordinating Committee).[2] In 1915 the CD of La Fraternidad issued a circular to mark its 28th anniversary bemoaning the reigning apathy:

> 'The cohesion and solidarity of our ranks appears more as an isolated phenomenon than as a natural and logical fact appropriate to our organisation and strength. We realise that as yet many have not managed to give up thinking with their stomachs instead of with their brains'.[3]

However, within La Fraternidad there were also rumours of maladministration throughout 1914 and 1915. In November 1915 the CD published a full account of the events, showing that the members of the CD who investigated the irregularities had approached their task with partiality, and the union had had to call in an independent accountant. One office employee was sacked and two left, though stories of $8,000 missing proved groundless; Sumay, who had been secretary since Tello retired in June 1913, was posted to his former job as editor of the magazine, accused not of dishonesty but of 'lack of capacity to detect errors, and energy to correct them'.[4] The secretary's job went to Américo J. Baliño. Despite the apparent ease with which the allegations of irregularities were investigated and eliminated, La Fraternidad was shaken by the process, which brought home that there were less obvious enemies of the union than companies, government or anarchists.

These problems could not obstruct the growth of good relations between FOF and La Fraternidad, especially at a sectional level. In June

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario Mar.1914; La Vanguardia 3 May 1914.
2. These activities were condemned by FORA IX and FOF alike (FORA IX Actas 18 July 1915, 2 Sept. 1915, 17 Oct. 1915).
3. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, circular 9 June 1915.
4. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, circular 29, Nov.1915. The three investigators, Andrés de Nardi, Juan Tiscornia and José del Castillo, persistently failed to attend CD meetings after the investigation (Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, circular 33 13 Dec. 1915). They, along with a local delegate N.Lanfossi who had also attacked the running of the CD, were censured by the 1916 General Assembly where the matter was brought into the open La Vanguardia 8 Apr.1916, 9 Apr.1916; La Fraternidad 1 May 1916).

1916 many sections celebrated the 29th anniversary of the enginemen's union together.[1] At other times joint meetings of railwaymen occurred to discuss a particular topic of interest; the pensions scheme prompted several such meetings in various parts of the country.[2] The meetings were not (prior to the Solidarity Pact) held in response to a policy statement or instruction from the leadership of either union; instead, they were probably a sign of some specific local condition whereby the men of the two unions were brought closer together accidentally, because of housing arrangements, political beliefs, or even family relationships, for example.

The urgency of unity was again pressed at FOF's second congress and at La Fraternidad's assembly of 1916, held within a month of each other.[3] On La Fraternidad's suggestion, a formal statement was made and on 7 August the two committees published their Pact.[4] It covered cooperation on practical matters, such as use of offices, reciprocal publicity and the like. Moreover, both unions undertook to avoid any criticism or bad publicity about the other. Detailed arrangements were established for each of three levels of support in strikes; moral, effective and financial, and full support, and the last was subject to the approval of members, not just the directive body. If an organisation refused support it did not have the right to

> 'obstruct, impede or combat the negotiations of the organisation involved in the dispute'.

Lastly, the Pact provided for a joint fusion congress at some future date.[5]

The Pact was justified thus in its preamble:

> 'Companies and government support one another mutually to perpetuate the dominion of capital. A perfect unity rules the bosses' action. And in view of this state of affairs the directive bodies of the only genuine organisations of railway workers decided the moment had come to support one another mutually as well, for a better and more efficacious campaign against the companies'.[6]

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1. This was the year in which La Fraternidad opened its own premises (Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1916 p.1).
2. El Obrero Ferroviario June 1916.
3. La Vanguardia 9 Apr.1916; La Fraternidad 15 Mar. 1916.
4. Fernández op.cit. p.122.
5. Ibid. pp.123-125.
6. Agnelli and Chiti op.cit. p.388.

Reactions to the Pact were favourable.[1] Though it aimed to pool resources and improve organisation and propaganda (and FOF doubled its membership in the last half of 1916 which must have had at least something to do with the recognition of FOF as a serious body by the senior rail union), the Pact still had only as much significance as the trade union leadership and members chose to give it.[2] Locally, the instruction to form joint committees was taken up, especially where informal relations had been good before. However, fusion had to wait upon more education of the rank and file, as the CF recognised in its report to the third congress of 1917:

> 'it is indispensable that they possess the necessary consciousness and aptitudes to live together in a large family of free men within which neither caprices nor mean personal interests can come before the convenience of all'.[3]

It was not long before the Pact was put to the test. There was already a hint of trouble on the FCS, where grievances presented by FOF members in the workshops late in 1916 had been ignored by the company.[4] FOF published a manifesto strongly supporting the maritime workers' strike, the first major labour conflict to greet the new Radical government, and reminding its members of the debt that FOF owed FOM on account of the latter's help with the initial organisation of the union.[5]

Organised labour had reason to expect more sympathetic treatment from the new government, even if the PS declared the Radicals' concern with the working class to be bogus and opportunist. It was to these hopes that La Fraternidad referred when it announced the new year of 1917 with a prophetic statement:

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1. La Vanguardia 21 Aug. 1916; El Obrero Ferroviario Aug. 1916.
2. Fraternidad CD Memoria 1916 pp.1-2.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario March 1917.
4. La Vanguardia 5 Dec. 1916, 16 Dec. 1916.
5. La Vanguardia 20 Dec. 1916. FOF also stated that as transport workers the needs and aims of both unions were linked, and urged railwaymen to provide as much support as they could. FOF's confidence was new; in June 1916, Rosanova and delegates from some sections claimed that FOF was too weak to support a general strike which FORA IX was contemplating over the Berisso judgements (FORA IX Actas 14 Apr. 1916, 18 June 1916). For more on Berisso, see Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.199, and Chapter 5 p.204.

> 'Let 1917 be the year of vindication. Let the bloody despotic politicians who attack our rights, our freedoms and our wages disappear once and for all'.[1]

The general railway strike, 1917

The major labour conflict of 1917 was the national railwaymen's strike, which lasted 24 days and was by far the most comprehensive transport strike the country had ever seen, recalling the stoppage of 1912. Amidst the generally high level of agitation in the years 1917-1919, culminating in the Semana Trágica, this movement has been lost and much underrated in importance. There are many parallels between the events of 1917-1918 on the railways and those of January 1919, and it can perhaps be said that railway labour was the first sector to learn the lessons that other labour groups were to learn in 1919.

Two unconnected movements lay at the root of the general strike of 1917, though the continuing fall in living standards and both real and actual wages remained the underlying cause of discontent.[2] FOM had taken up their grievances with shipowners and achieved a fair settlement through government-initiated arbitration,[3] and La Fraternidad took a cautiously optimistic view of relations with Dr Pablo Torello, the new Minister of Public Works, even if Nogués, still Railway Director, was thoroughly unsympathetic.[4] The strength of FOF was by now greatly increased, with over 9,000 members and nearly a hundred sections by the end of 1916.[5] The government was willing to contemplate regulation of railway working, and Nogués attended La Fraternidad's General Assembly that year for discussion of that subject.[6] Inter-union relations were as good as they had ever been, to the extent that La Fraternidad's Assembly welcomed Sebastián Marotta as delegate from FORA IX.[7]

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1. La Fraternidad 1 Jan.1917.
2. See Chapter 1 pp.24-25.
3. Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.204.
4. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 17 Jan. 1917; La Fraternidad 15 Apr. 1917.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario March 1917; La Vanguardia 7 Apr. 1917.
6. La Vanguardia 27 Mar. 1917.
7. FORA IX Actas 26 Mar. 1917.

The first railway strike since 1914[1] broke amidst protests over abuses from workers of almost every railway company on 22 June 1917 at Tafí Viejo, the new home of the State Railway workshops (FCCN) just outside Tucumán.[2] Eighty boilermakers brought the entire workshops out - some 1300 men - within a couple of days, demanding the dismissal of an overseer and the reinstatement of the boilermaker he had sacked, the incident that had caused the strike.[3] Mounted police and military personnel were soon strongly in evidence.[4] A general strike on the line was to begin on 2 July, but on 1 July the management accepted the claims, though they transferred the offending overseer instead of dismissing him.[5]

Both FORA IX and La Fraternidad acted quickly on hearing of this dispute. FORA's own secretary, Lucas Tortorelli,[6] manned FOF's office while Rosanova was on sick leave and both Bautista Mansilla and Juan Giordano had been sent to Tafí Viejo and Rosario (where another and more spectacular strike was brewing).[7] FORA IX also named two delegates to assist FOF in negotiations with the government.[8] The actual settlement, however, was reached with the assistance of La Fraternidad, an odd bedfellow for the very

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1. Fernández op.cit. p.83.

2. La Vanguardia 23 June 1917.

3. La Vanguardia 26 June 1917. Other demands were for regular pay (pay on State Railways was 2-3 months overdue early in 1917), free passes on all trains, and lower rents (the township had been developed in 1915). (La Vanguardia 10 May 1917, 22 May 1917; RRP 30 Apr. 1917).

4. RRP 29 June 1917; La Vanguardia 29 June 1917.

5. El Obrero Ferroviario July 1917.

6. See Marotta op.cit. Vol I pp.277-280 for Tortorelli's advocacy of the general strike at the 1906 UGT Congress, and his early work in the syndicalist movement.

7. Juan B. GIORDANO. Dismissed from Bolívar FCS early 1917, employed by FOF April 1917 at $100 p.month. Had been propagandist for amarillos 1913. 1917-May 1918; FOF representative in Rosario/Pérez strike July-August, meetings August 1917Min.Publ.Wks on settlement; Sept.propaganda speeches; spoke at Talleres victims' funeral Oct; sent to Tafí Viejo strike Nov.1917, administration FFCC Estado refused to see him and imprisoned him briefly; more propaganda work; May 1918 resigned over general strike with MANSILLA. Bautista Velásquez MANSILLA. Once worker Cruz del Eje (FCCA), sacked for organising Unión Ferroviaria (?) at unknown date, gave meetings Villa María (FCCA) May 1st, 1913. Member editorial board La Protesta pre FORA IX congress April 1915; April 1915 article La Protesta lamenting FORA IX rejection of anarchocommunism, but by mid-1915 helping FOF with pensions propaganda meetings. Dec.1915 temporary secretary FORA IX while Garcia running FOM strike, delegate FORA IX in FOM strike. Jan.1917: went to FOF,

footnote continued overleaf ..

independent-minded FOF sections of the North-West, whose tendency was always anarchist and which were only tenuously under FOF's control.[1] FOF in its Circular 36 describing this movement ignored La Fraternidad's role in reaching a settlement, and the seeds of further trouble between the two unions of the Pact were sown.

Meanwhile the carpenters of the Central Argentine Railway's new Pérez workshops (opened in June 1916 in a suburb of Rosario)[2] had come out on strike on 19 June because they had been told they would only be working six days a month; 320 men, from the carpentry and paint shops, all of whom were on short time, demanded a four-day week.[3] The entire workshop struck on 3 July. Sebastián Marotta went to Rosario for FORA IX, while La Fraternidad instructed its section to visit the workshop manager, who refused to see them though they reiterated their request daily. On 6 July a satisfactory settlement was suggested with full reinstatement and a four-day week, and when on 11 July the engine shed hands agreed not to press their claims for one day off each fortnight the strikers voted in a meeting of 3,800 to return to work. A fair victory had apparently been won, despite the management's

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Footnote 7 from previous page, continued ...
Feb.1917 took over as temporary secretary due to Rosanova's illness, remained until dismissal May 1918. Leading role, railway strikes 1917-1918 especially negotiations with government. Reputation for militancy, but more likely opportunist; note chequered political career. See below for his removal from FOF (pp.133-134). Worked for Minister of Public Works 1918; also campaigne for UCR Governor of Córdoba, Elpidio González (La Vanguardia 19 Nov.1918).

8. FORA IX Actas 29 June 1917.

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1. La Fraternidad's Tucumán members were being asked to drive trains carrying blacklegs to Tafí Viejo, and the CD feared that indiscipline would result (Fraternidad Reseña (1918); Report on Tafí Viejo strike to joint meeting Fraternidad - FOF 16 Dec. 1917).

2. La Vanguardia 16 Aug. 1917 (DNT report on FCCA strike); La Vanguardia 30 May 1916.

3. On 30 June, 2,000 workers from the workshops held a meeting, attended for FOF by Giordano, and agreed a series of demands, including a small pay rise and a 4-day week for all (La Vanguardia 2 July 1917; La Organización Obrera Aug. 1917). The local manager Crouch said these conditions could only be met if 80 carpenters were dismissed.

insistence on not recognising either FOF or Fraternidad delegates.[1]

The company broke its promises of no reprisals. Casimiro Fernández, who Crouch alleged had insulted him during talks about the first strike, was suspended and later sacked; a few days later Fortunato Polizzi of the workshop's foundry was dismissed.[2] On 20 July troops were moved in and the men locked out. Their response was violent; some machines and lathes were damaged, most of the workshop's windows were smashed and three coaches were broken up.[3] The government was reluctant to accede to the FCCA's request for troops; the War Minister's decision to send in the infantry was reversed, and the DNT appointed to arbitrate. Some sources suggest that this showed the populism and animus against foreign capital of the Radicals, but in fact it was almost certainly the result of an agreement between the government and FOF.[4]

Meanwhile the organisation of the strike proved complex. On 29 July the committees of FOF and La Fraternidad met to discuss policy, resulting in the footplatemen sending a delegation to Rosario to conduct a referendum of members there on the general strike, which yielded a 100% vote in favour of coming out.[5] The movement among other railway trades was at this time being sustained with the help of the women of Rosario, and the wives of strike-breakers were approached by other railwaymen's wives to persuade them of the justice of the struggle; the support of women for the conflict greatly strengthened the resolve of the men,[6] many of whom

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1. La Vanguardia 7 July 1917.
2. La Organización Obrera August 1917.
3. RRP 27 July 1917; La Vanguardia 22 July 1917.
4. RRP 27 July 1917, 3 Aug. 1917; La Vanguardia 26 July 1917.
5. Fraternidad Reseña (1918), report to joint FOF-Fraternidad meeting 16 Dec. 1917; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, Minutes FOF-Fraternidad meeting 3 Aug. 1917.
6. La Organización Obrera Aug. 1917; La Vanguardia 11 Aug. 1917. It is interesting to note that there is no evidence that pressure from women ended or curtailed any railway strike movement before 1922. They were not often actively militant either, on behalf of railwaymen (strikes of women on their own account did of course occur), but in the federal capital at least most working class women worked (married or single). This enabled families to subsist during strikes with greater ease than they could outside Buenos Aires, where the single male breadwinner was the norm. This was noted by Ruzo of the DNT as a particular cause of hardship among the Rosario railway families during the FCCA strike (La Prensa 16 Aug. 1917, 17 Aug. 1917).

were unwilling to cause further hardship to their families by failing to bring in even the reduced wages they could earn on short time.

On 3 August La Fraternidad and FOF agreed to strike, but the former was still involved in negotiation with the Minister of Public Works to try and avert trouble, and delays in communication caused FOF to grow impatient.[1] Suspicions were thus aroused, but the Strike Committee (consisting of San Sebastián, Sbranca and Bazán for La Fraternidad and Rosáenz, Plazas and Tonizzo for FOF), finally issued instructions for the strike to start at midnight on 11 August.[2] La Fraternidad issued a manifesto on 11 August advising its members not to join the movement after all, but to accept the solution offered on 7-8 August, which provided for a return to work and a DNT investigation (almost certain to favour the workers) of the Polizzi-Fernández cases.[3] Two days later the CD reversed its decision by a unanimous resolution because of the risks if the strike remained partial and because their members on the FCCA were determined to strike.[4]

The confusion over the facts is reflected in press reports of events. The FOF representatives in Rosario, Mansilla and Giordano, tried to gain the men's acceptance of the 7-8 August deal, while the CF in Buenos Aires rejected it. The strike, which was slow in getting started, developed into a total and violent movement, with the continued active participation of women, many detentions and injuries and one death.[5] On 15 August the DNT report was published,[6] and the government enforced the Railway Law against the company (for the first and only time); two days later train services

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1. La Organización Obrera August 1917.
2. Fraternidad Reseña (1918) Report to joint FOF-Fraternidad meeting 16 Dec. 1917; La Organización Obrera August 1917.
3. La Vanguardia 8 Aug. 1917; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares Circular 41, 11 Aug. 1917.
4. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 13 Aug. 1917.
5. RRP 24 Aug. 1917; La Vanguardia 12 Aug. 1917, 13 Aug. 1917, 15 Aug. 1917.
6. Ruzo's report favoured the workers, denying that the sacked men had merely been suspended, as the company had tried to make out, and drawing attention to the poor living conditions of the Rosario railway families (La Vanguardia 16 Aug. 1917; La Prensa 16 Aug. 1917, 17 Aug. 1917). Rosario railwaymen tended to be the only breadwinner in the family (see note 6, p.115). Living conditions were likely to be worse than those in the railway colonies (see Chapter 1 p.24) though less restricted; they can hardly have been worse than those in remote regions.

began again, while the workshops were reopened on 21 August and the 20,000 strikers returned to work.[1]

The FCCA strike was a victory for the workers' cause, but like the Tafí Viejo dispute it demonstrated the weakness of the bonds between La Fraternidad and FOF when they came to be tested, as well as the failure of both to control their members. Both these conflicts, which acted as triggers for the general strike in September, were the result of disciplinary questions. Thus they came in the tradition of solidarity strikes which had established itself in Argentina, strikes which, for generally poor results, were costly in both manpower and funds. Both strikes originated in centres outside the federal capital, in the homes of huge newly-established workshops, where anarchism was stronger than in Buenos Aires, partly through long-term influences and partly because the new style of syndicalism exemplified in the dealings of FORA IX with government had yet to penetrate. In the very near future, the railway leaders' approach to disciplinary disagreements was to negotiate with the DG FFCC in conjunction with the companies; disputes could be settled by an exchange of memoranda and telephone calls instead of a mass strike.

Nevertheless, the winter of 1917 saw an escalation of agitation and strikes on Argentine railways which finally forced La Fraternidad and the FOF to act in concert again, this time on a national scale.[2] At the same time relations between La Fraternidad and FOF were strained. Recriminations over the FCCA strike began at once, with FOF accusing La Fraternidad of complicity with the Minister of Public Works and of spinelessness in the face of the employers. The footplatemen retorted that the indiscipline of the rank and file - both strikes had started without reference to the guidelines of the Solidarity Pact - was the result of FOF's extremist political attitudes.[3]

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1. La Vanguardia 18 Aug.1917; La Organización Obrera Aug.1917; RRP 24 Aug.1917.
2. During August and September movements of varying importance and intensity began on the FCCN at San Cristóbal, FCPSF, Cía Gral, FCCC and the Midland Railway of Buenos Aires.
3. La Organización Obrera Aug.1917.

However, FOF's growth during and after the Rosario movement was stupendous. Fifteen new sections emerged in August, and the Rosario sections (traffic and workshops) totalled 4500 members, whereas before they had mustered only 700.[1] Some sources quote a membership figure of 80,000 or even 90,000 for the FOF in 1917 which (in terms of paid-up membership at least) was grossly exaggerated.[2] However, whatever the accurate figures (and an estimate of 40,000 or 50,000 would seem to be the absolute maximum for paid-up members in September 1917), there must have been impressive growth to inspire these high reckonings.

The success of the FCCA strikers, and the apparent partiality of the government (which evaporated soon after the strike of August 1917) alarmed railway owners, whose slightly improved traffic returns of 1917 were more than compensated for by rising costs, so that the ratio of expenses to receipts was constantly deteriorating.[3] The month of September saw the production of lists of workers' grievances on every railway in the republic, and the Congress seemed likely to legislate what would have been a costly working regulation for the companies, this being the issue underlying the greater part of the men's claims.[4]

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1. La Organización Obrera 1 Sept.1917.

2. In April 1917 FOF's Third Congress announced membership of 9,322, and a tenfold increase seems inconceivable; however, it is recorded that FOF sent out 20,000 application forms in August 1917 (La Vanguardia 7 Apr.1917; DNT Boletin Apr. 1919; see Chapter 7 pp.250-252).

3. Economist 29 Oct. 1921 gives the following table:

Ratio of Expenses to receipts, 1913-1920

Company	1913/14	1914/15	1915/16	1916/17	1917/18	1918/19	1919/20
FCP	62.63	61.70	61.60	65.68	65.80	71.51	69.69
FCS	58.56	60.44	57.04	64.06	76.16	77.96	69.19
FCO	58.82	59.67	58.22	66.88	75.68	75.08	69.48
FCCA	58.84	58.43	64.53	68.71	73.93	84.60	67.66

See Goodwin Los ferrocarriles británicos y la UCR 1916-1930 (Buenos Aires, La Bastilla, 1974) p.151 ff. for question of railway tariffs in relation to labour issues.

4. RRP 31 Aug. 1917.

FOF and La Fraternidad circulated their sections and sought to produce a unified set of demands before the agitation forced a strike.[1] However, by mid-September the Compañía General and FCCC were already on strike. FOF's Council decided that the strike would have to be declared company-by-company as the claims, demanding better wages and improvements in hours and conditions, were completed.[2] La Fraternidad rejected arbitration in the disputes which had begun, thus pledging its support for the general movement.[3]

Within a few days the general strike was in progress; the movement had snowballed, but the official ultimatum to the companies expired on 24 September.[4] La Fraternidad put out its united claim on 20 September,[5] with the help of the sections in and around the capital and a delegation from a Rosario Coordinating Committee, a body whose function was obscure but which apparently dated from the united action of footplatemen and general railway staff in the FCCA general strike.[6] The announcement warned against extravagant expenditure (on telegrams, for instance) and against any violence or sabotage.

The strike was complete, with the exception of the La Plata-5th Meridian Railway (hereafter FCMV^{O}) whose claims were settled but which later downed

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1. La Organización Obrera 15 Sept.1917 (FOF Circular 46, 12 Sept.1917); La Fraternidad 15 July 1917; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 14 Sept.1917.

2. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 14 Sept.1917. FOF was at this time contending with divisionism which was a serious threat in some of the northern sections; La Fraternidad was under attack from some disenchanted ex-members of the CD (those removed in 1916: see note 4 p.109).

3. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 16 Sept.1917.

4. Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga in Reseña (1918) p.66.

5. La Fraternidad stated that the rank and file had been aware of plans to call a general strike at the end of the year, but that this aim had been brought forward by the success of the FCCA strike and consequent enthusiasm. They presented claims on the basis of the opinions received so far, which were united in their desire to see a full working regulation (Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 8 Sept. 1917).

6. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, Actas 19 Sept.1917, circular 57, 20 Sept. 1917.

tools again in support of their comrades,[1] and the State Railways, whose claims were not ready and which did not strike until 3 October; 120,000 men were involved.[2]

Inside the railwaymen's joint strike committee, which first met on 17 September, divisions arose from the disparate interests of the groups.[3] FOF's members were advised by a permanent assembly of delegates which consisted of senior militants from the sections in and near the capital, who had originally come to devise a united set of claims but who La Fraternidad suspected of being retained to obstruct the strike committee's work, as well as a group from Rosario (whose Fraternidad contingent has already been mentioned) who remained in Buenos Aires.[4] On 25 September the delegates rejected government arbitration because it had as a precondition the return of all to work, agreeing only to run trains carrying milk and vegetables for hospitals; the next day the FOF delegation consolidated the claims of all the railways into eleven points, which were regarded as a prior condition for acceptance of any arbitration scheme. La Fraternidad and the telegraphists (whose presence on the committee is discussed below) agreed to FOF's preconditions, though they had hoped to agree to arbitration on terms easier for capital to accept.[5]

FOF's assembly passed a resolution moved by Mansilla on 27 September which is worthy of comment. It referred to the urgent need to overcome the irrevocable differences between the strikers and the companies, and proposed the following solution.

> 'considering that the FOF represents the life forces of this movement claiming redress of grievances in which the workers of the workshops, traffic, traction, permanent way and administration are participating, it declares that

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1. Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga 10 Oct. 1917, 11 Oct. 1917, in Reseña (1918) p.80-81; the date in Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.208 is wrong.
2. La Vanguardia 4 Oct. 1917; Goodwin op.cit. p.103.
3. Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga in Reseña (1918), p.55 (meeting of 17 Sept. 1917).
4. Fraternidad Actas Asamblea Extraordinaria in Reseña (1918) p.23.
5. La Organización Obrera 4 Oct.1917, 26 Jan.1918; La Protesta 30 Sept.1917.

> in accordance with Article 2(b) of the FOF's statutes, it is ready to assume direction and operation of the railways, in the certainty that with this step the workers and employees would find that they could receive a just recompense for their productive efforts; this step would bring as an immediate consequence the permanent normalisation of the general service and likewise constitute the best guarantee of the progress of the country'.[1]

This motion was sent (along with other declarations) to the Ministry of Public Works by Mansilla, whose unilateral action was condemned by the joint strike committee. However, they resolved to reiterate the substance of this motion in any case, adding that if the railwaymen did not take charge of the railways, the government should do so.[2]

The importance of this motion is difficult to evaluate. It is evident that nothing came of it, and there was little reaction to it from either the bourgeois or PS press. The leaders of both unions apparently accepted the principle of workers' control or nationalisation, but neither of these matters received much attention in the journals, circulars or minutes surviving.[3] On the whole, the isolated nature of this expression of sentiment makes it a mistake to regard it as of great political significance in the trade union movement and indeed it is difficult to explain the sudden emergence of the issue unless it was a sign that the union felt confident of the progress of the strike. More interesting perhaps, is the strike committee's apparent faith that the government would act on their behalf if it took over the railways.[4]

Mansilla's activities were condemned by the strike committee, though naturally the desire of FOF members on it to avoid interference from the

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1. La Organización Obrera 4 Oct. 1917.

2. La Vanguardia 29 Sept. 1917; Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga 28 Sept. 1917 in Reseña (1918) p.71.

3. Alfredo López Historia del movimiento social y la clase obrera argentina (Buenos Aires, Peña Lillo, 2nd ed. 1974) p.217 over-estimates the importance of this motion, doubtless in the light of the Peronist nationalisation of the railways of 1948. One section took a particular interest; Buenos Aires (FCS) wanted the strike committee to press for nationalisation (La Vanguardia 30 Sept. 1917).

4. See also Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.210. La Fraternidad applauded the nationalisation of Swiss railways in 1914 but remarked that a comparable step in Argentina would be counter-productive because of the repressive attitudes of the Government (La Fraternidad 1 May 1914).

CF of the union, its employees, or the FORA elements was less fervent than La Fraternidad's. The Mixed Committee was divided on the place of the Argentine Telegraphists Association in its midst, as only one of its four representatives was a railwayman.[1] The representatives remained, as La Fraternidad wished, but feeling ran higher as the division between FOF and the other unions on the committee became clearer.

The government, with the assistance of the DNT (its last sortie into labour relations in this government), drew up proposals on railway working to replace those held up in the senate, which the unions were prepared to consider.[2] The companies rejected the scheme and the DG FFCC was directed to prepare a decree which was published on 8 October and was rejected by the unions, since it bore little relation to the more favourable project of Dr Ruzo.[3] The decree obliged the companies to re-establish a provisional service, which they could not run.[4]

By this time the strike committee's precarious unity was collapsing. FOF, outnumbered by the moderates of La Fraternidad and AAT, can hardly be blamed for pursuing its aims through the CF. However, Mansilla's intrigues in particular were not conducive to a united movement.[5]

On 13 October the government issued a modified regulation in decree form. La Fraternidad and AAT wanted to accept it at once, while FOF's council rejected it out of hand. The telegrams on the subject received from the sections were inconclusive, though the largest single body of opinion favoured acceptance.[6] On 16 October FOF withdrew from the Joint Committee, because the footplatemen and telegraphists were instructing their men to return to work, and the unions resumed separate negotiations with the government.[7] FOF's delegation to Yrigoyen agreed to return to work on

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1. Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga (30 Sept.1917) in Reseña (1918) pp.73-74.
2. RRP 5 Oct. 1917.
3. La Vanguardia 7 Oct. 1917, 9 Oct. 1917.
4. La Organización Obrera 13 Oct. 1917; La Vanguardia 11 Oct. 1917.
5. See minutes of strike committee, and of extraordinary congresses of 1917 for abundant evidence.
6. Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga (16/17 Oct.1917) in Reseña (1918) p.84.
7. La Organización Obrera 20 Oct.1917.

18 October. This volte face - only three days before, FORA IX, FOF and FOM had declared that an immediate general strike of all trades would be called if the decree of 13 October was enforced - was accepted at once by FOF's permanent delegation.[1] The Socialists of the CF sought a settlement, and the rank and file were ready for one, so the more intransigent majority of the council decided to yield, and try instead to make political capital out of a reasonably honourable settlement.[2]

The unions involved in the strike's conduct had not surrendered their particular interests to the good of the general movement, partly because their conceptions of the general good were so varied. Indeed, three of the main figures turned out later to betray all the principles they appeared to stand for. Claros, President of AAT, was a Radical crony, Mansilla a corrupt autocrat who also ended up in the Radical's embrace; and San Sebastián, President of La Fraternidad, betrayed his socialism and his union as a dishonest and sycophantic member of the Board of the Pensions Fund.

One of the features of the general rail strike was its appeal among other elements of the working class.[3] The railwaymen's plight was widely known from the press; redundancies, short time and cuts in money wages had made their jobs precarious and poorly paid.[4] FOF commanded respect

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1. La Vanguardia 18 Oct. 1917; La Organización Obrera 20 Oct. 1917.

2. After FOF and FORA IX representatives had seen Yrigoyen, Mansilla allegedly announced that the strike had been ended 'in honour of the President'. Much was made of this by the PS and the anarchists (the latter were especially gleeful because Mansilla had deserted them in 1915). There is no evidence that Mansilla was close to the UCR at this time, as he later became, and in any case he was not alone on the CF of FOF, which included several ideological tendencies. Nor did he have as much individual power as the secretary of La Fraternidad; perhaps this was a false comparison made by the PS whose links with the footplatemen were so much closer.

3. $3000 was voted from funds by FORA IX components (it is likely that a great deal more came from subscriptions, as most unions had paltry funds; compare the sums collected by subscription in 1907, chapter 2 pp.65-66). All the unions involved, including FOM, had severe financial troubles after the strike (La Organización Obrera 13 Oct. 1917, 4 Oct. 1917; FORA IX Actas 14 Oct. 1917; Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga passim).

4. The situation was exacerbated by the deductions for the pensions fund, which had been made for almost two years, but which were still not being paid out to retiring railwaymen.

as a pillar of FORA IX, and the backing of La Fraternidad for the strike (misgivings aside) was an encouragement to the more timid and more prosperous members of the working class to support the men's pretensions.

The rump of the anarchist FORA, now known as FORA V, declared a general strike as soon as the rail strike was total; though this body was insignificant in terms of the number and strength of its adherent trade unions, it still had influence among anarchist workers of other trades. The strike was, however, tentative and abortive.[1] What did happen was that a number of strikes broke out in trades where discontent had been growing and where the disturbances on the railways proved contagious; this pattern was to recur in 1919. In Greater Buenos Aires alone the following were among the trades that struck at this time: textile workers, meat packers, tramwaymen, shoe operatives, tobacco workers, sugar refinery workers, cabinet makers, graphical workers, chauffeurs, taxi drivers, workers of the Central Produce Market, of soap, china and match factories and laundry employees all pursued their claims. Likewise this period saw a strike at the metal workshops of Pedro Vasena, where the trouble began which triggered off the tragic events of January 1919.[2]

A serious stance in solidarity with the railwaymen was adopted by the seamen. FOM registered its strong support for FORA IX's declaration of 30 September, made at the Deliberative Council meeting attended by 35 member unions and four autonomous bodies; it stated its great sympathy for the movement, urged all unions to assist financially and authorised FORA's council to declare a general strike in the event of government repression (a state of siege, for example).[3] It was the so-called 'coercive decree' of 8 October imposing the return to provisional working, coupled with the provision of troops by the government to effect this measure, which caused

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1. La Protesta 2 Oct. 1917, 4 Oct. 1917.
2. Marotta op.cit. Vol II pp.212-213; La Organización Obrera 20 Oct.1917.
3. FORA Actas 30 Sept.1917; La Organización Obrera 4 Oct. 1917.

FOM to call a strike of river and coastal shipping on 12 October.[1]

On 11 October FOF's council appealed for a second time to FOM for their support - on the first occasion FOM had insisted on waiting - stating that

> 'it should be borne in mind that the conflict the National Executive is pursuing and will continue to pursue will bring with it as a natural consequence clashes between the workers and the armed forces, for the workers cannot look on indifferent if the trains are running'.[2]

FOM's leaders did not now need to be pressed to act in solidarity, though two of FOF's representatives at these joint meetings of FOM, FOF and FORA IX were less than eager; both, ex-anarchists, were expelled with Mansilla for corruption in May 1918.

The support of FOM was probably decisive, though the government's decree of 13 October had probably been prepared by that time. The movement had weakened since the decree of 8 October. La Fraternidad commented later:

> 'After some three weeks of strike, alarming news reached the strike committee that some sections were beginning to disband. The retreat began precisely in those sections which had wanted the strike at all costs, and the comrades in retreat were workers who had belonged to the Federation. At that time, companies and government were preparing the famous provisional service and we know of many who were already prepared to offer themselves to the companies if they would accept them'.[3]

This weakening was accelerated by the imminence of rupture on the strike committee and the level of repression employed. The government introduced troops promptly and the complaints of brutality, arbitrary arrest and unlawful acts were many. La Fraternidad condemned the use of force and claimed that most acts of sabotage and disruption were the work of the companies.[4] There were serious incidents; first in Rosario, where two died in a clash with arriving troops before the general strike had even started, which brought protests from FOF.[5] In Mendoza, in the first few

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1. FORA Actas 11 Oct. 1917, 12 Oct. 1917.
2. FORA Actas 11 Oct. 1917.
3. Fraternidad Circular 64, 10 Nov. 1917, in Reseña (1918) p.49.
4. La Vanguardia 21 Sept. 1917.
5. La Vanguardia 22 Sept. 1917, 23 Sept. 1917, 25 Sept. 1917.

days of the strike, four men and two women died in a pitched battle between strikers and forces;[1] at this stage the government's position was equivocal, as the PS explained.

> 'We must know if the Radical statesmen, who have always thought of the army as a political organ of the first magnitude, are proposing to use it in strikes, denying hypocritically any responsibility for its outrages and in effect admitting that to avoid abuses by the strikers there is no other cure but assassination committed with impunity'.[2]

On the State Railways repression and violence were particularly bad; four men were killed in Tafí Viejo and Tucumán, and there were repeated protests over army activity on the FCCN.[3]

The worst attack occurred in Talleres (FCS) almost at the end of the strike, where five were killed and nine wounded during a mass meeting. The anarchists criticised FORA IX for not calling a general strike over the incident, a course advocated at a joint meeting of FOF, FOM and FORA IX by the railwayman Andrés Solanot.[4] However, the tragedy was commemorated annually with marches and speeches.

Overall, at least twenty strikers died and over a hundred were wounded during the movement.[5] According to La Protesta,

> 'In little more than a year, the Radicals have committed more outrages and iniquities than any other loathsome government of the former oligarchy'.[6]

and Dickmann pointed out in Congress for the PS that more deaths had occurred as a result of the use of troops in the general rail strike than in any earlier conflict.[7] The strikers, despite acts of sabotage, had killed nobody; the burning of stations at Bolívar (FCS), and Agüero (FCCC), of stockpiled wood fuel at Huinca Renancó (FCP) and Pico (FCO), and of warehouses and waggons, as well as the lifting of rails, cost the companies money but

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1. La Organización Obrera 4 Oct. 1917; RRP 28 Sept.1917; La Vanguardia 26 Sept. 1917.
2. La Vanguardia 27 Sept. 1917.
3. La Protesta 7 Oct. 1917; La Vanguardia 5 Oct. 1917, 6 Oct. 1917.
4. La Vanguardia 15 Oct. 1917; La Protesta 16 Oct. 1917; FORA Actas 12 Oct.1917 (must be mistake in date on minute).
5. La Vanguardia 23 Oct. 1917.
6. La Protesta 31 Jan. 1918.
7. Diario de Sesiones 8 Jan.1918 quoted in Godio La Semana Trágica (Buenos Aires. 2nd ed.. 1973) p.29

not lives.[1] The rail unions preferred to play down the role of their members in the destruction, until the 'coercive' decree caused them to notify the government that they could no longer be responsible for events.[2]

The government did not take a passive role in this movement, favourable to the workers' excesses. It is likewise very difficult to detect evidence of German plots which were also cited as a possible cause of trouble. Even the Review of the River Plate, always anxious to associate the Radical government with anti-British feeling, admitted this; strike movements also affected the German electricity company at this time, and seemed to be no respecters of nationality.[3] However, the capitalist press berated it for the ineffectual attempts made to settle the conflict, as did the PS, whose part in this dispute might perhaps have been greater had the party not been in the midst of the debate which eventually caused the Internationalist group to split away and form the PSI (later the PC). Some Socialists, indeed, were censorious of the strike movement because of the inactivity it forced on many other trades. Repetto expressed this view strongly in La Vanguardia after the strike, urging that strikes should be avoided unless related unions complied.[4] He cited the Triple Alliance (of railway, general transport and miners' unions) in Britain as a model, and even made a parallel with Wilson's League of Nations. Not surprisingly, the implications of these criticisms infuriated FORA IX.[5]

Dissention and disorder, 1917-1918

The strike settlement was unsatisfactory from the start, and the next six months witnessed a series of partial disputes over the interpretation of the regulation embodied in the decree of 13 October

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1. RRP 21 Sept.1918, 28 Sept.1918; La Protesta 10 Oct.1917.
2. Fraternidad Actas de la Comisión de Huelga in Reseña (1918) p.84, (meeting of 16/17 Oct. 1917).
3. La Vanguardia 19 Sept.1917; RRP 28 Sept.1917.
4. La Vanguardia 5 Nov.1917.
5. La Organización Obrera 10 Nov.1917.

Principal railway strikes in Argentina, October 1917 - May 1918

Dates	Railway	Location, department	Causes/demands	Length of strike	Comments/result
18–22Oct	FCCA	Rosario-Pérez workshops	Release of strikers imprisoned in general strike	3 days	Not known
18–25Oct	FCPSF	Santa Fe and ? elsewhere	Satisfaction of all demands from general strike	7 days	Mansilla saw Minister of Public Works seeking solution, achieved with Fraternidad help
18–25Oct	FCCN	Taff Viejo workshop	Lockout	7 days	Reopened workshops not reinstating 60; 25 sacked as dangerous. Complaints Admin. of State Rlys. Inconclusive
23–24Oct	FCP	Alianza workshop	Old contract work regulations being enforced	2 days	
12–20Nov	FCCN	Taff Viejo workshops	Non-compliance with regulation; sacked men not reinstated	15 days	Admin. trying to force men to join UCR union; tried to exclude 250 men; sacked strike leader; Minister of Public Works promised just solution. FOF delegate im risoned.
27 Nov–1 Dec	FCCC	Rosario telegraphists, spreading	Hours of work; FCCC trying to sue men	5 days	Favourable settlement
5–10 Jan	FCS	Km 4 and Km 5	Guards sacked for refusing to break meat-packing strike	5 days	Satisfactory settlement
22 Jan–14 Feb	FCCA, FCCC	Tucumán, Alta Córdoba, La Banda; then centred Rosario	Abuses of regulation; removal of a foreman; wage rises	22–24 days	FOF tried to stop strike but it continued in Rosario so they made it official;negotiations; some sabotage/violence; ended by arbitration.
22–27Jan	Midland	All + Fraternidad	Regulation not applicable on provincial railway	6 days	Satisfactory settlement
9–17Feb	FCS	Restaurants dept.	Exclusion from regulation, long hours, heavy fines	9 days	Sacked blacklegs and concluded satisfactory settlement.
18–22Feb	FCER/NEA	Traffic dept.	Abuses of regulation	5 days	Government to settle claim; some violence
26 Feb–2 Mar	FCP	Traffic, engine sheds	Abuse of regulation, long hours, men dismissed for working to rule	4 days	Official FOF strike from start; troops put down strikers; government decreed return to work
15–29Mar	FCO	Signalmen, construction gangs	Wage rises	15 days	Free Labour Association scabs used; FOF support for strike, but lost through lack of solidarity
11–26Mar	FCCN	San Juan	Pay arrears	14 days	Large anarchist-run movement; got promise of visit from paymaster
13 Apr–1 May	FCP + FCS	Guards; began B. Blanca (FCP), Saavedra (FCS)	Suspensions because of disagreement over non-diagrammed service; 12-hour days being worked	23 days	FOF declared general strike FCS (FCP) 17 (23) April; mild petition. Fraternidad willing to help by negotiating only. Defeated, 1500 redundant, despite intercession of FORA IX.
19–24Apr	FCPSF	Permanent way, workshops	Unjust transfer	c.1 week	Run by divisionist group; petered out.

and amplified on 21 November. The strikes have been summarised in the table, since most of their details are of little general concern. However, it must be noted at once that only FOF recognised any of these strikes, while La Fraternidad refused to become officially involved in any militant action.

The important consequences of the general strike for the trade union movement centred on its effects on relations between the two bodies united in the Solidarity Pact of 1916. The minutiae of the regulation won from the government are not of great importance, particularly as their enforcement was agonisingly slow; even the 10% wage rise was evaded as far as possible by the companies. One or two groups of railwaymen criticised the settlement as inadequate in itself, and many of these seceded from FOF (and some even from La Fraternidad).[1] However, the bulk of the disputes concerned efforts to see the limited settlement reached on 18 October enforced, rather than extending these demands.

La Fraternidad and FOF both held extraordinary congresses in Buenos Aires in December 1917, at which the conduct of the strike was exhaustively discussed. These congresses, both of which opened on 15 December, yielded sorry results for the unity of the railway trades.[2] La Fraternidad was outraged by a proposal for discussion at the federation's congress, for the fusion of all railway trade unions in a 'Federación Ferroviaria' with the continued existence of La Fraternidad as a mere friendly society for those railwaymen who wanted that service.[3] This, the CD claimed, was an attempt to

'dispose of La Fraternidad like the goods of a dead man'.[4]

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1. This process had already begun before the general strike, on the State Railways in particular, over FOF's refusal to rush into the organisation of sindicatos por ferrocarril (La Vanguardia 20 Oct. 1917; see Chapter 7 pp.268-270. FOF Circular 46, 12 Sept. 1917, in La Organización Obrera 15 Sept.1917).

2. Fraternidad Actas Congreso Extraordinario in Reseña (1918) p.3.

3. La Organización Obrera 1 Dec. 1917 (FOF Circular 57 of 26 Nov. 1917) Another similar scheme was proposed by FOF Buenos Aires (FCS) section (La Vanguardia 11 Dec. 1917).

4. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares circular 75, no date (late 1917).

This scheme was not new; Vicente de Todaro, a life-long enemy of the footplatemen's union and a member of FOF's council since 1913, had proposed it at the general union's first congress in March 1915, where it had been rejected.[1] However, it was an insult to the footplatemen's union, and the end result was that La Fraternidad opened its membership to a much broader range, to include all railway staff whose work was covered by the government regulation, and to organise a parallel group among the administrative employees.[2] It justified this move on the grounds that all railway workers should have the right to choose which of two clearly-differentiated unions they wished to join.

> 'The Federation is a society of direct trade union activity, which favours partial strikes and which is managed by people who do not belong to the trade and yet who figure as the only leaders and heads of the organisation. La Fraternidad, by contrast, is a society organised a base múltiple, in other words organised as much for resistance as for mutual assistance among its members; it is a society recognised as a legal entity and thus responsible before the law and justice, recognised by the government and respected by the companies, and lastly it is led by authentic railwaymen, responsible before all for their actions. Thus the difference between the two societies is notable; they both claim to have the same end in view, but each goes by completely different routes'.[3]

The declaration meant intense rivalry between the two unions; it arose from a fruitless joint meeting held on 16 December. Acrimony developed over FOF's refusal to allow AAT delegates to sit on the committee established to outline the proposals for unity, on the ground that most railway telegraphists who belonged to a union at all belonged to FOF.[4]

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1. La Vanguardia 9 Mar.1915. Vicente de Todaro (D'Acquila - pseudonym Alma Templada). Began work FCO 1908, probably goods guard, Caballito or very near federal capital. CF FOF from 1913, but resigned Oct. 1915 (temporarily) over funding of proposed railwaymen's magazine. Active syndicalist; representative to Congreso de Concentración Sept.1914; December 1918 supernumerary member CF FORA IX, full member FORA IX CF from Jan.1921; inexhaustible writer for La Organización Obrera, involved in its production (1921 described as printing worker, though in 1919 had been secretary of FOF Caballito section). Strong attacks on La Fraternidad 1917-1918, but equally severe on divisionism in FOF. Frequent speaker and propagandist; member strike committee, general strike 1917 and FCCC/FCCA strike Feb.1918, on FORA IX general strike propaganda committee May-June 1918.
2. Fraternidad Actas Congreso Extraordinario in Reseña (1918) p.28.
3. Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares circular 78, 27 Dec. 1917.
4. La Organización Obrera 29 Dec. 1917.

Clearly, the resentments went much deeper than this, although the presence of AAT (whose status as a railway union, alleged by La Fraternidad, was highly questionable) would have made it impossible for FOF's views to prevail, which was what mattered to them at this time. A series of notes was exchanged; La Fraternidad had left the joint meeting because its standing orders were thrust aside by angry FOF delegates and chairs, punches and insults were thrown.[1] In the end FOF declared de facto fusion, or in other words its intention to include footplatemen in its ranks.[2]

The other work of the congresses was less important. La Fraternidad's assembly approved the regulation in general, after much detailed discussion.[3] FOF resolved to press for the inclusion of all railway staff in it, as well as insisting that the agreed wage levels should be paid.[4] This congress also agreed to leave the organisation of sindicatos por ferrocarril to the CF, who were to circulate the sections with proposals.[5]

Thus at the end of the year relations between the general rail union and the footplatemen's society reached a low point. Not all the leading figures were at loggerheads; Juan F.Tato of Alianza (FCP) conducted a single-handed campaign on La Fraternidad's CD to reverse the rigid policy towards FOF.[6]

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1. La Vanguardia 18 Dec. 1917; Fraternidad Actas Congreso Extraordinario in Reseña (1918) p.27.
2. La Organización Obrera 29 Dec.1917 - minutes FOF Congress for 19 Dec.1917.
3. Fraternidad Actas Congreso Extraordinario in Reseña (1918) p.29.
4. La Organización Obrera 29 Dec. 1917 - minutes FOF Congress for 19 Dec.1917.
5. This resolution caused the Santa Fe (FCPSF) section to secede from FOF, as they were no longer satisfied with the mode of organisation (La Vanguardia 23 Dec. 1917; La Organización Obrera 29 Dec.1917).
6. Juan F. TATO. (NB not José Tato of 1912 Fraternidad strike committee). 1915 critic of Fraternidad maladministration, resigned (from Alianza FCP section); Oct. 1916 accepted as FCP representative on CD despite lack of seniority; Sept.-Oct. 1917 on strike committee, general strike; Dec. 1917 withdrew from Fraternidad assembly in protest at behaviour towards FOF, later returned; member CD Fraternidad 1916; 1917-1918; 1922. 1920 backed unsuccessful move for joint congress before Fraternidad started talks on wages scales (proposal of Rufino Jodsinsky); member first JC Confraternidad 1920-1921. Tireless worker for railway unity, critical of Fraternidad's narrow base throughout career. Political sympathies unknown.

The Socialists among the leaders of the two unions (of whom there were several) debated hotly over the responsibility for the failure of unity.[1] With the Socialists in conflict among themselves, unity seemed even more distant.

In the first half of 1918 FOF had to handle two very serious threats to its existence: the growth of indiscipline, as well as divisionism, in its ranks, and the discovery that its employees and some of its council had defrauded the institution and exceeded their function. The evidence of indiscipline was manifold; of the strikes summarised in the table, the only movement conducted strictly according to the statutes was that on the FCP in February-March 1918.[2] All the rest were more or less unilateral action by the section or sections where the particular grievance originated and FOF's CF was obliged to sanction the movements after the event.

The most severe case of indiscipline occurred over the FCCC-FCCA strike in January-February 1918. FOF issued a circular on 19 January which suggested taking advantage of the busy harvest period to embark on another general rail strike, since negotiations had failed, and asking sections to express opinions and prepare for a movement whose claims would be based on those presented and partly satisfied four months before.[3] A fortnight later the union's council condemned those who interpreted this circular as an order to rush into a strike. However,

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1. See Chapter 5 pp.207-209 for more details on these disputes.

2. La Organización Obrera 9 Mar.1918. Unions are often blamed for allowing their members to act unofficially, just as FOF was by La Fraternidad and the PS (see note 1 above). The same groups blame unions for being undemocratic and unresponsive to their members; however, the logical response to unofficial strikes would be increased official militancy, opposed by the critics of such unions as FOF. Unofficial strikes often receive sympathy but not authorisation from the union leadership if the cause is good, either because union leaders do not want to be associated with unconstitutional action or because they lack the financial resources to make the dispute official. Moreover, however destructive of organisation unofficial action may be, it does produce contact between workers and managers at local level which may in turn benefit consciousness and organisation. These and many other relevant points about indiscipline and unofficial strikes are discussed more fully in Richard Hyman Strikes (London, Fontana, 2nd ed. 1977) pp. 37-51.

3. Circular 67 of FOF, 19 Jan. 1918, printed in RRP 25 Jan. 1918.

> 'as it is impossible to continue arguing as to who is wrong and who should be held responsible for a possible demoralisation, the CF decided in last night's meeting to declare a general strike de facto on these two lines'.[1]

This decision was taken for practical reasons, much against FOF's intentions, and created a risk that other companies would seek to advance their claims likewise. The council's attitude was different in the two substantial strikes on the FCS and FCP which finally, in their defeat, brought a close to this period of damaging agitation; it authorised the movements almost as soon as they had begun, rather than awaiting any further breach of discipline, and indeed the CF appeared enthusiastic for a general strike under the auspices of FORA IX.[2]

There are various possible explanations for this. Throughout the summer of 1917-1918, FOF had been unable to persuade La Fraternidad to participate in any strike movement;[3] indeed, in March the CD published the notorious circular 11, which said that

> 'Whenever FOF declares a general strike without previous consultation with La Fraternidad, our members will consider themselves UNENCUMBERED BY ANY MORAL OR MATERIAL OBLIGATION'.[4]

All pleas for solidarity were to be conducted through the CD, even if FOF had been trying to bypass this procedure.

The consistent failure and government repression of the partial strikes added to the drivers' reluctance to become entangled. The footplatemen's withdrawal meant that FOF had to act alone, and encouraged it to draw closer to FORA IX, the only consistent supporter the union's leaders had.

Secondly, the strikes on the FCCC and FCCA had demonstrated that at least a portion of the rank and file were in militant mood. This activity, 'setting aside the norms of trade union conduct', was condemned by FOF

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1. Circular 69 of FOF, 2 Feb. 1918, printed in RRP 8 Feb. 1918.
2. La Organización Obrera 1 May 1918.
3. See letters exchanged February 1918, published in La Organización Obrera 16 Feb. 1918; further letters May-June are published in El Obrero Ferroviario Aug. 1918. Locally some Fraternidad sections had responded unofficially; hence Circular 11 of Fraternidad below.
4. La Vanguardia 23 Apr. 1918; Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, circular 11, 20 Mar. 1918.

leaders as stubbornly syndicalist as Vicente de Todaro whose denunciation of these strikes and that on his own FCO were severe, so that it was not only Socialists who were openly critical of the rank and file's conduct at this time.[1] However, the employees Mansilla and Giordano, and some members of the CF, thought that their positions could be most easily secured by adopting the stance of the most militant,[2] and responding to the demands of at least a section of their members.

FORA IX's willingness to become involved in the FCS and FCP strikes was shown in the decision of its CF to put its influence at the disposal of the railwaymen in effecting a solution to the movement, and in putting a stop to the many police abuses.[3] The Deliberative Council of FORA IX agreed that a general strike should be called if the directors of FOF, FOM and FORA IX agreed to do so; a week later, on 3 May, FOF's secretary acted unilaterally and declared a general rail strike, an order which reversed the decision to return to work made by the CF in conjunction with the strike committees of the two railways in conflict.[4] Finally, FORA IX's council agreed with the scheme of the Socialist Alejandro Comolli, of FOF, that negotiations to see that all the strikers were reinstated should be exhausted before thinking of the general strike.[5]

These changes and reversals were very difficult to follow, and confusion was compounded by inaccurate press reporting of events, but the most dramatic attendant event was the exposure of the fraudulent and undemocratic procedures of FOF's paid employees. Mansilla issued the call to a general strike despite the council's decision; the next day Comolli

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1. La Organización Obrera 13 Apr. 1918, 1 May 1918. See also Chapter 5.
2. For the debate see Chapter 5 pp. 207-209 ; La Vanguardia 21 Apr. 1918, 24 Apr. 1918, 26 Apr. 1918, 29 Apr. 1918, 30 Apr. 1918; La Organización Obrera 1 May 1918, 14 May 1918.
3. FORA Actas 23 Apr. 1918.
4. FORA Actas 26 Apr. 1918, 3 May 1918, 5 May 1918; La Organización Obrera 14 May 1918 (FOF circular 81, 6 May 1918).
5. FORA Actas 5 May 1918.

uncovered this act and the CF reversed the order. The CF rejected the resignations of Mansilla and Giordano and dismissed them, but not before they had removed the lists of addresses and names of officials of all the sections.[1] The last act of this group was an abortive occupation of FOF's headquarters three weeks later, which lasted long enough for them to remove the petty cash, the new address book, and the outline proposals for organising sindicatos por ferrocarril; they also attempted to form a new CF with local officials, and sent out a false manifesto.[2] The genuine CF met at FORA IX's office with some local leaders and ejected the usurpers by force. Two members of the CF were sacked for their complicity: Cándido Villaró and José M. Amato, both of FCO.

Conclusion

With the expulsion of Mansilla and his friends, the failure of the FCS-FCP strikes, and the manifest indiscipline in the sections, FOF's position in mid-1918 was apparently precarious. The sustained and meteoric growth of the union since its foundation, and its ability to achieve compromise and cooperation with both FORA IX and La Fraternidad, seemed wasted. The great general railway strike of 1917 had yielded scant fruits, and any expectations under the Radical government of impartial treatment at the hands of security forces and troops, or of substantial legislative progress, had hardly been fulfilled. The triumph of the organisation of a politically neutral mass union of railwaymen, with beneficial consequences for its members and for the vitality of the entire Argentine labour movement, had been dissipated in fragmentation, disillusionment, and both material and spiritual impoverishment.

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1. La Organización Obrera 14 May 1918 (FOF Circular 81, 6 May 1918). Mansilla's letter of resignation succeeded in attacking the CF, FORA IX and even Francisco Rosanova, whose prolonged convalescence in the Córdoba hills soon came to an end (RRP 10 May 1918).

2. La Organización Obrera 15 June 1918 (FOF Circular 88, 6 June 1918); La Organización Obrera 1 June 1918 (FOF circulars 86 & 87, 26 May 1918, 25 May 1918).

Something like 1500 men remained redundant after the fiasco of the strikes on FCS and FCP. The best solution La Fraternidad could suggest was an attempt to institute an arbitration for each invididual case. Meanwhile, FORA's and FOF's councils campaigned officially for the projected general strike.[1] These alternative solutions appear almost as a parody of the differences which La Fraternidad and FOF had failed to resolve between them, each standing firm behind the ideology and practices which had so weakened the impact of the national railway strike. Nevertheless, a rapprochement was beginning, and as the syndicalist groups smarted under the other failures of 1918 - notably in the meat packing businesses - their still dominant members (FOF ceding first place to FOM for most of 1918) began to adopt a different approach to workers' grievances, to the scope and nature of their aspirations, recognising in this step the practical as opposed to traditional or rhetorical claims which past movements had actually sought. In the new approach FOF, despite its debilitated state in mid-1918, was to be the leader.

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1. La Organización Obrera 25 May 1918; La Vanguardia 15 May 1918, 16 May 1918.

Chapter 4. The achievement of practical unity, 1918-1922

The long struggle to organise a coherent general railway union acceptable to La Fraternidad culminated in October 1922 with the foundation of Unión Ferroviaria, whose statutes and organisation mirrored many aspects of the footplatemen's union. This chapter, which concludes the narrative history of the formative years of Argentine railway trade unions, is concerned with the processes which affected the general union, loosening the ties with the syndicalist movement and transforming it into a centralised body. The establishment of the Confraternidad Ferroviaria (by FOF and La Fraternidad) in 1920 was not the only reason for this change, though its effect on the syndicalist leadership of all organised labour turned out to be considerable. FORA IX itself suffered internal problems, and the decision to make yet another attempt to unite the labour movement in one non-political, revolutionary entity produced an unsatisfactory result in the Unión Sindical Argentina, which lost its most vital support when the railwaymen decided not to join it.

These events took place against a background of post-war recovery, which was by no means a lightning process but which certainly resulted in increased prosperity for the working class by 1922. Nevertheless, there were intense battles between capital and labour, the most notorious of which was the general strike of January 1919, the Semana Trágica (Tragic Week). This in many ways marked the end of an era, and even before it the priorities of both railway unions were undergoing changes; this chapter examines the progress of these changes, the continuing strains of opposition to them, and their eventual resolution.

Retrenchment, 1918

The 1918 general strike on behalf of fifteen hundred sacked employees of the Southern and Pacific Railways did not take place. The main stumbling block, according to FORA IX, was the insistence of La Fraternidad that all

legal channels must be exhausted. The CD maintained that

> 'The companies won the battle; they were the victors, and as such they have the right - a right born of might - to impose conditions. It is a situation in which we must accept the irremediable, but which on no account must be complicated in case it becomes utterly irremediable'.[1]

They even asserted that some of those dismissed did not deserve to be defended by the union, and that the companies should be permitted to weed these out by arbitration.[2]

This position was contested in a lengthy and fruitless correspondence, while FORA IX's strike committee gathered forces. In mid-June FORA IX proclaimed that

> 'There are times - like the present - when we must embark on action even at the risk of suffering a reverse'.[3]

However, despite the comparatively good progress of propaganda, the movement lost its impetus. The combination of La Fraternidad's refusal to participate (reinforced by the good progress of an arbitration procedure begun on the Compañía General), and the doubts among some influential leaders (like Senra Pacheco,[4] or Comolli who was standing in as secretary of FOF until Rosanova returned in June) were compounded by a factor that could not be ignored; the reports received from FOF's own sections showed that the railwaymen, on whose behalf the strike was being organised, were among the least willing to risk conflict.[5]

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1. Letter of CD Fraternidad to CF FOF, 14 May 1918, in El Obrero Ferroviario, August 1918.

2. The companies reserved the right to 'select'workers and refused to take on FOF activists (La Vanguardia 18 May 1918). Torello personally sympathised with the union case for reinstatement, but the government was impartial, which effectively favoured the companies' intransigent line (La Organización Obrera 25 May 1918; La Vanguardia 12 May 1918, 15 May 1918).

3. La Organización Obrera 15 June 1918.

4. La Vanguardia 26 June 1918. On Cía Gral arbitration, see Chapter 6 pp.246-247.

5. La Vanguardia 20 May 1918, 5 July 1918, 15 July 1918. A subscription initiated by Cañada de Gómez section for the victims of the FCS and FCP strikes raised only $2,350 (El Obrero Ferroviario Dec. 1918).

By mid-July, accusations that the companies were meddling in the agitation began to appear - a sure sign that the movement was weakening - and emphasis was placed on the need to gain the reinstatement of the dismissed men somehow, rather than the need to show the teeth of the union movement in a revolutionary general strike.[1] However, the hand of FORA IX was forced by the anarchist decision to call a general strike on the railwaymen's behalf. Their justification for doing this is hard to measure.[2]

The anarchists clearly united a lesser proportion of railwaymen than FOF, and their insistence on a general strike - even though it demanded a characteristically broad set of concessions - ran against the wishes of most railway sections. FORA V alleged that FORA IX was neglecting its duties towards the railwaymen, but the immediate reason for the conflict was a strike of stevedores in Rosario and Bahía Blanca. It seemed that FORA V wanted to cash in on the preparations already made by the syndicalists.[3]

FORA IX rejected the strike at a Deliberative Council meeting of 18 July, attended by fourteen railway sections, saying that the enthusiastic movements of 1917 and early 1918 had weakened organisations that had not then been strong, and that the employers' response - the National Labour Association - would defeat labour in these circumstances.

> 'The general strike - supreme arm of the proletariat - must not be used when the enemy wants it, as in the present case, but when, through the need that exists for labour, the collective withdrawal of labour will affect the exploiters intensely. Moreover, the declaration of the general strike in the present circumstances, far from contributing to the defeat of capitalism, could, on the contrary, make it easy for them to realise their intentions - which are, as has been said, none other than to destroy trade union organisation.'[4]

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1. La Organización Obrera 6 July 1918.

2. FORA V had support from the Santa Fe sindicato but most of the divisionist groups at this stage had no clear connection with genuine political or trade union movements. See Chapter 5 pp.200-203.

3. La Vanguardia 18 July 1918; La Organización Obrera 24 Aug. 1918.

4. La Organización Obrera 20 July 1918.

FORA IX's decision not to come out on general strike was in a sense an abnegation of its revolutionary role, particularly notable in the context of capitalist intransigence and government harshness. However, it was by no means the first time; ever since 1915, the use of this ultimate weapon had always been averted at the last moment, in the case of Berisso (1916), the seamen (1916) and the railwaymen (1917 and 1918).[1] As before, the anarchists condemned the decision, though their strike was a fiasco and was called off after a couple of days.[2]

Strike movements during the remaining months of 1918 were rare, on the railways and elsewhere.[3] The leaders of the two principal rail unions were largely occupied with internal business, in particular with indiscipline.

FOF had to face the question of sindicatos por ferrocarril according to the pledge to the 1917 extraordinary congress. The CF's report to the 1918 congress denounced the activity of 'unscrupulous sectarian groups' who had claimed in a divisive campaign that the leadership had deliberately delayed the preparation and implementation of the new style of organisation; it maintained that the preoccupation with partial strikes had been the cause of delay.[4] The CF's scheme was circulated in June and the sections were merely asked to decide whether the step was appropriate, rather than to discuss the details and possible new statutes with a view to their immediate implementation.

The scheme provided for a sindicato on each railway, which would elect its own committee, which in turn would send delegates to a new National Council. The National Council would supervise the CF - now reduced to a purely administrative body - and would be empowered to intervene any sindicato which

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1. See Marotta op.cit. Vol 2 pp. 199-200 for Berisso, pp.202-205 for the seamen's strike of 1916; Ch 3 for railway strikes.

2. La Vanguardia 22 July 1918; Abad de Santillán op.cit. p.242.

3. An important arbitration instigated by La Fraternidad on the Compañía General produced a satisfactory interpretation of the regulation (La Vanguardia 5 Aug. 1918). A short strike occurred on the FCMV° over the matter of a regulation for railways under provincial jurisdiction, but the question was soon referred back to the legislature (La Vanguardia 4 Aug. 1918, 15 Aug. 1918, 24 Aug. 1918).

4. El Obrero Ferroviario Dec.1918. For sindicatos por ferrocarril, see Chapter 7 pp.268-270.

violated statutory or customary practice. Congresses of each sindicato would he held every two years; no general strike could be declared (unless exceptional conditions such as a state of siege prevailed) without the approval of the National Council. On the matter of local autonomy, the scheme was not specific:

> 'they will enjoy the broadest liberty and autonomy compatible with the organisation and the general interests of the trade'.[1]

This project thus did little more than satisfy superficially the desire for organisation by company instead of by trade. While the internal running of the sindicatos permitted a degree of autonomy, its precise nature was in doubt and the greater part of the regulations was concerned with curtailing that autonomy. As soon as the scheme was laid before the unions the campaign for the adoption of sindicatos por ferrocarril evaporated, and a number of groups and individuals opposed the changes at a time when internal discipline was weak, on the grounds that it would put unity further at risk.[2]

The CF avoided committing itself on the desirability of sindicatos por ferrocarril. The PS stated its position clearly, saying that

> 'it suits the railway trades to be organised on an even more centralised basis than they already are'.[3]

Some sections - like Tolosa, Victoria, and San Nicolás - published manifestoes opposing the new scheme of organisation.[4]

In the event, the mood of the Fourth Congress (in 1918), after heated debates over the status of autonomous or secessionist sections, permitted the postponement of discussion of sindicatos por ferrocarril until the next congress.[5] This decision, and the reversal of the de facto fusion vote of 1917, established the mechanism for renewed contact between La Fraternidad and the Federation.[6] Most of the activity of the congress was negative -

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1. La Organización Obrera 29 June 1918; El Obrero Ferroviario August 1918.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario September 1918, December 1918; La Organización Obrera 5 Oct. 1918.
3. Joaquín Coca in his column 'La Semana Gremial', La Vanguardia 10 Sept. 1918, 8 Oct. 1918.
4. La Vanguardia 12 Oct. 1918, 31 Oct. 1918, 6 Dec. 1918.
5. 47 favoured postponement with 18 against and 6 abstentions (see La Organizaci Obrera 8 Feb. 1919 for a list).
6. El Obrero Ferroviario Feb.1919: La Vanguardia 26 Dec. 1918.

'a sterile act', La Vanguardia called it.[1] On the other hand, if positive steps towards unity and rehabilitation were not taken, at least some of the obstacles were removed.

FOF's congress and FORA IX's Tenth Congress, both held in December 1918, testify to the cautious mood of organised labour. Both bodies were financially weak after a year of serious reverses and the dependence of FORA IX on FOF subscriptions meant that dissention and defeat in the latter had adverse effects on the funds of the former.[2] The discussions at FORA IX's congress resulted in the restriction of outside political activities of office holders of the federation. It would be mistaken to regard these resolutions as a manifestation of anti-political militancy; close dealing with state institutions continued under the very auspices of the congress.[3] The practical position of the syndicalists with regard to bourgeois state institutions and a legalistic frame-work of operation was unchanged, as became evident in the month which followed these major congresses.

The Semana Trágica, January 1919

The strike which triggered off the most famous and bloodiest workers' struggle that occurred in Buenos Aires in these years originated in the metal workshops of the Vasena company. Since the outbreak of the Great War, monthly wages at Vasena had fallen in money terms from an average of $103 to $52 by late 1918 - a much greater fall in real terms, taking into account the inflation of the period.[4] Agitation for better wages and for an end to by now unacceptable archaic disciplinary procedures had been intensifying

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1. La Vanguardia 6 Jan. 1919; note that FOF's name was changed to Federación Ferroviaria at this congress. There is some evidence to suggest that this change was made at the 1917 congress, but the new name only came into use after 1918. For simplicity, the abbreviation FOF is here used throughout the period 1912-1920.

2. La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919.

3. For instance the FORA IX congress sent a delegation to the Minister of Public Works to protest about the lack of an adequate settlement to the FCMVo dispute (La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919). See also Chapter 5 pp.207-208.

4. Departamento Nacional del Trabajo Boletín February 1919; David Rock 'Lucha civil en la Argentina - la semana trágica de enero de 1919' Desarrollo Económico No 42-44, 1972, p.194.

since 1917.[1]

The union, anarchist in orientation but at this juncture unsupported by FORA V, was established in the factory in November 1918, and presented the petitions for improvements that lay at the root of the strike of 2,500 workers which broke out on 2 December.[2] The company, with the help of the National Labour Association of which Pedro Vasena was a pillar, quickly moved in the blacklegs, and troops to protect them. Violent acts built up gradually; strikers sabotaged water and electricity supplies and prevented raw materials and sustenance from getting through to the strike-breakers, who as usual were being housed and fed within the works.[3] On 4 January Vasena asked for police reinforcements to counter the activities of the strikers. Three days later five men were killed and many more wounded in the first large shoot-out between strikers and the forces of law and order, comprising police, troops and firemen.[4]

This was the event that sparked off the declaration of a general strike for the next day by the metal workers and FORA V.[5] The strike did not get off the ground till 9 January, much to the anarchists' indignation. Many syndicalist and non-aligned unions had answered the strike call, though so far FORA IX, FOF and FOM had not.[6]

FORA IX's Council met on the evening of 8 January to discuss how to regard the crisis, especially since the strike was being organised by a group that had seceded from the FORA IX metallurgical union.[7] All the CF did was to issue a statement demanding police neutrality in conflicts between capital and labour, and condemning the killings which had occurred, and expressing solidarity with the Vasena workers' claim.[8]

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1. La Organización Obrera 20 Oct. 1917.
2. La Protesta 9 Jan. 1919; Oddone Gremialismo (1975) p.404.
3. Rock Politics in Argentina 1890-1930 (CUP, London, 1975) p.164; Esbozo de historia del partido comunista de la Argentina (Buenos Aires, Anteo, 1947) p.39 n.56.
4. Rock Politics (1975) p.164; Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.241. None of the contemporary sources remark on the fact that the workers were easily able to acquire arms, nor is it denied by the unions.
5. La Protesta 8 Jan. 1919.
6. La Protesta 9 Jan. 1919.
7. FORA IX CF Actas 8 Jan. 1919.
8. FORA IX CF Actas 8 Jan. 1919; La Organización Obrera, Suplemento 10 Jan.1919.

Despite FORA IX's failure to endorse the anarchists' strike call, most of Buenos Aires struck on 9 January.[1] This should not be viewed as evidence of an upsurge in support for FORA V; at most, it was a victory for the old anarchist influence in the development of organised labour which had ingrained the practice of the strike of protest and solidarity. On 9 January most workers had gone to work, and only there decided to demonstrate against the events by attending the burial of the victims.

> 'All the factories and workshops stood silent and deserted; the workers themselves united spontaneously into strike committees and, in a few hours, all the enormous activity of this great city was utterly paralysed. At ten o'clock not a single tram was running and a few hours later not a single vehicle was to be seen in the streets of this metropolis.'[2]

The burial demonstration was backed by FORA IX at least to the extent of sending speakers to address the mourners, and by the afternoon the federation's position was no longer equivocal, especially after the police ambush of the demonstrators on the way to the Chacarita cemetery became known;[3] on 9 January at least 39 were killed, 30 seriously wounded and over a hundred hurt.[4]

Meanwhile, those unions who had expressed their solidarity with the victims of these tragic events were consulting their own interests as well. A partial seamen's strike had begun on 7 January because some companies had not accepted FOM's latest claims, but on 9 January the conflict was generalised in response to the violent events.[5] The railway sections which came out over the Vasena tragedy - by no means all those of the federal capital - applied the necessary pressure for the declaration of

1. La Vanguardia 10 Jan. 1919; informe of CF FORA in La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919.
2. Report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.
3. Speakers sent to Chacarita were E.D.Semería and Juan Pallas; FORA IX CF Actas 9 Jan. 1919.
4. La Organización Obrera Suplemento 10 Jan. 1919; La Vanguardia estimated more like a hundred, according to Julio Godio La semana trágica de enero de 1919 (Buenos Aires, 2 ed., Granica, 1973) p.34.
5. La Protesta 9 Jan. 1919; La Organización Obrera Suplemento 10 Jan. 1919.

the general railway strike which should have taken place in May 1918.[1] Shoe operatives and tramwaymen[2] likewise made known their demands.

Thus a number of conflicts of interest developed. Many individual unions, and militant factions within unions, in FORA IX and outside it, saw the general strike as an opportunity to pursue separate claims with employers. FORA IX was intent on making its presence in the movement strongly felt, once they had been forced to participate, and in view of its size and influence in comparison with FORA V this was easily done. At the same time, the syndicalists hoped to dissociate themselves from the extra-legal activities and excesses of the anarchists.[3] FORA IX, like FOM and FOF, were concerned not to provoke Congress into a declaration of a state of siege, averted in the end by the complacent delays of the Senate rather than any respectable utterances from the unions.[4] Furthermore, to retain the initiative it had seized in the strike, FORA IX had to bring about the speedy end to the protest which showed signs of snowballing when the railwaymen, shoe operatives and post office workers sought to add their claims to the limited demands for the Vasena workers and guarantees of basic freedoms.

FOF's Council decided on 10 January to order a general rail strike to start two days later, bearing in mind the promise of the union and of FORA IX to

> 'demand the reinstatement of sacked workers [of the railway strikes of 1918] by means of a general movement.
>
> Moreover, it was thought that a passive attitude on the CF's part, besides damaging the railwaymen on strike by exposing

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1. FOF CF Report in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919; La Vanguardia 11 Jan. 1919. The first railway sections to come out were Caballito and Liniers (FCO), Buenos Aires (Cía Gral) and Buenos Aires (FCS). Caballito voted to return to work 9 Jan. 1919 until it heard FORA IX's resolution to strike, when it reversed the decision; an instance of a large and well-organised section's confusion about the events of the times.

2. For information on the tramwaymen see Rock Desarrollo Económico 1972 p. 197-198.

3. FORA IX denied responsibility for the attack on the head Post Office (La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919); La Protesta 26 Jan. 1919, 28 Jan. 1919 criticises the cowardice of the syndicalists.

4. On activities in the Congress, Diario de Sesiones; Godio op.cit. pp.26-30, 43, etc.; La Vanguardia 15 Jan. 1919.

> them to the companies' reprisals, would affect our institution gravely, making it appear ultra-conservative, inward-looking, and indifferent to the anguish of the working class, thus losing the prestige among organised workers that we have gained through seven years of struggle and sacrifices ...
>
> The CF, in making common cause with the general protest against police outrages, believed it convenient and opportune to take advantage of these new efforts and sacrifices to try also to satisfy the just desires of the trade.'[1]

The demands they wished to add to those already formulated by FORA IX were as follows: liberty for all railwaymen in prison; reinstatement of all workers and white-collar employees made redundant in the recent strikes; strict enforcement of the working regulation in accordance with the resolutions of the Congress of December 1917; immediate sanction of the pensions and regulatory legislation shelved in the Senate; and lastly, the promise of no reprisals for participation in the present movement.[2]

These matters were discussed at a meeting of FORA IX delegates from the capital and its vicinity on the night of 10 January. FOM saved FORA IX from the unwelcome task of having to present diverse claims for negotiation and settlement by rejecting the railwaymen's proposal to include the seamen's grievances in a composite claim and condemning efforts to broaden the basis of the deal.[3] On the other hand, it was not difficult for FOM to adopt this self-denying ordinance, since almost all their grievances had by now been settled, and FORA IX's delegates to the government were to press the need for executive neutrality in the seamen's disputes while negotiating the general settlement.[4] This settlement was now to comprise the solution of the Vasena strike in the workers' favour and the liberation of all prisoners taken during the disturbances.[5] The anarchists meanwhile demanded a far broader set of concessions, including the release of all anarchists in prison.[6]

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1. Report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.
2. La Vanguardia 11 Jan. 1919.
3. Report of CF FORA IX in La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919.
4. Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.243; FORA IX CF Actas 11 Jan. 1919.
5. La Organización Obrera Suplemento 11 Jan. 1919.
6. La Protesta 20 Jan. 1919.

On 11 January the FORA IX unions met again to discuss the agreement reached, and decided to call off the general strike.[1] The full strike, therefore, lasted only two days, but the declaration of FORA IX was by no means the end of the unrest. In the early hours of 11 January, FOF resolved to proceed with its strike regardless. The shoe operatives, chauffeurs and cabbies, and FOM also decided to pursue their separate claims despite being members of FORA IX, and other groups outside it (the most important of which was the tramwaymen) remained on strike.[2] FOA IX condemned this indiscipline, maintaining with reason that the continuance of some movements sowed confusion, encouraged continued repression and even endangered the settlement with the Vasena company.[3]

FORA IX's claim that the strike ended as soon as they issued their statement was false, but it is equally wrong to regard its continuation as an indication of anarchist power. Some groups pursued their own claims for a short time. Others, like the seamen, stayed out mainly because police and Patriotic League harassment made committee meetings and assemblies impossible.[4] Many groups that would otherwise have returned to work remained on strike because of the action being carried on by seamen and railwaymen, such was the prestige of these groups.[5] Finally, the protest strike (as well as specific union conflicts) had spread to the Interior, and with telegraph censorship - always a hazard in periods of labour unrest - as well as strike-hit communications, news of the settlement arrived late and was treated with mistrust.[6]

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1. Report of CF FORA IX in La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919.

2. Report of CF FORA IX in La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919; report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.

3. The settlement with Vasena established an 8-hour day; 20-40% wage rises; overtime pay; it abolished piecework and promised no reprisals. Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.245.

4. Report of FORA IX CF in La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919.

5. FORA IX CF Actas 13 Jan. 1919.

6. La Protesta 21 Jan. 1919 for details of movement in Mar del Plata; report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919 for problems of communication; also CD Fraternidad Circular 1 15 Jan. 1919.

La Fraternidad's role in the Semana Trágica (Tragic Week), as it soon became known, was very limited. On 9 January FORA IX tried to make contact with the footplatemen but found nobody at their headquarters.[1] A number of La Fraternidad's sections, some of which had stopped work for short periods because of the massacres, censured the CD for its failure to man the offices. Their defence - that short of hiring private cars, it was impossible to reach the headquarters from the suburbs in which all the CD but the veteran Molinari lived - had some justification.[2] However, their inactivity was more serious in the face of FOF's declaration of a general railway strike, a decision also made without consultation because La Fraternidad's officials were not available.[3] A number of Fraternidad sections had again unilaterally decided to support the protest, but the CD was united in their condemnation of this course and its first meeting after the tragic events resounded with acid anecdotes about the hostile attitude of striking FOF members towards the footplatemen.

The extent of support for the rail strike, which officially began on 12 January, from FOF sections themselves is very hard to ascertain. There was support in and around the federal capital, where the repercussions of the battles of the general strike were felt most acutely and most quickly, though the Buenos Aires Central Railway was completely unaffected.[4] The Rosario militants within and outside FOF and including some footplatemen lent their support too, as did the FCCN sindicato, comprising most of the unruly sections of the North-West.[5] The strike was most complete on the FCCC, FCCA and FCO, where footplatemen generally gave support, sometimes more energetically than the FOF members themselves.[6] A number of railway sections never received the CF's order to

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1. FORA IX CF Actas 9 Jan. 1919, 10 Jan. 1919.
2. CD Fraternidad Actas 13 Jan. 1919.
3. Report of FOF CF in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.
4. La Vanguardia 13 Jan. 1919, 14 Jan. 1919; CD Fraternidad Actas 14 Jan. 1919.
5. La Protesta 28 Jan. 1919 on FCCN; La Protesta 6 Feb. 1919 on Rosario.
6. El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.

stop work, and most of these did not participate; among them were important sections of the FCP and FCS.[1]

On 13 January, police and firemen attacked FOF's Caballito offices, detaining over fifty men and killing one railwayman. The next day the forces of law and order, including, it seems, a contingent from the Patriotic League, took the union's head office by force and tried to detain most of the CF, who were later released and the authorities apologised for the 'mistake'.[2] It is thus clear that the threat of another general rail strike could provoke strong reaction.

On the same day, the CD met Fraternidad leaders from nearby sections to consider their policy on the strike. Only one section, Tapiales (Cía Gral), wanted to continue the strike, but a number of groups had been prevented from meeting by the police, who closed their offices.[3] These attacks on the moderate footplatemen's right of assembly indicate how far the reaction to the strike had gone and show how fearful the authorities were of a repetition of the disorders of 1917. In the event, La Fraternidad expressed its decision not to support FOF's strike in a manifesto, which recognised the justice of all FOF's claims (which had indeed included chuses on pensions and the regulation to appeal to La Fraternidad's priorities).[4] However, the moment was inauspicious for a rail strike, particularly as most other trades had started work again; the unions were neither strong enough nor willing to press their claims except through legal channels. La Fraternidad emphasised its goodwill towards FOF, despite differences in methods, and expressed very concrete hopes for fruitful cooperation in the near future.[5]

The adverse conditions outlined above, coupled with the impossibility of continuing on strike under the state of siege which had passed the Deputies and could be imposed at any time,[6] were indeed impeding the strike's

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1. La Protesta 6 Feb. 1919; report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario Feb.1919.
2. Report of FOF CF in El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.
3. CD Fraternidad Actas 14 Jan. 1919.
4. La Protesta 6 Feb. 1919; report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario Feb. 1919.
5. La Vanguardia 16 Jan. 1919; El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919.
6. Godio op.cit. p.78.

progress. FOF decided to yield to La Fraternidad's pressure after discussions with Yrigoyen and the DG FFCC, and they made specific reference to their desire to cooperate with La Fraternidad in their statement ordering the return to work.[1] A genuine rapprochement had begun.

The Semana Trágica left many railwaymen out of work on the FCO; the attempts of the FCCC and FCCA to 'select' personnel when the strike was called off were thwarted by its continuance for a further two days on these lines. However, the situation demanded the establishment of a Redundancies Committee, and the failure of FOF sections to resist reprisals was condemned.[2] The state of siege was averted, though La Fraternidad circulated elaborate contingency plans, and the Senate was shaken into action over the railway pensions bill by the upheavals.[3]

The shock to organised labour was much greater, however; while it was weakened financially through loss of subscriptions, it was also affected morally by the acceleration of violent and tragic events. The fame of the events of 1919 rests on the extent of the tragedy, which was unprecedented. Somewhere between 100 and 700 people died, and between 400 and 2,000 were injured in the week; the lower estimates come from La Nación, the higher ones from La Vanguardia.[4] Many prisoners were taken, but again the figures are uncertain; FORA IX claimed that the 1500 prisoners taken during the week's disturbances were released on 16 January according to their deal with the government, while the anarchists suggest a rather extravagant figure of 50,000 arrests in that time.[5]

The numbers involved are therefore very impressive, and reflect a distinct change in the response of the ruling classes, which they justified in terms of their alleged fear of Bolshevism in Argentina. Before 1919,

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1. La Vanguardia 16 Jan. 1919; report of CF FOF in El Obrero Ferroviario Feb.1919
2. La Vanguardia 18 Jan. 1919, 19 Jan. 1919, 21 Jan. 1919; El Obrero Ferroviario February 1919, March 1919.
3. CD Fraternidad Circulares 2 & 3, 15 Jan. 1919; El Obrero Ferroviario March 1919.
4. Godio op.cit. p.79.
5. Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.247; Godio op.cit. p.80.

vigilante activity of the type advocated and undertaken by the Patriotic League[1] was largely absent from strikes and their repression. However, the characteristics of the general strike are those of previous years, if the reaction was different. It was a movement of solidarity which picked up support largely from trade unions with grievances of their own to press; the directors of the movement were unable either to confine this action to one of solidarity and protest, or to broaden it into a revolutionary struggle; acts of violence and sabotage were carried out in parallel with attempts by strike leaders to reach an accommodation with the authorities through legal negotiating channels. The similarities with 1917 are clear.

FORA IX's periodical published an instructive analysis of the nature of the movement.

> 'It must be said that it has been startling to see that in reference to its spontaneity and unanimity there has been absolutely no mention of the revolutionary past of the working class in this country, nor of any of the epic phases in which they participated ... If the working class experienced so unanimously the need to give proper form to its angry protest against the capitalist regime for the class crime perpetrated by the armed forces on behalf of their mainstay the state, it is because the struggles sustained before this event created the moral conditions, and developed the necessary spiritual and material elements, to infuse the minds of the workers with the consciousness - still largely intuitive - of its common duty. To the formation of this new moral sense contributed, among others, the unforgettable struggles of 1902, 1904, 1909, 1910 and 1917.'[2]

This emphasis on the buildup to the events of January 1919 is very apt. It was, in many senses, the last of the great violent urban strikes like those which occurred in the first decade of the century.[3] The lessons of

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1. Detailed consideration of the Patriotic League is out of place here. It was founded at several meetings between 10 and 19 January in the Centro Naval; among the founders were at least 3 local directors of British railway companies, and Manuel Carlés, erstwhile champion of railway pensions in 1912, and leading members of most Buenos Aires aristocratic clubs. It created an alliance, across party lines, of foreign business and army interests against 'agitators'. Its heritage was militaristic and nationalistic, but its paramilitary organisation was much better than that of earlier groups. The only comparable action to that which took place against the strikers of January 1919 occurred in 1910, during the labour agitation which coincided with the 100th anniversary of Argentine independence (for which see Marotta op.cit., Vol II pp.73-75, Oddone Gremialismo (1975)pp.331-333). For more details on the LPA, see Rock Politics (1975) pp. 180-183; also Godio op.cit.
2. La Organización Obrera 8 Feb. 1919.
3. For which see Marotta op.cit. Vol I passim.

1917 had caused the large, influential unions to eschew the general strike and to modify their unequivocal support for solidarity movements. Unions like FOM, with a continuing record of militancy and its origins among some of the most unruly anarchist groups of the pre-1910 period, were finding it possible and desirable to make settlements through negotiation with the government. This was not simply because of the conciliatory pretensions of the Radicals, which were to say the least ambiguous; the ideological commitment of syndicalists to the revolutionary general strike was now overlaid by practical experience of material gains by legal, even parliamentary, means. The nature of the sectors pioneering collaborationist activity is clearly important; they were crucial to the economy, and involved in the services sector, where legislation and regulation, and state intervention in general, were of considerably greater influence than elsewhere in the economy. However, the fact remains that these modes of action did not remain confined to these specific sectors, but came gradually to guide trade union activity across the board.

The Semana Trágica deserves considerably more analysis and discussion than considerations of space have permitted here, where the outline of events had been presented in such a way as to include most aspects germane to the developments in the railway unions, to the neglect of other important matters.[1]

The conduct of the strike did not satisfy all the FOF sections. While Buenos Aires (FCS) resolved to leave FORA IX because it had betrayed working class interests by limiting the aims of the strike, the men of Talleres (FCS) criticised FOF for calling a strike at all, maintaining that action should have been confined, as FORA IX wished, to a protest general strike of short duration.[2] However, the general railway union was not

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1. The studies by Rock in Desarrollo Económico 1972, and Politics in Argentina 1890-1930 pp.157-179, and by Godio in La semana trágica (1973) serve to fill these gaps.

2. La Organización Obrera 14 Feb. 1919; FORA IX CF Actas 8 Apr. 1919.

seriously weakened by its vacillating conduct during the week of disturbances and killings, and the next eighteen months demonstrated that resilience which had preserved the union during the troubles of 1918.

Attempts at consensus: labour in general, the rail unions in particular

The most pressing matters which faced the railway union bureaucrats were the spectre of divisionism, and the need to achieve unity in the face of renewed resistance from first the National Labour Association (ANT) and later the Patriotic League.

The divisionist threat has been described in the chapter on the influence of anarchism and the PC in railway unions. This approach may suggest a link between these political ideologies and separatist organisation which tends, in the case of anarchism at least, to reinforce some misconceptions about the nature of that ideological position in Argentina with respect to its role in trade unions; this link has been overstated. However, it is undeniable that most of the divisionist groups either had or claimed to have an anarchist basis. The ambiguity of what was meant by such asseverations is examined elsewhere[1], but the campaigns directed against these groups in 1918, 1919 and indeed throughout the 1920s were correct particularly in their emphasis on the opportunism of individuals involved in secessionist attempts. Plain profiteering, such as that indulged in by Fransisco Saavedra of Junín (FCP), whose term as sectional secretary cost union funds an average of $10.92 per day (at least twice the average railwayman's daily wage),[2] was matched by attempts to build a political career, like the case of Ramón Cuello of Cañada de Gómez who began as a PC militant only to end up working for the Radical Party.[3] Not only FOF was affected; the influence of the sindicato of the FCCN caused disruption in La Fraternidad during the latter

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1. See Chapter 5 pp.200-203.
2. La Vanguardia 26 June 1918; La Organización Obrera 8 June 1918.
3. Vía Libre 1 May 1923 (autonomous railway sindicatos' periodical).

part of 1918 and in 1919, which the CD countered with propaganda and expulsions.[1] One of the aspects of divisionism which weakened FOF was, indeed, its inability and unwillingness to expel undisciplined (rather than simply dishonest) elements from its ranks.

The progress towards unity of the two railway unions deserves less summary consideration. Several reasons contributed to the formation of a more favourable climate for unity after the Semana Trágica. The activities of divisionists were one, and in particular the response of FOF's new council to them. It took the unprecedented step of issuing a statement of intent.

> 'Although the orientation of FOF is subordinated to the will of the majority of its members, as is well known, and, for the same reason, the influence of the CF is little less than nothing, the men who make up the new CF regard it as their duty to declare that they fully intend to adjust their conduct to the dispositions of the statutes and the clearly expressed desires of the majority of members, whom they shall consult as frequently as possible ...
> Comrades, it is not a question of imposing a Prussian discipline upon ourselves - no. All that we seek to achieve is that, just as the members of a section yield to and fulfil the resolutions of a sectional assembly, so also must the sections yield to and fulfil the dispositions of the statutes and the resolutions of the majority.'[2]

This statement, and the new composition of the CF, made negotiation with La Fraternidad much easier. The railway pensions law was finally sanctioned on 30 April 1919 and seemed proof of the results which could be achieved through painstaking negotiation rather than costly strike action. An informal united front was developing in the face of the *amarillos* of AFN,[3] whose existence had received a boost by the formation of the ANT among the principal employers.

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1. CD Fraternidad *Actas y circulares*, circular 12 July 1918; *La Fraternidad* 1 Jan. 1919, 1 Feb. 1919, 1 Mar. 1919, 15 Mar. 1919 etc. One Fraternidad member, Jose Martín, was killed by FCCN divisionists after a dispute with them in April 1918 (Agnelli and Chiti *Cincuentenario* (1937) p.403).

2. CF FOF Circular 111, 18 Feb. 1919, in *La Organización Obrera* 22 Feb. 1919, *La Vanguardia* 20 Feb. 1919.

3. See Chapter 6 pp.230-233 for more on AFN at this time.

La Fraternidad's General Assembly in April approved the CD's proposals that the organisation of railwaymen should be conducted on the basis of five trade units, namely traction (La Fraternidad), workshops, traffic, permanent way staff and administration.[1] Thus La Fraternidad showed itself prepared to become just one union among five to encompass the different railway trades. Organisation along trade lines became more attractive to FOF as La Fraternidad began to make progress in its efforts to obtain a national pay and promotion scale for footplatemen.[2] Finally, the employment situation was fast improving; the DNT published details of its success in placing men, and noted that permanent way labourers on the railways were able to command the maximum wages.[3] At their assembly the footplatemen resolved unanimously to reopen negotiations on unity with their colleagues of FOF.[4] The 'more fulsome and progressive spirit' displayed at the assembly even led FORA IX to hope that La Fraternidad would contemplate joining the syndicalist federation.[5] Soon after, on 11 May, FOF published a circular acceding to the footplatemen's wish to organise by trades.[6]

The first half of 1919, then, was a period in which important elements of the trade union movement were coming together. In June FORA IX called an extraordinary congress to discuss legislation affecting the working class, notably the question of legal recognition for trade unions and the restrictions on extra-legal organisations being discussed by the Deputies' Social Legislation Committee.[7] The union movement was not yet able to present

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1. La Vanguardia 26 Apr.1919.
2. La Vanguardia 8 May 1919.
3. La Vanguardia 20 Mar. 1919.
4. El Obrero Ferroviario May 1919; La Fraternidad 1 May 1919.
5. La Organización Obrera 10 May 1919.
6. Organisation by trades had first been mooted in 1912 (see Chapter 3 p.96) and had been adopted in some large sections; for instance Rosario FCCA formed two sections, one for traffic and one for workshops.
7. La Vanguardia 11 July 1919; La Organización Obrera 28 June 1919.

a united front; La Fraternidad refused to attend the congress, on the grounds of fundamental ideological differences, and sent a separate protest to Congress.[1] La Fraternidad's CD addressed the Chamber of Deputies as the only trade union with personería jurídica, criticising the proposed labour law for its

> 'interminable series of dispositions restricting the normal free functioning of unions; it is hoped to legislate as if the whole working class of this country were already organised on a regular basis, but since this is not so, in fact the legislation will mean that the working class can never organise on a normal stable basis'.[2]

The campaign against this scheme, which affected railwaymen in particular as public service employees who were threatened with the loss of the right to strike, culminated in country-wide demonstrations on 10 August, in cooperation with PS, PSI and Radical elements.[3] FOF attacked the proposals on the grounds of

> 'the arbitrary and unjust limitations which they aim to impose on the union activity of foreign workers; the failure to recognise workers' organisations of a national character; the protection they afford to unorganised elements or traitors; the restrictions of all kinds that impede the free development of genuine union activity and the rights conquered by the working class'.[4]

The demonstration was well supported nationally, and an estimated 93,000 joined the processions in the federal capital, representing over seventy unions.[5] It was apparently a most auspicious cooperative venture, transcending party and ideological lines, and enthusiastically backed by FORA IX and its senior components. As far as the railwaymen were concerned, FOF was the lynch-pin of the protest in many parts of the country, providing speakers at almost every township.[6]

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1. La Vanguardia 29 June 1919; CD Fraternidad Circular 24 11 July 1919; La Fraternidad 15 Sept. 1919.
2. La Vanguardia 16 Sept. 1919.
3. La Organización Obrera 9 Aug. 1919.
4. CF FOF Circular 120, 19 July 1919; in La Organización Obrera 26 July 1919, La Vanguardia 28 July 1919.
5. La Organización Obrera 9 Aug. 1919, 16 Aug. 1919, 23 Aug. 1919; La Vanguardia 11 Aug. 1919, 13 Aug. 1919.
6. In some localities Fraternidad members played an active part (La Vanguardia 23 Aug. 1919; La Organización Obrera 13 Aug. 1919). The syndicalists declined the PS attempt to extend this cooperation into a joint committee on the cost of living; the PS activity was connected with the revitalisation of the Trade Union Propaganda Committee, for which see Chapter 5 pp.209-212.

Negotiation between FOF and La Fraternidad was under way in this period. On 9 September the leaders of FOF and La Fraternidad agreed to issue a manifesto. Unity

> 'must be realised in conformity with the orientation already set out, in other words, on the basis of trade divisions, independent and autonomous in their internal running, but joined in a federation for all business affecting the railwaymen as a whole and requiring the joint action of the union'.

The mechanics of organising this federation of autonomous trade entities were set out in detail and the unions resolved to banish the 'aberration' of sectional autonomy, along with the amarillos of AFN.

> 'If we, the railwaymen of Argentina, wish to put an end to the unenviable situation in which we find ourselves, we must follow the course of the great disciplined organisations which the railwaymen of more advanced countries have formed.'[1]

This manifesto was very well received by union journals, by FORA IX itself, and by La Internacional, paper of the PSI.[2] AFN, on the other hand, issued a manifesto attacking FOF for aiming for workers' control and for its 'anarchic' structure, and at the same time maintaining that La Fraternidad would soon be exposed as a company union.[3] The attack was understandable in the face of the threat that FOF might destroy AFN by ousting it from the Board of the Pensions Fund; the allegation against La Fraternidad refers to the activities of the footplatemen's two representatives on the Board, San Sebastián and Múñiz, who subsequently were sacked and resigned respectively.[4] It also refers to the attendance of La Fraternidad's secretary, Américo J. Baliño, at the International Labour Conference held in Washington. This move was criticised by Fraternidad members themselves, who felt that the government request for a delegate should have been answered by the election of a union member to the post.[5] The International

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Oct. 1919.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Oct. 1919.
3. La Fraternidad 1 Nov. 1919; El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Nov. 1919.
4. See Chapter 6 pp.232-233.
5. The CD replied that time had been short, and that no member had the knowledge of Baliño concerning the origin of Argentine unions, the social and economic conditions of the country, and the present state of social and labour legislation (CD Fraternidad Actas y circulares, circular 35, 8 Oct. 1919).

Federation of Trade Unions objected in Washington to Baliño's credentials, on the grounds that its affiliate, FORA IX, was the institution most representative of Argentine organised labour.[1] However, the organisation most angered by the choice of La Fraternidad to represent Argentine unions was AFN, who lobbied Yrigoyen and the Foreign Minister in an unsuccessful attempt to secure this role.[2] The importance of La Fraternidad's attendance at the conference was not great, and its work was not to affect Argentina for some years. Even so, it is interesting to note both that the government decided to ask the footplatemen to act (especially when Baliño was a Socialist, and AFN would have been able to produce a Radical delegate), and that La Fraternidad was eager for Baliño to go, taking the opportunity to commission a report on the activities of the North American Railroad Brotherhoods.[3] Their increased interest in the legal progress of trade unions outside Argentina was a measure of their priorities at home.

Meanwhile signs of cooperation between FOF and La Fraternidad became apparent at a local level, FOF experienced a recovery from some of the difficulties of 1918 and 1919, and La Fraternidad began to grow closer to the rest of the labour movement through increased contact with the general railway union. Before the end of 1919, several FOF and Fraternidad sections issued joint statements on the need for unity and their intention to work for it.[4] Elements of FOF and La Fraternidad united to rebuild sections undermined by divisionism, notably in San Juan, Cruz del Eje and San Cristóbal on the FCCN.[5] This work had its effect, and the FCCN sindicato, severely weakened by political manoeuvring, proved unable to muster much support for a strike early in 1920.[6] In October 1919 a ballot of members

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1. La Fraternidad 15 Jan. 1920; La Organización Obrera 10 Jan. 1920.
2. RRP 19 Sept. 1919; La Vanguardia 23 Nov. 1919.
3. Informe del delegado a la conferencia del trabajo de Washington by Baliño in Fraternidad archive; extracts appear in La Vanguardia 3 Feb. 1920.
4. These included Villa María, Gálvez, Patricios, Villa Mercedes, Villa Dolores, La Bajada, Las Varillas (La Organización Obrera 13 Dec. 1919; El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Jan. 1920; La Vanguardia 16 Dec. 1919).
5. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 May 1919; The same thing occurred in Junín (FCP) - see La Vanguardia 8 Mar. 1919, 15 Mar. 1919.
6. La Vanguardia 4 Jan. 1920; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Dec. 1919.

brought the Rosario (Traffic) section of the FCCA back into FOF, which was a substantial triumph for the official leadership.[1]

Sections began to establish joint committees and a real impetus for unity came from this local activity, especially that inspired by a circular from the railwaymen of Buenos Aires (Cía Gral), which urged the formation of a coordinating committee in the capital.[2] In the wake of local interest, the central committees finalised their plans for the 'bases of unity' on 31 March 1920, and circulated them for discussion before the joint congress.[3]

On 1 May 1920 the railwaymen demonstrated their commitment to the ideas behind the First of May commemoration in a practical way, with a stoppage of all traffic for five minutes.[4] The footplatemen viewed the action in 1920 as follows:

> 'With it we only want to demonstrate the adherence of the men of La Fraternidad to the day of the First of May, a date which for part of the workforce is of protest, and for others of rejoicing, but which is for all a date for the affirmation of working class ideals, of plans for struggle and of hopes for better times, for more truth and justice in the world.'[5]

It was the first occasion on which the traffic and traction departments had participated in the strikes and protests of May Day, though some workshops had struck regularly and some from as long before as 1905, if not before;[6]

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1. La Organización Obrera 11 Oct. 1919.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Jan. 1920, 16 Feb. 1920; La Vanguardia 16 Jan. 1920; La Organización Obrera 17 Jan. 1920.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Mar. 1920. Railway unity received further encouragement from the meetings held (principally for FORA IX) by Enrique Villacampa, Adán Ibáñez, and Luis Lotito, who were touring the country for the syndicalist federation (La Organización Obrera 6 Mar.1920, 20 Mar. 1920, 3 Apr. 1920, 10 Apr. 1920; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Feb. 1920).
4. La Fraternidad's assembly had voted to follow this course at its 1919 meeting, but it had been too late to act upon it that year (La Fraternidad 1 May 1919).
5. La Vanguardia 30 Apr. 1920.
6. La Vanguardia 13 May 1905 cites Bahía Blanca and Junín.

these men were to strike for the full day in 1920.[1] As FOF declared,

> 'it was most eloquent proof of the class consciousness that our trade union is acquiring. Along with the rest, it could demonstrate to the capitalist class the moral and material value of organisation by means of the stoppage of work and the public events organised together with La Fraternidad, events which besides being commemorative, had the virtue of being comradely acts between members of the two unions'.[2]

Apparently the strike was universal except in the Buenos Aires section of the FCO, and a good number of joint meetings were successfully held.[3] A similar course of action was adopted for May Day in future years as testimony, albeit symbolic, of the railwaymen's place within the general framework of working class activity in Argentina.

By far the most important event of 1920 for the rail unions themselves was the foundation of the Confraternidad Ferroviaria. La Fraternidad held its assembly from 25 to 30 May, before the joint congress, which occurred on 29 and 30 June in the middle of FOF's congress. This arrangement undoubtedly limited the opportunity for FOF's more militant sections to protest against the statutory commitment to organisation by trades rather than by company, and the restrictions on autonomous action necessarily imposed by the creation of the Confraternidad. However, these dissident opinions seem not to have been represented and in both the joint congress and that which transformed FOF into the Sindicatos de Tráfico y Talleres (Traffic and Workshop Unions - hereafter Tráfico y Talleres),

> 'the frankest cordiality and mutual tolerance prevailed'.[4]

The scheme for unity was much discussed at all three congresses, but was basically unchanged. The forms of organisation are discussed elsewhere,[5] but some of the matters of principle raised by the statutes are interesting. Article 3 gave as the first aim of the Confraternidad

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1. La Organisación Obrera 8 May 1920.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 May 1920.
3. La Fraternidad 15 May 1920; La Vanguardia 4 May 1920, 8 May 1920.
4. La Organización Obrera 3 July 1920.
5. See Chapter 7 pp.265-266.

> 'the coordination of the efforts of the sindicatos which comprise it to defend the interests and improve the economic, technical, moral and social conditions of railwaymen, and, in general, to prepare the trade so that it can assume the direct control of the railway industry according to the principle that the means of production belong to the producer'.[1]

The other aims, to encourage the growth and development of the Confraternidad's components, and to win the right to represent railwaymen on the Board of the Pensions Fund, would appear much less controversial than the first. However, there was no dispute or discussion about the ultimate aim of workers' control of the industry, whereas the means towards the ends embodied in these other sections received much more attention from the assemblies. The concern for immediate practicable claims is entirely understandable, but the acceptance of the principle of workers' control without comment is perhaps more bewildering, especially as it was not embodied in La Fraternidad's own statutes. However, it was of course well established in syndicalist circles and it had been sanctioned by the joint strike committee during the strike of September-October 1917 without provoking discussion within the movement.[2] Original ideological guidelines for organisation frequently remain as part of a union's programme long after more day-to-day matters have become the genuine basis for the survival of the institution in the eyes both of members and of external groups (the capitalist class included).[3] The railwaymen were no exception; they took up the question of ideological and party political neutrality, so often affirmed, without any apparent regard to the anomaly which this commitment in Article 3(a) represented. Workers' control was thus treated not as a political matter, but rather almost as part of trade union tradition.

A great deal of discussion took place as to whether officials of Confraternidad should be permitted to hold political office, a question which was left open after a brilliant speech by a young Fraternidad delegate,

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 May 1920.
2. See Chapter 3pp.120-121.
3. See Richard Hyman The Workers' Union (OUP, London, 1971) p.176 on union survival.

Fransisco Alό, on the theme of individual liberty.[1] This set the new organisation apart from FORA IX; the congress's committee on the statutes recommended subscribing to the national federation, a view also endorsed by Alό, who envisaged a tripartite organisation consisting of a Transport Federation, an Agricultural Workers' Union, and FORA IX for other industrial trade unions.[2] However, other distinguished members of La Fraternidad protested hotly that their members would not wish to join FORA IX, and it was decided not to act in case the new-found unity was jeopardised by a resolution of such moment, which would necessarily achieve only a bare majority if it was carried at all.[3]

The constituent congress of the Confraternidad did not, therefore, adopt any exceptional resolutions or establish an unexpected approach to the organisation of the railway trades as sindicatos within the Confraternidad. The most immediate problem which arose from it concerned the PS Trade Union Propaganda Committee and the attempt, planned by Pedro José Breta, an employee of FOF, to pack the new Junta Central (JC) of the Confraternidad with Socialist nominees.[4] On 25 August the Comités Centrales (hereafter CC CC) of Tráfico y Talleres voted that

> 'Those meetings that railwaymen of a given party affiliation, tendency or doctrine may hold are contrary to the statutes and counter-productive, in as much as they usurp functions and attributes proper to assemblies'.[5]

This, though officially the end of the matter, did not prevent party political influences from recurring frequently within the railway groups.

Scarcely had the new organisation been voted into existence when the carefully-orchestrated checks and balances of the Confraternidad were tested. A strike broke out among the traffic and workshops employees of the FCCC without the consent of the CC CC or the Junta Central of the Confraternidad,

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1. La Vanguardia 1 July 1920.
2. La Fraternidad 15 July 1920. See Chapter 5 p.212 note 3.
3. La Fraternidad 15 July 1920; La Vanguardia 1 July 1920.
4. See Chapter 5 p.212.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Sept. 1920.

and the CC CC sent two representatives to Córdoba a day or two after the strike began to help the strikers put pressure on the company to comply with the working regulation.[1] They brought the strike to a satisfactory conclusion after a week, on 28 August, with the assistance of Minister of Public Works Torello.[2] Tráfico y Talleres warned its members that

> 'It is as well not to enter too frequently into actions of this kind, which could ultimately impede or retard the struggles of a general nature which move the consciousness of all railwaymen and have as their aim the solution of very fundamental and urgent problems'.[3]

The Confraternidad: new priorities and new tactics

The emphasis of the railwaymen's claims had changed. This was a subtle process; there was no question of a takeover by La Fraternidad, or a PS plot to oust the dynamic forces of syndicalism from control of administration and policy. During the period of consolidation of FOF, its leaders had already divined the need to establish the organisation as a permanent force and pressure group[4], not merely a shadow strike committee to be activated in times of conflict, and to languish in times of industrial peace. The union needed to become the guardian of its members' interests, with a right to participation at sectional or company level, and to participation in the field of legislation. The pattern of unionisation where manifestations of strength and organising ability appeared during industrial conflicts, only to be deflated and collapse when the impetus had subsided, was all too familiar in Argentina. The union's survival as a permanent institution depended on campaigns which did not revolve around strike action; after the disillusion and disruption of 1918, strikes were seen more and more as a last resort, to be

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1. La Vanguardia 21 Aug. 1920; El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Sept. 1920.
2. La Vanguardia 26 Aug. 1920; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Sept. 1920. AFN (not a totally reliable source) claimed that Tráfico y Talleres played a lesser part in the dispute than the local autonomous sindicato, which undoubtedly had some influence (El Ferroviario (AFN journal) 15 Sept. 1920).
3. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Sept. 1920.
4. See their willingness to pronounce on pensions from the early stages, for example.

tolerated only when other channels of negotiation and accommodation had been exhausted. To this end, Tráfico y Talleres were intent on winning themselves a place in negotiations and collective bargaining like that of La Fraternidad for the footplatemen. The main areas of work at this time concerned the functioning of the railway regulation which had emerged piecemeal out of the 1917 strike, and the establishment of uniform wage-systems for the traffic and workshops departments like those recently won by the footplatemen's union. In this desire to standardise practice on pay, promotion and conditions, the trade unions' wish to circumscribe management choice and regulate the range of work on the railways so as to increase their members' job security is clear.[1] The unions thus tied themselves to playing a part at local or workshop level which they had only taken in major conflicts before now. Local committees became more important as they became involved in largely routine negotiations, but their potential for independence was checked from the centre as their structure became more formalised.[2]

La Fraternidad's agreement with the companies on a uniform pay and promotion scale was completed in August 1920, after a last minute crisis which nearly precipitated industrial action. The footplatemen's campaign was as old as the union itself, but had been subject to delays right to the end.[3] It aroused criticism from several sources; some believed that it interfered with the men's right to strike, a misapprehension that La Fraternidad said was an insult to the union's history.[4] Others felt it

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1. H.A. Turner Trade union Growth, Structure and Policy (London, Allen and Unwin, 1962) p.262; Hyman (1971) p.176-178.

2. La Fraternidad's Complaints Committees were embodied in statute in 1919 (Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares, Circular 26, 22 July 1919).

3. The scheme accepted in August 1920 had been presented over a year earlier (La Vanguardia 8 May 1919). First efforts for pay parity date from 1895 (various authors Historia de los ferrocarriles argentinos (Santiago de Chile, 1947) p.210); it was not achieved in Britain until the war bonus schemes of 1914-1918 were made permanent (Sidney & Beatrice Webb History of Trade Unionism (London, Longmans, Revised ed. 1920) p.535).

4. La Vanguardia 15 Sept. 1920; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Sept. 1920.

was restrictive; as La Fraternidad saw it

> 'The curious thing is that many who accept the discipline of capital, of labour, of the barracks and of the state in all its thousand manifestations, resist the acceptance of discipline within the organisation despite the fact that in this case it is conscious and voluntary'.[1]

When the 'deal' (convenio) as it was known was put to the sections, the footplatemen's magazine commented that some groups seemed to vote against particular clauses which did not benefit them directly, failing to take into consideration that the agreement served all footplatemen, not merely individual interests.[2] It is plain that even in La Fraternidad there was need for education to stimulate a collective consciousness; the task of the younger Tráfico y Talleres, whose membership was considerably more heterogeneous, was thus likely to be much more difficult.[3]

By November 1920 an overwhelming majority of Fraternidad sections had ratified the pay and promotion scales agreed,[4] sometimes individually and sometimes through company-based assemblies, such as that held by the sectional delegates of the FCCN in Tucumán, which concluded the poll.[5] The FCCC sections in Rosario, Alta Córdoba and Quilino were expelled when they began to organise a separate congress, instead of yielding to the majority decision.[6] Individuals from these sections were invited to express their loyalty to the union's policy, and so many did that it was possible to reorganise these sections.[7] This incident demonstrates the problems facing union leaders who wished to cement lasting accommodations with capital and the state. It is possible that the unsuccessful dissention was fomented by AFN, which was incensed that it had been excluded from the discussions and summoned its own traction department members to discuss the deal.[8]

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1. La Vanguardia 15 Sept. 1920.
2. La Fraternidad 5 Oct. 1920.
3. La Fraternidad had not sought the approval of the JC before concluding the deal; this was cited more than once when relations between the unions were strained, as an instance of La Fraternidad flouting the Confraternidad constitution (El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Sept. 1920, 1 Oct. 1920; see also Chapter 7 p.266).
4. La Vanguardia 8 Nov. 1920.
5. La Fraternidad 20 Oct. 1920.
6. La Fraternidad 20 Dec. 1920.(circular of 24 Nov.1920); La Vanguardia 26 Dec1920
7. CD Fraternidad Actas 27 Jan. 1921; La Fraternidad 20 Jan. 1921.
8. El Ferroviario 1 Oct. 1920.

Tráfico y Talleres began their efforts towards forming wage-systems for their members almost at once.[1] Once again AFN was excluded from discussion;[2] meanwhile the companies attempted to prevent any negotiations at all.[3] The issue came to a head early in 1921, with the companies' refusàl to deal with the union, though they agreed to talks with men elected at local level, on a company-by-company basis.[4] A plenary of the three union committees and the JC of Confraternidad, at which an enormous variety of opinions were expressed, finally agreed to negotiate company-by-company, provided that elections of delegates were held through Confraternidad sections, that discussions were simultaneous and began by 15 January, and that both government and union would have a presence at the talks.[5]

Meanwhile a work to rule was planned for 31 January in case the companies did not comply. This again was a new departure for the rail unions, though La Fraternidad had made limited use of the tactic. An important article, quoting copiously from Emile Pouget's writings on this tactic, appeared in El Obrero Ferroviario in November 1920. It emphasised that the work to rule was cheap to organise (as everyone remained at work) and would produce chaos in a matter of days; it also pointed out that certain carefully-orchestrated acts of sabotage, such as the cutting of telegraph lines, were markedly more effective while work was in progress.[6]

Unfortunately, enthusiasm for experiment with the new tactic was stronger than internal discipline on the FCCC, where the autonomous sections were instrumental in starting a work to rule over a wage claim in the first

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Oct. 1920. Delegations from the various trades were summoned to discuss the basis for negotiation; guards and restaurant staff met on 5-7 October, the workshop and permanent way staff on 28-29 November and the traffic department on 1 December (Manuel F. Fernández Unión Ferroviaria (1948) pp.131-132). The difficulties the union was to face were already evident when the meeting of workshop delegates was disrupted by the men of Alta Córdoba, insisting on a prior vote on the matter of sindicatos por ferrocarril, which was thrown out with only 2 votes in its favour (El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Oct. 1920; La Vanguardia 8 Oct. 1920).
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Oct. 1920; La Vanguardia 8 Oct.1920; El Obrero Ferroviario 15 Dec.1920.
3. La Vanguardia 22 Nov. 1920.
4. RRP 4 Feb. 1921.
5. La Vanguardia 5 Jan.1921, 12 Jan.1921; Sesión plenaria, JC, CD, CC CC, 30 Dec.1920
6. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Nov.1920. Emile Pouget edited La voix du peuple, organ of the French syndicalist federation, the CGT.

week of January 1921.[1] The CC CC made the action official when thirteen guards had been sacked for indiscipline (for working to rule) after government intervention.[2]

> 'Alleging infantile pretexts, such as the lack of a lid on the grease-box on an axle, or of a feather duster in the train, several guards recently refused to accompany trains, claiming that they (the trains) - for the petty reasons indicated - did not conform to the requirements of the government regulations.'[3]

Over seventy workers were dismissed.[4] Meanwhile the Confraternidad issued a statement explaining that a general work to rule had been agreed because of the companies' attitude to the discussions on wage-systems.

> 'The entry of La Fraternidad into the federated body should have provided the companies with the most solid guarantee of order and seriousness. Added to this was the fact of an announcement that the tactic of struggle had changed, at least in what might be called its disorderly aspect, to take full account of practical questions within the correct norms of serene and reasoned discussions.'[5]

It attacked the government's disregard of modern efforts to improve negotiating mechanisms and its refusal to act to promote the talks. The companies emphasised the lack of legal status of the Confraternidad, a matter which was quite immaterial, according to La Fraternidad in a statement to the Minister of Public Works on 29 January;[6] by this time it had been decided to postpone the general work to rule until 7 February.[7]

Meanwhile, the situation on the FCCC had become graver. On 28 January a plenary of Confraternidad's JC and the other central entities decided to demand the reinstatement of men dismissed or else to call a strike, which brought a large sector of the FCCC workers out before the order had actually been given.[8] This lack of discipline was a problem to the union authorities from the start of the FCCC agitation. The Confraternidad, and both unions,

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1. La Vanguardia 7 Jan. 1921.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Jan. 1921; RRP 4 Feb. 1921.
3. RRP 7 Jan. 1921.
4. RRP 28 Jan. 1921; La Vanguardia 9 Jan. 1921, 10 Jan. 1921.
5. La Vanguardia 12 Jan. 1921; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Jan. 1921.
6. La Vanguardia 30 Jan. 1921; El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Feb. 1921; La Fraternidad 5 Feb. 1921.
7. RRP 4 Feb. 1921; CD Fraternidad Circular 8, 29 Jan. 1921.
8. Sesión plenaria, Actas, JC, CD, CC CC, 28 Jan. 1921; RRP 4 Feb. 1921.

tried to bring the men to order with detailed instructions on the conduct of the work to rule; La Fraternidad emphasised the need to avoid sabotage and the irresponsible tactics instigated by the autonomous groups, while the Confraternidad confined itself to instructions, and Tráfico y Talleres defined the work to rule as

> 'that work which is done as slowly as possible and adheres strictly to the regulatory dispositions'.[1]

This potentially critical situation at the height of the harvest season was abruptly defused. The managers of the FCCC urged the DG FFCC to reconsider its order to the company to sack men who had worked to rule, and they were reinstated and a settlement published on 31 January 1921.[2] A partial strike was maintained by autonomists in the important sections of Buenos Aires, Boulogne and Rosario, but without the union's authority the movement was weak and was no longer the Confraternidad's responsibility.[3] On 5 February, two days before the work to rule was due to start, the Ministry of Public Works decreed that talks on the wage-systems should begin on 12 February.[4] Despite some powers apparently ceded to the DG FFCC, the election of delegates (known as escalafonistas) was in the union's hands and the talks that opened on 7 March excluded AFN candidates from the escalafonistas' ranks.[5] By this stage, the union was not prepared to throw away the chance of starting the talks for trifling reservations about the terms.

The summer of 1920-1921 saw other manifestations of change and unrest among railway labour. The workers on the ferry-boats which crossed the Paraná and Uruguay rivers, employed by the Entre Ríos Railway, were defined

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1. CC CC T y T Actas 26 Jan. 1921; CD Fraternidad Circular 10, 1 Feb. 1921; La Vanguardia 26 Jan. 1921; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Jan. 1921.
2. RRP 4 Feb. 1921; La Vanguardia 1 Feb. 1921.
3. However, the JC's attitude caused one of its members to resign (JC Confraternidad Actas 12 Feb.1921). Many were sacked and the organisation much weakened on the FCCC, according to Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.105.
4. La Vanguardia 6 Feb. 1921. The companies meanwhile insisted to the government that an increase in tariffs would have to follow any increase in costs which resulted from the negotiations (Paul B. Goodwin 'The politics of rate-making: the British-owned railways and the Unión Cívica Radical, 1921-1928', Journal of Latin American Studies Vol.6 pp.266-267).
5. RRP 11 Feb.1921; La Vanguardia 6 Feb.1921; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Mar.1921, 1 Apr. 1921; El Ferroviario 13 Mar.1921.

as railwaymen and some lost their jobs for infringement of the Railway Law.[1] After a two-day stoppage, FOM and the Confraternidad succeeded in convincing the government that their status should be redefined.[2]

The ferrymen were defined as water transport workers forthwith, but their status as regards the two unions was left open. Even between La Fraternidad and Tráfico y Talleres, only desultory and intermittent attempts were made to re-allocate members according to trade,[3] and so far no such jurisdictional agreements had been made between different entities. This is hardly surprising in view of the undeveloped state of industrial and inter-union relations, and room for expansion existed without arguing about cases of workers who were already organised.

1921: the divisive results of steps towards labour unity

FORA IX's Eleventh Congress of January-February 1921 demonstrated the lack of clear rapport between the leading union organisations. Thirty railway sections sent delegates, but the CC CC's right to represent the rest of the union was rejected by 78 votes to 61, despite their entitlement to do so according to the union's statutes.[4] FORA IX's CF apparently also felt that the decision to exclude the CC CC representatives was a mistake, but their prime concern at the time was with the resignation of five newly-elected PC members of the CF, who refused to serve as long as the question of the international affiliation of the federation remained unsettled.[5] Indeed, one of the reasons that a debate on the relative merits of the Amsterdam International and the new Red International of Trade Unions did not take place was that three sessions had been absorbed with wrangling over the railway representatives' status.[6]

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1. RRP 3 Dec.1920, 10 Dec. 1920; FORA IX CF Actas 29 Nov. 1920.
2. FORA IX CF Actas 6 Dec. 1920; La Vanguardia 10 Dec. 1920.
3. La Vanguardia 12 May 1921.
4. La Organizacion Obrera 12 Feb. 1921. The issue was extensively debated in print; Koghan and Rosanova, the secretaries of Talleres and Tráfico respectively, and Luis Lauzet of FORA IX, all wrote in favour of the CC CC's position, while Ricardo Bauleo was prominent among those in favour of the majority decision at the congress.
5. See Chapter 5 p.24.
6. La Organización Obrera 26 Feb. 1921.

During 1921, then, the issue which became the major policy for the Confraternidad was the establishment of wage-systems for sectors not covered by La Fraternidad's deal; in the union movement generally, activity centred around the establishment of a central federation without ideological commitment, in a period when political interests among labour leaders were heightened, particularly with the growth of PC influence in the unions. Neither of these vital concerns developed smoothly.

A common enemy of labour was the Argentine Patriotic League (LPA) whose anti-union work began during the Semana Trágica. During the disturbances on the railways of the first two months of 1921, the League issued a manifesto to its members inciting them to attack railwaymen, maintaining order in any rail strike 'using force and arms with prudence and energy'. La Fraternidad appealed to the Government to ban the LPA, as did the JC of the Confraternidad:

> 'the working class is faced with a civilian army, a white guard, which obstructs it, which impedes the pacific solution of conflicts and only intends to provoke reprisals and justify the intervention of the armed forces, to drown the serene protest of the organised and aware working class in blood - as occurred recently in Villaguay'.[1]

The LPA did succeed in provoking another general strike in Buenos Aires, declared jointly (in an effort at cooperation) by FORA IX and FORA V. The killing of six strikers on May Day in Gualeguaychú (Entre Ríos) - yet another manifestation of League brutality in addition to incidents in the Chaco and Patagonia - [2] brought protest from the taxi drivers' union, among others. The union was blacked and harrassed by the LPA and the licences of the union leaders revoked by the police. A protest meeting organised by the local workers' federation was prevented by violence and killings.[3] FORA V and FORA IX met and demanded the release of detained trade unionists

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1. La Fraternidad 5 Mar 1921; La Confraternidad 28 Feb. 1921.
2. See Gaston Gori La Forestal (Buenos Aires, Proyeccion, 2nd ed. 1974) pp.161 -194; Osvaldo Bayer Los vengadores de la Patagonia trágica (Buenos Aires, Galerna, 3 vols, 1972-1974) passim.
3. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.39; Rock (1975) p.212.

and guarantee of right of assembly, but they decided to let forty-eight hours elapse before declaring the general strike.[1] The mildness of the demands and the delay before calling the general strike show how reluctant the leaders were to adopt this course, despite the considerable provocation.

All but two of FORA IX's council were arrested at a delegates' meeting on 31 May from which 180 trade unionists were detained.[2] The strike organisation was thus left in the hands of the men who escaped detention, and they were unequal to the task. Syndicalists and anarchists disagreed, and the former cut their losses and returned to work.[3] Of the mass unions, the Confraternidad refused outright to participate, stating that their delicate negotiations on uniform pay and promotion scales would be jeopardised, and that neither they nor the rest of organised labour were in fit condition to sustain this sort of strike; instead they would negotiate the release of prisoners and the reopening of union offices direct.[4] The seamen, who supported the strike at first (being involved in one of their own), withdrew from it the day before FORA IX's two surviving councillors abandoned the movement.[5] Two days later it was all over; the anarchists had capitulated the prisoners were free and the union offices reopened.[6]

The Confraternidad leaders were not united in rejecting the strike.[7] Juan F. Tato of La Fraternidad directed the railwaymen's attention to the risk that the government would not answer the Confraternidad's insistence that the LPA be disbanded,[8] and his motion to threaten a 48-hour strike on this issue was only narrowly defeated.[9] The Liniers section of Tráfico y Talleres

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1. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.39.
2. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.40.
3. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.43.
4. La Organización Obrera 11 June 1921. Two leading intellectuals of the syndicalist movement, doctors Arraga and Troise, assisted in the negotiations (FORA IX CF Actas 5 June 1921).
5. The railwaymen felt the movement would not have taken place if FOM had not pressed their claims (Sesión plenaria, Actas JC, CD, CC CC, 8 June 1921; see also Rock Politics (1975) pp.209-214).
6. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.44.
7. Sesión plenaria, Actas, JC,CD, CC CC 8 June 1921.
8. Notes of strike committee to JC Confraternidad and vice versa 3 June 1921, in La Organización Obrera 11 June 1921.
9. Sesión plenaria, Actas, JC,CD,CC CC 8 June 1921. The motion was defeated by 17 votes to 13.

refused to pay their subscriptions because they rejected the Confraternidad's position on the strike.[1] Tráfico y Talleres published their own manifesto on the strike, to counter charges that they had acted under the influence of La Fraternidad or the JC, stating their position categorically as follows:

> 'revolutionary romanticism has had its day, and what we need now are not heroic and sterile actions which leave the workers disorganised and at the mercy of capitalism. On the contrary, we need to work to fortify our organisations still further'.[2]

The Confraternidad: loss of momentum and breach with the syndicalists

The period between the general strike attempt of June 1921 and the foundation of Unión Ferroviaria in October 1922 was very difficult, both for the Confraternidad and for the rest of organised labour in Argentina. The first wage-systems, for the guards and pointsmen, were produced after only three weeks of discussion;[3] they were less than perfect, and worst of all were attacked by some of the escalafonistas themselves.[4] The Confraternidad tried to explain the 'value and scope of the wage-systems' in a circular:

> 'With the pay and promotion scales and the complaints committees that complement them, the labour force takes on a function in the administration and direction of everything relating to its interests'.[5]

The dissatisfaction which prevailed was not only a consequence of poor education as to the potential gains to be made through the establishment of uniform scales and practices for the railway labour market. The most recent expression of discontent in traditional form, the June general strike, had been repudiated by the strongest union in the country, giving rise to further unsettling ideological self-examination to add to that fomented by Communists,

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1. FORA IX - despite their anger at the Confraternidad's non-participation - denounced the indiscipline at Liniers (FORA IX CF Actas 2 Aug. 1921).
2. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Circular 20, 9 June 1921.
3. La Organización Obrera 2 Apr. 1921.
4. La Vanguardia 22 July 1921; CC CC Trafico y Talleres Actas 2 July 1921. One cause of dissatisfaction was the inefficacy of the committee appointed to supervise the reinstatement of all sacked men except for those dismissed for 'adminstrative reasons', one of the undertakings made and then broken by the companies (La Vanguardia 9 Apr. 1921, 6 Oct. 1921; La Confraternidad May 1921, Aug. 1921; La Organización Obrera 16 Apr. 1921, 5 Nov. 1921).
5. La Vanguardia 8 May 1921.

notably in the railway section of Cañada de Gómez.[1] Other railway groups were affected by less overtly political divisionism, basing their attacks on the Confraternidad either on the pay-scale talks per se, or on criticisms of the results achieved and the slow progress of discussion. FORA IX and the PS indulged in a long sterile quarrel,[2] and even La Fraternidad was beset by difficulties when the scandal over San Sebastián's conduct on the Board of the Pensions Fund broke.[3]

The Confraternidad centrally stood up to these troubles and threats quite successfully, and the various committees' respective responsibilities were gradually being demarcated.[4] There were occasional internecine disputes, such as that which occurred over the question of donations to the victims of war and hunger in Russia. The CC had succeeded in diverting a decision on recognition of the Bolshevik regime to FORA IX,[5] but when the plea for financial assistance arrived, the CC CC supported the scheme and suggested a sum of $500 from each sindicato.[6] Two days later, Confraternidad's JC voted $1000 on its own behalf and recommended that the local joint committees should raise further contributions.[7] La Fraternidad's CD felt that the JC was exceeding its powers with this donation, and that the separate unions - rather than their coordinating committee - should vote money for this cause. Other members of the CD even pointed out that no such generous contributions had been made to the hungry of Argentina as were being sent to those of Russia.

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1. See Chapter 5 p.215.
2. See Chapter 5pp.212-213.
3. CD Fraternidad Actas 16 Sept. 1921, 19 Oct. 1921, 14 Nov. 1921 deals with the dangerous, if pathetic, resistance to the CD put up by some of San Sebastián' cronies from his home section of Haedo (FCO).
4. JC Circular 20, 14 Sept. 1921, in La Confraternidad Sept. 1921.
5. Bauleo, a PC member of the CC CC, persisted in bringing up this issue, claiming that recognition of the Bolsheviks would increase trade and create jobs (CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 5 Sept. 1921, 23 Nov. 1921).
6. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 8 Oct. 1921.
7. JC Confraternidad Actas 10 Oct. 1921; La Confraternidad 22 Oct. 1921.

Américo Baliño demonstrated his distaste for the scheme by casting doubt on whether the funds would arrive, a patent PS slur on the PC, echoed by Negri of the JC who wanted to have the money sent out throuth the Amsterdam International.[1]

The money was sent and with generous subscription contributions constituted a substantial donation.[2] However, the incident betrays the inadequacy of the Confraternidad's statutes on financial arrangements (sadly underscored by the exposure of fraud at the centre), the rivalry between the three committees, and lastly the extent to which the unions were openly influenced by external political allegiances.

In October 1921, a plenary of the railway union committees decided to issue the government with an ultimatum: unless by the end of the year new elections were held for the Board of the Pensions Fund, and the discussions of wage-systems completed, with enforcement of the undertaking on staff reinstatement and of the established working regulation, the union would take national action. A special Congress on the action to be taken, advocated by the left wing, was narrowly defeated in favour of a referendum.[3]

This decision, which was intended to arouse the rank and file to united action, was a disaster. The strongly worded circular, detailing the delays, injustices and evasions to which the union's representatives had been subjected, met with an apathetic response.[4]

> 'The majority of the secions are not dedicating the care and attention to this system of choice that it merits',

complained Fraternidad's CD.[5] In the end, the footplatemen responded best; 46% of the union voted to effect the work to rule compared with only 36% of

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1. CD Fraternidad Actas 19 Oct. 1921; JC Confraternidad Actas 10 Oct. 1921.
2. A total of $3274 collected is recorded in El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Jan. 1922, but this is almost certainly the total of subscriptions only.
3. Plenaria 14 Oct. 1921.
4. Circular 23 of JC, 19 Oct. 1921, in La Confraternidad 22 Oct. 1921, La Vanguardia 27 Oct. 1921.
5. CD Fraternidad Actas y circulares Circular 37, 26 Dec. 1921.

the traffic and workshop sections.[1] Railway traffic, instead of reaching a peak at the time the ultimatum expired, diminished steadily, reinforcing the men's reluctance to risk militancy for fear of losing their jobs.[2] Dismissals because of the recession had occasioned a strike at the Rosario-Pérez workshops of the FCCA, organised by the autonomous sindicato. Its defeat - though the Confraternidad was not involved - showed that the threat of unemployment was real. Confidence in the union was undermined when it was made public that the Confraternidad's secretary, José Basanta, had been dismissed for embezzling the union's funds.[3]

The Unity Congress, which founded the Unión Sindical Argentina as successor to FORA IX, was held from 6 to 13 March 1922. The CC CC of Tráfico y Talleres, anxious to avoid repetition of the strife of 1921, consulted its sections in advance as to the way in which the union should be represented.[4] The CC CC decided that the minority favouring direct delegates should be permitted to send their own delegates as a special concession, as long as these accepted the CC CC's delegation representing those sections who could not or did not wish to send their own spokesmen; it was also decided to insist that the direct delegations met that of the CC CC to coordinate railway representation on the day before the Unity

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1. La Vanguardia 21 May 1922 (Limonghi's speech at Tráfico y Talleres congress. Even so, some groups apparently secured an 80% turnout in the referendum, so not all the union was apathetic (El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Nov. 1921, 1 Jan. 1922).

2. La Vanguardia 28 Dec. 1921; Sesión plenaria, Actas, JC, CD, CC CC, 30 Dec. 1921.

3. La Organización Obrera 10 Dec. 1921; JC Confraternidad Actas 24 Nov. 1921; La Vanguardia 31 Dec. 1921. The JC was charged with negligence from FORA IX and within the union as well as by its usual enemies; the replacement, Marcelino Buyán, was thoroughly investigated by the union to clear him from allegations of dishonesty (La Confraternidad Mar. 1922; La Organización Obrera 21 Feb. 1922). The connection between this affair and the PS Trade Union Information Committee is examined in Chapter 5 p.209; Buyán was also a Socialist.

4. Of the sections that replied, 49 favoured representation through the CC CC, compared with 34 who wanted sections to send their own delegates (La Vanguardia 19 Feb. 1922; La Organización Obrera 18 Feb. 1922; CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 10 Feb. 1922, circulars 26 Sept. 1921, 14 Nov. 1921, 11 Feb. 1922).

Congress.[1] The CC CC viewed the Congress with misgiving; Rosanova said that

> 'he had never seen proposals worse prepared or less conducive to fusion than those presented by the Unity Committee'.[2]

Fourteen railway sections attended the Congress in their own right;[3] the provision of delegates for this as well as the two railway congresses scheduled for April and May was too great an expense for many sections to bear.[4] The CC CC's credentials were attacked widely, and indeed by several sections, including the workshops sections of Buenos Aires (Cía Gral), Buenos Aires (FCS), and Liniers (FCO), in the last instance in a speech by Francisco Xarrier, a former member of the CC CC.[5] The Congress however voted to permit the CC CC to represent those sections who had requested them to act on their behalf by 80 votes, as against 60 votes for an alternative proposal to allow the delegation voice but no vote.[6]

The Congress which established USA marked the end of the close relationship which had persisted, through considerable strain, between railway union leaders and the central union federation. The CC CC's official view was to welcome the new entity and hope fervently for its success, but to postpone any decision on joining it until the forthcoming congress.[7] However, USA exceeded its powers somewhat with importunate insistence that the Confraternidad invite the autonomous railway sections to their joint Congress, and the new Comité Central Sindical (CCS) announced that the railway organisation was limited by

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1. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Circular 2, 11 Feb. 1922; Actas 10 Feb. 1922; La Organización Obrera 18 Feb. 1922.
2. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 17 Feb. 1922. At the same time, the union agreed to oppose discussion of the international question at the congress and to support neutrality on the matter if it was discussed (La Organización Obrera 25 Feb. 1922).
3. La Vanguardia 7 Mar. 1922; La Organización Obrera 18 Mar. 1922 says sixteen.
4. La Vanguardia 1 Mar. 1922, complaint on costs from Buenos Aires (FCS), Workshop dept.
5. Bauleo, a current member of the CC CC, also attacked that body as reformist (La Vanguardia 8 Mar. 1922, 9 Mar.1922; El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Apr. 1922).
6. La Vanguardia 9 Mar. 1922.
7. La Vanguardia 23 Mar. 1922.

> 'the reformist spirit of its constitution which even conflicted with that of USA'. [1]

La Fraternidad declared that

> 'we have never seen the unity of the working class so remote or so impracticable, despite the formal conclusions reached by the Congress'.[2]

Syndicalists versus reformists I: the Congresses of May 1922

The articles which appeared in the working class presss on the issues to be discussed at the coming railway congresses demonstrate the extent to which the men were divided as to future action. Some advocated the separation of resistance and friendly society functions, with La Fraternidad responsible exclusively for the latter;[3] others proposed the abandonment of organisation by trades in favour of sindicatos por ferrocarril;[4] still others felt that the present organisation was preferable (with individuals favouring minor statutory modifications) but that the essential struggle was with the apathy of the rank and file.[5] A considerable body of Tráfico y Talleres was in sympathy with the aims and principles of USA, a view exemplified by Rufino Jodsinsky, the only railwayman on the CCS;[6] still more believed that it was important for the railway unions to support it (either through the adherence of the entire Confraternidad or at least through Tráfico y Talleres). However, a significant group, including a disproportionately large section of the CC CC, were opposed to any involvement with the new organisation.[7]

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1. CCS USA Actas 21 Mar. 1922, 31 Mar. 1922; La Vanguardia 1 Apr. 1922. The decision of the CC CC not to comply with the USA's initiative on behalf of the autonomous railway unions provoked the new federation to circulate all railway sections, protesting at the CC CC's attitude and urging discussion at the congress of the unity question (CCS USA Actas 28 Apr. 1922).
2. La Fraternidad 20 Mar. 1922. The footplatemen had been invited to the Unity Congress but too late for the sections to authorise their attendance; La Fraternidad was greatly abused by those unions which did attend.
3. La Unión Sindical 8 Apr. 1922.
4. La Confraternidad April 1922; La Vanguardia 8 May 1922; La Unión Sindical 22 Apr. 1922.
5. La Confraternidad April 1922.
6. La Unión Sindical 8 Apr. 1922; see his utterances in the minutes of the CCS.
7. La Vanguardia 28 Mar. 1922, article by Pedro Spagnuolo; La Vanguardia 5 May 1922 for resolution of Mar del Plata section (Traffic).

Thus the issues to be discussed at the Congress of Trafico y Talleres, and that of the Confraternidad which followed it, in May 1922 were dangerously divisive. By comparison, the level of unity displayed at La Fraternidad's congress, held earlier in May, was exceptional. The union's internal business was discussed economically, including a session devoted to the cross-questioning and final condemnation of the former President, Jose San Sebastián.[1] They also delivered a dignified snub to AFN, who sent greetings to the footplatemen from their own congress.[2]

The question of the future of the Confraternidad received much more attention. The delegates of the FCP - with Juan F. Tato prominent among them - presented a project which entailed the surrender of a good part of each sindicato's autonomy to a more powerful JC. Most of the other delegates opposed this plan; Antonio Baldomir (FCS)

> 'maintained that the other railway unions could not always demand that La Fraternidad sacrifice itself. They could demand it if they were administratively, organically, and in all other respects on La Fraternidad's level, but unfortunately they were not.'[3]

Nor was La Fraternidad prepared to surrender the renegotiation of its pay-scales to the JC, because 'it did not have confidence in it' and its record on the pay-scales of the other trades had not been good.[4]

La Fraternidad thus asserted its desire to stand aloof from its sister organisations, and to preserve its existing level of autonomy from the JC, until such time as Tráfico y Talleres had resolved its difficulties. This did not prevent the union from expressing most strongly its support for the JC's scheme of transformation of these unions. The Assembly resolved that

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1. La Fraternidad 20 May 1922; La Vanguardia 12 May 1922.
2. La Confraternidad June 1922; El Ferroviario 5 June 1922.
3. La Vanguardia 12 May 1922.
4. La Vanguardia 12 May 1922.

> 'once the Sindicatos of Tráfico y Talleres had accepted the modification of their system of organisation and struggle in the form sought by La Fraternidad, the CD should be empowered to place at their disposal any means by which they could collaborate in the work of giving the said Sindicatos this new orientation'.[1]

The willingness to assist the former components of FOF thus depended upon their adoption of the proposals laid down by the JC.[2]

The Traffic and Workshops departments were to be reunited in one union, and this body was to acquire personería jurídica. This union and La Fraternidad were to be equally represented by members of their two committees on an action committee, which would take steps on the request of either constituent union after all channels had been exhausted and if over half the membership requested it in a referendum.[3]

The momentous changes which these guidelines implied constituted the major business before the congress of Tráfico y Talleres, a congress whose declared aim was to close the gap between the CC CC and the rank and file.[4] In the event, the congress proved how divided the movement was, and though it lasted for nearly two weeks made no contribution to the efforts to achieve consensus for progress.

Delegates to the congress attacked the work of the CC CC and the Confraternidad. The lengthy debates on the CC CC's report were characterised by personal attacks, notably that on Rosanova who resigned when the congress denied him the right to speak on the grounds that he was an employee of the union and not a delegate.[5] A sizeable portion of the delegates were thus determined to reject all the work of Tráfico y Talleres; this mood was embodied in a motion from the Rosario (Traffic) section of

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1. La Vanguardia 14 May 1922.
2. La Confraternidad May 1922.
3. La Confraternidad May 1922; La Vanguardia 15 May 1922.
4. La Confraternidad June 1922.
5. La Vanguardia 15 May 1922, 16 May 1922 (4th, 5th and 7th sessions); El Obrero Ferroviario 16 June 1922. This was a harsh attack on the longest-serving officer of the union; though some found his control occasionally autocratic, the records suggest that Rosanova was scrupulously honest.

the FCCA, demanding that the CC CC be intervened by the congress, and their representatives on the JC withdrawn, and proposing to establish a unity committee to reorganise railway workers.[1] However, most of the CC CC's report was substantially approved, with the important exceptions of the attitude to the general strike of June 1921, and the work of the escalafonistas.[2] The escalafonistas were criticised in the report, but the discussions in the congress expressed broader dissatisfaction, with some delegates protesting that the talks on wage-scales took place at all, and others preferring to object to the way in which their conclusions - some of which were already in effect - had not been put to the membership before they were accepted.[3]

While dissatisfaction with past conduct had some serious implications, the most concerted onslaught on the leadership of Tráfico y Talleres concerned the future. In this connection, the congress was subject to two external influences; the PS Trade Union Propaganda Committee was alleged to guide the conduct of the leaders and those delegates who favoured personería jurídica, while USA tried to secure representation for autonomous groups and pressed for rejection of the JC-La Fraternidad mode of organisation.[4]

The majority of the committee entrusted with the presentation of the statutory proposals rejected the JC-La Fraternidad scheme.[5] They proposed to reuinte the two sindicatos as the Federación Ferroviaria, and join USA. The sections would have as much autonomy as possible, but the central committee's authorisation would be required for any strike. The statutory provisions in short reconstructed FOF, with minor modifications.[6]

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1. La Vanguardia 14 May 1922, 3rd session.
2. La Vanguardia 19 May 1922, 14th session.
3. La Vanguardia 17 May 1922, 18 May 1922 (10th and 11th sessions). The escalafonistas themselves were denied the right to report, and when they did so later they attached a great deal of responsibility for their failures to the unresponsive or even hostile attitudes of the sections (La Vanguardia 2 July 1922, 3 July 1922.
4. La Vanguardia 17 May 1922, 10th session; for PS La Uniόn Sindical 27 May 1922; on USA, see La Confraternidad June 1922, La Vanguardia 2 June 1922, La Uniόn Sindical 17 June 1922.
5. La Vanguardia 20 May 1922, 16th session.
6. La Vanguardia 22 May 1922.

The former leaders of Tráfico y Talleres attempted to prevent the adoption of these proposals by having the two conflicting projects put to the vote by the sections, but this was defeated (by 63 votes to 49, with 7 absent and 5 abstentions).[1] However, the congress was dissolved without disbanding the CC CC, though a supervisory Committee of Control was elected, most of whom favoured the USA position; moreover, delegates from the two sindicatos were still elected to sit on the JC, and most of these came from the old leadership, albeit partly from its left wing.[2] The leaders of the pro-USA majority in the congress, like Esteban Loza of Rosario and Francisco Xarrier of Liniers,[3] thus enabled the old guard to remain in control until a new congress and the election of the committee of the reconstituted Federación Ferroviaria could be arranged.

Syndicalists versus reformists II: the victory of reform

The failure of the majority in the congress to seize control proved its undoing, and shows how inexperienced the delegates were.[4] The JC of the Confraternidad at once issued the lengthy Circular 34, detailing the events of the congress and the intervention of USA, explaining the JC-La Fraternidad proposals for reorganisation and asking the sections to express their opinion before the next congress, which had been postponed.[5]

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1. La Vanguardia 21 May 1922.
2. La Vanguardia 22 May 1922, 21st session.
3. Esteban LOZA. Active in Rosario from 1917 strike FCCA (several speeches); 1918 frequent speaker. Very anti-Socialist; Jan.1921 La Organización Obrera article advocating expulsion Trade Union Propaganda Committee members from CF FOF. Wanted escalafonistas excluded from May 1922 Tráfico y Talleres congress; close to Lotito (of USA) during congress, where he represented Rosario (FCCA) Traffic section. July 1922 ousted from sectional leadership by Confraternidad loyalists. Profession uncertain; a fairly senior employee, but hotly denied being an inspector 1922.
Ernesto XARRIER. Secretary-general, Liniers (FCO) Jan. 1920. Frequent delegate to congresses (at FORA IX Congress 1921, opposed CC CC representation); JC Confraternidad May 1922; CC CC Talleres from Aug. 1920. Politics unknown but clearly USA-type syndicalist.
4. La Vanguardia 28 May 1922.
5. La Confraternidad June 1922.

La Fraternidad urged its members to appeal to their colleagues at joint meetings and elsewhere to overthrow the 'lamentable resolutions' of the congress of Tráfico y Talleres.[1] The Tráfico y Talleres journal, El Obrero Ferroviario, also urged reconsideration, pointing out that none of the delegates had been mandated to put unity at risk in this way.[2] The CCS of USA retaliated with a denial of the JC's right to seek a referendum on the constitution of the Federación Ferroviaria, and alleged that the JC and CC CC were dominated by the PS Trade Union Propaganda Committee. They claimed that

> 'legal status, per se, does not merit discussion by any genuine trade union'.[3]

The polemic that ensued reflected an enormous variety of opinions. La Internacional (the organ of the PC) and La Unión Sindical (of USA) provided the main opposition to the railway leaders' insistence on further consideration of the Federación Ferroviaria's statutes.[4]

The secretary of the section Buenos Aires (FCO), José Morales, tried to unite the opposition in the federal capital; he eventually led the body which came to represent the dissidents, the Comité de Relaciones (or Coordinating Committee).[5] This later received explicit support from USA, and circulated many unions inciting them to condemn Circular 34 and the Confraternidad's leaders, and to back the USA-orientated railway workers.[6]

Even the CC CC could not present a united front. The political differences remained, centring on a long-standing row about where El Obrero Ferroviario should be printed. Bauleo, now an employee as a result of a resolution of the congress and Rosanova's resignation, rejected the CC CC's

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1. La Fraternidad 20 May 1922; CD Fraternidad Actas 29 May 1922; CD circular (no date) in La Vanguardia 9 June 1922.
2. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 June 1922
3. La Unión Sindical 3 June 1922; CCS USA Circular 4 1 June 1922.
4. The CC CC finally severed links with USA in answer to a plea from the Buenos Aires (Traffic, FCS) section, by publicly denying Rufino Jodsinsky's representative status on the syndicalist federation's CCS (La Vanguardia 21 June 1922; CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 29 June 1922).
5. La Unión Sindical 10 June 1922; La Vanguardia 4 June 1922, 9 July 1922.
6. Bandera Proletaria (successor to La Unión Sindical) 6 Sept. 1922, 16 Sept. 1922, 19 Sept. 1922, 20 Sept. 1922, 22 Sept. 1922.

desire to place the printing with La Vanguardia once more, now that La Internacional had refused to accept the railwaymen's paper.[1] Bauleo's own situation as a PC member working for a body which opposed the PC position on railway organisation was anomalous until his resignation in August.[2]

It soon became clear that support for the JC's Circular 34 was greater than that for the Federación Ferroviaria.[3] The JC circulated the statutory proposals prepared for consideration at a new joint congress, after the generally favourable reaction to Circular 34.[4] It was agreed that the CC CC should have its sections elect delegates to the joint congress and the new congress planned for the general union by ballot, and that the turnout for each election should be recorded. The JC itself designated the sections whose delegates were to attend the joint congress.[5] This attempt to introduce basic democratic safeguards was particularly significant in the case of the traffic department, whose employees were scattered and worked shifts which always hindered the attendance of all the workers at a single meeting.[6]

The coup - for such it was, in many respects - effected by the railway leaders between May and October 1922 was markedly successful. Even the Rosario (Traffic) section of the FCCA was reorganised and reincorporated in the union.[7] Despite the discovery of yet another fraud

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1. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 21 July 1922. See also Chapter 5 pp.212-213.
2. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 18 Aug. 1922; La Unión Sindical 26 Aug. 1922.
3. For controversy over the numbers of sections approving Circular 34, see La Unión Sindical 8 July 1922; La Confraternidad August 1922; La Vanguardia of 23 June 1922 quotes JC Circular 36, giving 82 in favour and 12 against Circular 34 by 21 June 1922.
4. La Vanguardia 14 June 1922, 15 June 1922, 16 June 1922, 17 June 1922.
5. La Vanguardia 29 July 1922.
6. JC Confraternidad Actas 30 June 1922; CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Circular 8 14 July 1922. On the problems of participation of the traffic department, compare the United States case, for which see Joel Seidman The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen: the internal political life of a national union (New York, Wiley, 1962) p.24.
7. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Sept. 1922 gives CC CC minutes of 4 Aug. 1922; La Vanguardia 2 Aug. 1922; a less charitable picture is presented in report of Comisión de Control in Bandera Proletaria 27 Sept. 1922.

by an employee, Carinci, and the CC CC's failure to cover it up as they had intended,[1] the leaders retained the initiative and the confidence of the bulk of the sections. Even the wage-scales began to come into their own as an achievement of the union leadership's policy, with a government decree establishing the dates from which they became effective and a publicity drive in the union to see they were enforced.[2]

The Committee of Control established in the congress proved powerless when the sections' support for Circular 34 nullified their raison d'être; though it issued a strongly critical report, it did so courtesy of the CC CC who granted the use of typing and duplicating facilities.[3]

By the time of the congresses in October 1922, both the Confraternidad and the general union had abandoned their former lip-service to impartiality in favour of a new assertive tone on future policy and organisation. Articles emphasised the way in which the organisation of railway labour was affected by the structure of the industry;[4] unity was imperative because all departments were interdepentent to a greater degree even than, say, among the seamen.[5] The union's response to Circular 34, and the healthy condition of the traction department's organisation, led the CC CC to advocate constituting the union on lines similar to those of La Fraternidad.[6]

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1. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 4 Aug. 1922; La Unión Sindical 8 July 1922; La Vanguardia 6 Aug. 1922.
2. La Vanguardia 22 Aug. 1922, 23 Aug. 1922; El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Sept. 1922; La Confraternidad September 1922.
3. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas 18 Aug. 1922; Bandera Proletaria 27 Sept. 1922. One of the Committee of Control, and a leading critic of the CC CC at the May congress, José Cansobre, resigned from the committee because he felt the sections' judgement made nonsense of its work (La Vanguardia 3 Oct. 1922).
4. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Aug. 1922: 'Objectivo inmediato y finalidad de la organizaciones obreras'.
5. La Confraternidad August 1922: 'Cual debe ser el verdadero concepto revolucionario de los trabajadores ferroviarios organizados'.
6. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Aug. 1922.

Moreover, the CC CC ventured to make a political judgement.

> 'Nobody, except senseless people, can deny that the way of thinking of most of our comrades in La Fraternidad, like the rest of the exploited, is in conflict with the present social régime, nor that they aspire to the emancipation of all their class. However, they are not such admirers of advanced theories and statutes as others. Why? Because they have realised that the revolution is not made with more or less violent utterances and writings; they know that it will not be by means of bombs and clashing cymbals that the bourgeoisie is defeated; they know that to say the word revolution when one is out of danger is very easy, but that it is quite another matter to do the practical work to make the real revolution.'[1]

The JC concurred.

> 'Because of the very characteristics of the work and conditions of the railway worker, the revolution - which will certainly take place - will happen gradually, evolving naturally with a firm base and without dangerous setbacks.'[2]

La Fraternidad defended the Confraternidad leaders' position, replying to attacks from FOM in La Unión del Marino upon the union's intention to seek personería jurídica;[3] the footplatemen's journal pointed out that the philosophy of direct action propounded by FOM was not consistent with their practice, citing the fact that nearly all the seamen's strikes from 1916 to 1921 had been solved through mediation and with the help of the police department.[4]

Thus the railwaymen's leaders emphasised the special needs of railway organisation, which faced not only employers but also government and the public in their struggles.[5] They stressed the need to put their own house in order before acting effectively for the emancipation of the working class,

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Aug 1922.
2. La Confraternidad August 1922; compare the speech of Aló to joint assembly of Buenos Aires (FCS) 18 Aug. 1922 in La Vanguardia 20 Aug. 1922.
3. La Fraternidad 5 Aug. 1922, 20 Sept. 1922.
4. For examples of FOM's dealings with government and other legal authorities, see the accounts of the disputes of 1919, 1920, and 1921 in Rock Politics (1975) pp.184-190, 209-211.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Aug. 1922.

and published a number of individual critiques of past methods and organisation of the railway workers.[1] Lastly, they maintained, with some reason, that the acquisition of personería jurídica would strengthen their trade union status, which was after all a prime consideration, and would not of itself separate them from their comrades in labour unions without this status.[2]

The main opposition to this view came, of course, from the ranks of labour, and from USA in particular. The federation denounced the fact that the Joint Congress of the Confraternidad was taking place before that of Tráfico y Talleres, so that

> 'the latter would have nothing else to do but to approve the resolutions of the joint congress'.

Such anti-democratic procedures were opposed to unity. Moreover, USA could have nothing to do with organisations

> 'disposed to reach understanding with the bourgeois state, because, by acting in this way, they place themselves on the edge of the class struggle, a doctrinaire symbol used by the so-called reformist socialists to lure the workers and lead them along the road to association with the regime which exploits us'.[3]

Instead, they insisted that the dissidents should maintain the Federación Ferroviaria under the mantle of USA.

Unión Ferroviaria, October 1922

The Joint Congress met on 2 October, with thirty representatives of the Traction Department and 25 each from Traffic and Workshops. From the start, dissidence was minimised; sections which were not completely up to date with their subscriptions were left unrepresented.[4] Reporters

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Oct. 1922; La Confraternidad September 1922.
2. La Fraternidad 5 Aug. 1922.
3. Bandera Proletaria 3 Oct. 1922.
4. Even those who offered payment at the last minute were excluded, in case they did so with intent to disrupt proceedings; such strict procedure was (as far as can be seen) quite unprecedented in the railway unions, even in La Fraternidad.

from the papers of the PC and USA, La Internacional and Bandera Proletaria, were excluded because of these journals' defamatory campaigns against the Confraternidad.[1] Some indication of the political complexion of the congress also emerged from the resolution (by 41 votes to 22) not to vote a donation from the central funds to the hungry of Russia, on the grounds that to do so would remedy none of the ills that it was intended to cure.[2]

The report of the JC was approved, with very little discussion. The most important business concerned the statutes of the Confraternidad.[3] There was some debate about whether the body should be constituted as a single union or in two or three parts, but eventually the project to establish Unión Ferroviaria as a counterpart to La Fraternidad was accepted, with a number of delegates expressing the desire that this should be a first step towards complete unity.[4]

The joint congress was interrupted so that Tráfico y Talleres could meet. This congress passed resolutions demanding the reinstatement of railwaymen out of work, the abolition of the blacklist, and measures to minimise the practice of piece work.[5] The statutory commission approved the CC CC's proposals in general,[6] and the delegates echoed this opinion by 46 votes to 5. In three sessions, the Sindicatos de Tráfico y Talleres transformed themselves into Unión Ferroviaria, a body whose aims were confessedly legalistic, which intended to serve as a friendly society as well as a trade union of resistance, and whose structure was thoroughly centralist.[7]

This unity of purpose, in sharp contrast to the strife of the May congress, was clearly not simply the consequence of a change of heart by

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1. La Vanguardia 3 Oct. 1922.
2. La Vanguardia 4 Oct. 1922.
3. La Vanguardia 14 June 1922, 15 June 1922, 16 June 1922, 17 June 1922 for Confraternidad statutory proposals.
4. La Vanguardia 5 Oct. 1922.
5. La Vanguardia 7 Oct. 1922.
6. La Vanguardia 31 Aug. 1922, 1 Sept. 1922, 2 Sept. 1922, 3 Sept. 1922 for CC CC statutory scheme.
7. See Chapter 7 pp.257,260,266.

the mass of the general railway union. Nor was it simply the result of the impositions of a relatively experienced and politically committee leadership with the weight of the footplate union behind them, still less was the withdrawal of a section of the dissidents and the alienation of the railwaymen from the USA the root of the change. The creation of Unión Ferroviaria in the image of La Fraternidad was a logical conclusion of the direction of the practice of the general railway union, however conflicting and halting that direction had sometimes been. It represented a fusion of the theory of organisation and structure which evolved through the tergiversations of the history of railway labour organisation with the practice of these organisations.

The concluding sessions of the joint congress, reinforced by this vote of confidence in the structures which it advocated, dealt quickly with the remaining business. A resolution was passed approving the continuation of the work of the escalafonistas to include those trades not yet covered, and to improve the terms of some existing wage-systems which had proved defective in practice. Another motion gave the JC the task of improving the national railway regulation and securing its embodiment in law; the motion of the general rail union on the reinstatement of redundant railwaymen was approved; and the congress voted to demand the Confraternidad's proper representation on the Board of the Pensions Fund, and some modifications in the railway pensions law.[1]

The foundation of Unión Ferroviaria - or the 'submission of the railwaymen' as USA greeted the end of the congresses - [2] was indeed 'much more transcendental than anyone will imagine at first sight'.[3] However, the secure establishment and growth of the new union was slow and painful.

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1. La Vanguardia 10 Oct. 1922.
2. Bandera Proletaria 10 Oct. 1922.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Oct. 1922.

> 'The eminently constructive work undertaken by the two latest congresses .... must have its natural consequences not only in the sections which comprise our organisation, but also in each individual member.'

The story of the process by which Unión Ferroviaria fulfilled the aims of its constituent congress belongs elsewhere.

Chapter 5. Left-wing ideology and party politics in the unions

The theme of the relationship between union action and left-wing ideology has emerged throughout the narrative account of the struggles of Argentine railwaymen. The general social evolution of Argentina in the period of mass immigration is reflected in the attempts of different ideological tendencies to influence organised labour and in the efforts of party political groups to foment labour organisation on their own preferred lines. This account sets out to point to some of the misleading results of traditional analyses of left-wing influences in Argentine unions, which have tended to underestimate the early years of union development, describing the labour organisations that emerged as anti-political, extra-legal, even alien organisms.[1]

A study of the theoretical beliefs of any group creates difficulties. One method, an analysis of the writings of leaders produced for the consumption of those already committed, has more or less been applied to the ideological formation of early Argentine trade unions, by Solomonoff.[2] The pitfalls of this approach are obvious. Official pronouncements for a restricted audience tend to follow a set pattern, which is self-perpetuating. Themes are reiterated long after their relevance to the day-to-day existence of an organisation has been dissipated by events. It would be surprising not to find analysis of social conditions in terms of the opposition of exploiters and exploited, of capital versus labour, in the official resolutions of labour federations in Argentina or almost anywhere else in this period (with the possible exception of the American Federation of Labour in the United States).[3]

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1. See for instance Alfredo López Historia del movimiento social y la clase obrera argentina (Buenos Aires, Peña Lillo, 1974); A.Belloni Del anarquismo al peronismo (Buenos Aires, Documentos, 1960).
2. Jorge N. Solomonoff Ideologías del movimiento obrero y conflicto social (Buenos Aires, Proyección, 1971).
3. Patrick Renshaw The Wobblies (New York, Anchor, 1968) p.19.

These utterances concerning the place of trade unions in society do not necessarily guide the actions of union leaders, who (it would be reasonable to suppose) constitute the more politically conscious elements of union membership. Solomonoff maintains that the pronouncements of union leaders matched the aspirations of their social base; in other words, the leaders' views accurately represented those of the rank and file.[1] It is a mistake to stretch this identity too far. At least until 1910 or 1912 in Argentina, the rank and file was only called upon to express its loyalty sporadically, in strikes or other militant action. Strikes were not closely related to ideological consciousness. Deeper ideological considerations doubtless motivated some workers in their protests against the material injustices of the economic system of which they were clearly the exploited party; however, participation aimed at improving wages and/or conditions, not at overthrowing the status quo.[2] Union leaders did not fail to grasp this; despite the public rhetoric on class lines, they were ready to collaborate with the forces of state and capitalism to a much greater extent than has been acknowledged. The union's function was inextricably linked with material improvements. It was on these, not on a tight political base,[3] that its permanent raison d'être depended, whatever the ideologies implicit in the resolutions of congresses. Moreover, it is obvious, though not subject to concrete proof, that some of the working class voted Radical and even Conservative from 1912 onwards in national elections, while continuing to elect Socialists, syndicalists and anarchists to lead their trade unions. This process continued in Argentina, at least up to 1945, and has parallels in Spain, for example.[4]

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1. Solomonoff op.cit. p.147.
2. On the difficulties of defining why strikes occur, see Richard Hyman Strikes (London, Fontana, 2nd ed. 1977) Chapter 5 pp.106-139.
3. Note that Argentine trade unions explicitly denied the usefulness of any political identity.
4. On railway workers' support for UCR and conservatives in Junín, see Carlos Aloé Gobierno - Proceso - Conducta (Buenos Aires, Sudestada, 1969) pp.212-213; on Spanish working class voting for Carlists and Republicans, while organising in PS unions, see Juan Pablo Fusi Política obrera en el país vasco 1880-1923 (Madrid, Turner, 1975) pp.115-116.

It is impossible to say whether the anarchist tactic of non-participation in elections (on the grounds that the state was a repressive institution per se) was echoed by organised labour, which would indicate a degree of anarchist consciousness. There are two principal reasons for this; first, the continuing high proportion of foreign and therefore disenfranchised males,[1] and the failure of campaigns for mass naturalisation run by the PS; and secondly, because until 1912 participation in elections was so low.[2] After 1912 the vote was technically compulsory for adult male citizens, but non-participation continued; it is nevertheless distinctly unlikely that a significant proportion of this group was made up of Argentine citizens of strong anarchist conviction.

So far doubts have been cast on the idea that the ideology influential in the development of the Argentine labour movement can reliably be analysed by means of official resolutions emanating from union leaders. Some of the problems of judging the extent and nature of theoretical influences have been suggested, like the dichotomy between the motivation for trade union action in pursuit of specific goals and the broader aims of the movement; the fact that the unions existed initially to satisfy the immediate needs of their members, and had to devise a coherent basis for permanent existence while eschewing sectarian interests; the impossibility of analysing voting patterns seriously, either because of the weak and ephemeral nature of trade unions themselves, or because of the extent of non-participation in national electoral processes.

Despite the methodological obstacles, it is possible to isolate influences which shaped the development of organised labour, and show some of the limitations of ideological commitment, by monitoring the responses of unions and their leaders to events, rather than by concentrating on their rhetoric.

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1. Solomonoff op.cit. p.134.
2. Dario Cantón Elecciones y partidos políticos en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1973) pp.43-45.

The ideological influences which are the concern of this chapter were of three distinct types: first, those of ideological constructs which do not entail the formation of political parties with an electoral goal - anarchism and syndicalism; secondly, the efforts of the Socialist and Communist parties[1] to come to terms with their dual role as working class mouthpiece in state institutions and their greater or lesser commitment to working class organisation outside the party; thirdly, the attempts of the Radical party to woo the electoral support of the working class.

Anarchism

Distinguishing the anarchist attitudes and beliefs regarding union organisation from those of the syndicalists is not an easy matter, either from a study of the contemporary writings or from subsequent commentaries. Solomonoff treats both together as anarcho-syndicalism, but this is not very appropriate in the Argentine case.[2] From 1905, when FORA's Fifth Congress declared that

> 'the workers should be inculcated with the economic and philosophical principles of anarcho-communism',[3]

there existed separate anarchist and syndicalist federations, FORA and UGT (superseded by CORA from 1909 to 1914) respectively. The abandonment of this clause brought the majority of the components of FORA and CORA together at FORA's Ninth Congress in 1915 in what came to be known as FORA del Noveno, or FORA IX, which also embraced a number of very important and hitherto autonomous groups. The unions that persisted with the commitment to anarcho-communism withdrew and united in the so-called FORA V.

So there was a difference between anarchists and syndicalists, and considerable rivalry, though there was a constant tension between that rivalry and the recognition of nearly all unions that unity in one federation

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1. The term 'comunista' was applied more to the anarcho-communists of FORA V and the divisionist sindicatos on the railways than to members of the Partido Socialista Internacional or (after December 1920) the PC in this period. This can cause confusion, but the distinction is preserved as far as possible here.
2. Solomonoff op.cit. pp.260-261.
3. Jacinto Oddone Gremialismoproletario argentino (Buenos Aires, Líbera, 2nd ed. 1975) p.255.

was vital to the interests of the organised working class. However, it is not easy to isolate that difference in practice. Renshaw, in his study of syndicalism in the United States,[1] analyses the tension and eventual breach between anarchists and syndicalists in terms of a battle between advocates of a federalist versus a centralised structure. There was undoubtedly more tolerance of a centralised bureaucracy in the syndicalist federations FORA and CORA than in the anarchist FORA - but there is an obvious historical corollary to this. By the time the syndicalist federation had matured, as FORA IX, its most important components were themselves substantial trade federations whose efficient operation depended on some degree of consultation and constraint on internal autonomous action. Thus, while the federation continued to pay lip service to maximising sectional autonomy, it was bound to tighten some of the central controls because of its dependence on these large unions. In the first decade of the century, by contrast, there were no mass unions in any federation; an advanced level of individual autonomy was feasible or indeed unavoidable because of the lack of permanent organisation, and the prevalence of local and isolated groups over national or regional federations. The differing attitude of anarchist and syndicalist union groups on the matter of centralised control and autonomous action depended on the type of trade union found in each organisation rather than on definite ideological differences.

Examples from the history of the railway unions serve to illustrate the work of anarchist and syndicalist organisations in action, to see what practical differences emerged. There are several exceptional aspects to railway union organisation, though many of these also help to make this sector a useful example. These aspects include the strategic importance of the industry to the state for economic reasons, which brought the state closer to the railway companies and their workers than to most private

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1. Renshaw The Wobblies (New York, Anchor, 1968) pp.123-4; 139-140; compare Solomonoff op.cit. p.191, and Chapter 7 pp.267-270.

industrial enterprise. The almost national spread of the railways and hence of railwaymen, and the good ready-made communications between workers, make it possible to consider developments outside the boundaries of the federal capital from a comparative wealth of documentation. The early establishment of trade unionism on the railways permits the examination of the whole period of the formation of the Argentine union movement through one sector, and the influences of all the ideological and party political groups under consideration can be detected. However, at no time did anarchists dominate either the organisation or the leadership of any national railway union. Strike action was frequently influenced by anarchist groups, especially before 1908; some rail unions existed on an anarchist base; but the anarchist FORA V took little express interest in fomenting organisation among railwaymen.

The Rosario Sociedad de Ferrocarrileros was founded in April 1896.[1] Anarchist in orientation, the union took part in the eight hours' movement of that August, though the FCCA workshops only struck for about ten days;[2] this swift collapse was related to the failure and repression of a general strike movement in Rosario at the time.[3] The anarchist element in the major strikes around the capital had some experience of organisation,[4] and cooperated with the newly-formed Sócialist Party and a Socialist railway group from Tolosa on the strike committee,[5] to the extent of joining the PS in negotiation with the police and with government. This type of negotiation was contrary to anarchist principle, which saw the state as a repressive institution on a par with the capitalist economic system. On the other hand, the anarchists were operating here in concert with Socialists who did

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1. Manuel F. Fernández La Unión Ferroviaria a través del tiempo (Buenos Aires, 1948) p.110.
2. La Vanguardia 5 Sept. 1896; RRP 26 Sept. 1896.
3. La Vanguardia 30 Jan. 1897; RRP 29 Aug. 1896.
4. A union of men of the Sola workshops is cited by Augusto Kühn in Nuevos Tiempos 20 May 1916.
5. La Vanguardia 15 Aug. 1896.

not regard the state in this way, and it is perhaps too rigid to pick out the anarchists' theoretical inconsistency so early in the development of the movement in Argentina.

In 1901, the Rosario railwaymen's association selected the prominent Italian anarchist and jurist, Pietro Gori, as one of its delegates to the inaugural congress of the Federación Obrera Argentina; its other delegate was Gregorio Inglán Lafarga, first editor of the anarchist paper La Protesta Humana.[1] Thus they chose big names, and intellectuals; soon, however, the anarchists turned away from such representatives and insisted that delegates to congresses were members of the relevant trade union.[2] Syndicalists were always insistent upon this point; but by the time syndicalist unions and federations were established more workers were involved in the running of unions on a permanent basis, and thus the necessary working class leadership existed.

Dr. Gori's visit to Argentina (1898-1902) is rightly seen as a vital influence in the establishment of anarchism as a major force in Argentine labour organisation.[3] Rudolf Rocker, the German anarchist, wrote that anarchism was the marriage of the historical trends of socialism and liberalism.[4] One finds elements of both in Gori's activity in Argentina, but Gori's thinking - 'his tactic of moulding his opinion to the prevailing atmosphere' as the PS executive put it - took Argentine anarchism away from the mainstream of theoretical anarchism, which had little following in Argentina except among a handful of vociferous intellectuals, and

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1. Diego Abad de Santillán El movimiento anarquista en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1930) p.71; Fernando Quesada 'La Protesta - una longeva voz libertaria', Todo es Historia no.82, March 1974, p.80.
2. For instance the attack on the credentials of Zaccagnini, representing the San Nicolás printers at the 1907 Unity Congress; Zaccagnini was editor of La Vanguardia at the time. Carlos Balzán, editor of La Protesta, was accepted without dispute, despite his identical position vis à vis the union. (Marotta Movimiento sindical argentino Vol I (Buenos Aires, Lacio, 1960) p.278; Oddone Gremialismo (1975) pp.290-291.)
3. Fernando Quesada 'La Protesta' Todo es Historia March 1974 pp.82-84.
4. Rudolf Rocker Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism (London, Freedom Press, 1973) pp.9-10.

towards anarcho-communism.[1] Gori emphasised organisation as the sole way of winning battles against capitalism, and opposed individualist and anti-organisational tendencies. He also denounced the sectarian refusal to accept arbitration as a last resort, to avoid catastrophic defeats.[2]

Gori was true to his philosophy; in October 1901, he acted for the construction workers of the FCS in the south of the province of Buenos Aires in an arbitration. This arbitration was the result of anarchist action alone, though the workers are scarcely likely to have asked Gori to intercede for them out of strong anarchist conviction.[3] The arbitration settlement was soon broken by the company, and the Bahía Blanca Socialists cast doubt on the motives behind the continued involvement of some intellectual anarchists from Rosario after Dr. Gori had departed for Italy.[4]

Some anarchists, therefore, were prepared to negotiate through formal arbitration; ad hoc bargaining was even more popular, and by no means only as a last resort. This is the more surprising from 1902, when the Socialists formally broke off from FOA and formed the rival UGT,[5] and when the government's obdurate antagonism towards working class activity was underlined by the passage of the Residence Law and the imposition of the first of five states of siege declared between 1902 and 1910. Anarchist unions did not abandon negotiation, and continued to cooperate with unions outside the anarchist federation, both within and outside UGT. The years 1903-1905 were those of least joint activity and greatest

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1. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.313. On intellectual anarchism see Gerald Brenan The Spanish Labyrinth (London, CUP, 1971) pp.131-136; on anarcho-communism, ibid. pp.159, 161, 169.
2. Marotta op.cit. Vol I pp.116-117. For more details of Gori's stay in Argentina, see Jorge Larroca 'Un anarquista en Buenos Aires', Todo es Historia No.47, 1971.
3. Iaacov Oved 'El anarquismo en los sindicatos obreros de la Argentina a comienzos del siglo XX (1897-1905)' (Ph.D.Thesis, Tel-Aviv, 1975) p.140.
4. La Vanguardia 1 Feb. 1902.
5. La Vanguardia 26 Apr. 1902; Oddone Gremialismo(1975) pp.187-190; Marotta op.cit. Vol I pp.120-121.

rivalry, before the development of syndicalism inside UGT loosened this group's links with the PS. They are also years of unprecedented strike action and state repression.[1]

The largest single union in Argentina before 1910 was politically non-aligned. The Confederación de Ferrocarrileros has been ignored as a force in Argentine labour history in these years because it played no part in the rivalry between FOA and UGT. As a result, the success of an organisation which deliberately eschewed an ideological framework has escaped notice - a crucial omission, distorting the understanding of these early years. The neutrality of the Confederation was maintained despite the fact that its two principal paid employees, Antonio Zaccagnini and José M. Lemos, were PS members, both of whom later held political office.

On a personal level there was no love lost between Zaccagnini and the anarchists. During the strike in March 1904 on the Amalgamated Companies, centred in Rosario,[2] the Confederation's executive secretary was bitterly attacked in La Protesta, leading him to make the following rejoinder:

> 'I would like to have seen the effects of the propaganda for gymnastics, [sic] but as in the port strike, the gymnasts were conspicuous by their absence; we now know that their task begins and ends with advising others what to do! I expected to see trains derailed, bridges flying through the air, stations burnt down, but I didn't know - lacking in personality and brains as I am - that the philosophers of direct action were busy producing fulminating ... articles'.[3]

At the same time FOA was offering its help in the event of a general strike.[4]

The polemics which occurred ostensibly centred on ideological considerations, though the ideological position of the anarchist railwaymen was not clearly defined. They claimed that the centralism of the Confederation,

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1. See Oddone Gremialismo (1975) pp.167-183; 205-212; 225-243; 300-325; 329-340 and passim; Marotta op.cit. Vol I passim.
2. See Chapter 2pp.45-50.
3. El Ferrocarril 15 Apr. 1904.
4. Iaacov Oved 'El anarquismo en los sindicatos obreros (Ph.D. Thesis, Tel-Aviv, 1975) p.269; El Ferrocarril 15 Apr. 1904.

with a central committee to check local 'spontaneous' movements whose strength they greatly exaggerated, stifled class consciousness and led to apathy and defeat;[1] local autonomy was the only way to keep the fighting spirit alive.[2] Underlying these theoretical duels was a simpler matter. Anarchists were deliberately organising parallel rail unions to rival the Confederation, but were finding it extremely hard to assert dominance.[3]

In a crisis, the anarchist railway unions always worked with the Confederation. In 1906, during the strike of FCS workshop hands in and near Buenos Aires, this arrangement was formalised in a joint strike committee. The committee not only met in the local Socialist Centre,[4] as was becoming almost customary in strikes of all trades; it also supported the PS leaders' intervention with the Minister of Public Works.[5]

This action was not condemned by La Protesta, even when the initiative came to nothing, despite the strong anti-statist line of FORA's Fifth Congress and its declaration of anarcho-communism.[6] The strike was

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1. La Protesta 22 Sept. 1904, 29 Sept. 1904.
2. El Ferrocarril 1 Sept. 1905, 15 Sept. 1905.
3. Several groups existed: two groups of autonomous workers, in Mendoza and Bahía Blanca, of which little is known, the Ferrocarrileros del Oeste (only in the capital), and a Sociedad General de Ferrocarrileros del Sud, apparently founded in Nov. 1903, only 6 months after the Confederation became a resistance society. The first two were represented at the Unity Congress of 1907, and the Ferrocarrileros del Oeste attended the Sixth Congress of FORA in Sept. 1906. The Ferrocarrileros del Sud played an important part in strikes on the FCS in 1905, 1906 and 1907-1908. Strikes of railwaymen on the FCPSF in 1906 and 1907 were also conducted with anarchist support from the Federación Obrera Local, important within FORA. Anarchists were involved in the violent strike on the FCCN in San Cristóbal and Tucumán in 1904-1905. On encouragement of anarchist groups, see Chapter 7, p.272.
4. El Ferrocarril 1 Mar. 1906.
5. La Vanguardia 23 Mar. 1906; El Ferrocarril 1 April 1906.
6. Indeed there is some evidence that the Ferrocarrileros del Sud sought unity with the Confederation, but this was unenthusiastically received (El Ferrocarril 3 Aug. 1905; La Protesta 13 Feb. 1906).

was a success, albeit temporary, and seemed to vindicate the policy of cooperation and the use of any means at the workers' disposal to win their claims. Moreover, none of the anarchist societies proved able to sustain a strike independently of the Confederation. Even in the 1905 FCCN strike, the eventual boycott of the San Cristóbal workshops was organised by the Confederation.[1]

When it came to cementing these informal ties in a common workers' federation, as was the purpose of the Unity Congress of March 1907, the anarchists refused to abandon their theoretical premises, and most of the non-aligned and UGT unions including the Confederation, withdrew forthwith.[2] The position of rail unions in 1907, being the only trades where parallel unions were systematically being organised, heightened the Confederation's awareness of the ultimate futility and wastefulness of ideological rivalry in the labour movement. The advanced nature of the railway industry and the national base of railway unions both encouraged ideological catholicity and made it essential for survival.

Hence, less than six months after the setback of the failed congress, the Confederation and the anarchists were again cooperating, once more in a strike in the FCS workshops. This movement lasted over six months,[3] destroying the Confederation, but the larger union worked with the anarchist society throughout. Yet again the PS notables put the strikers' case to the government, the Ministry of Public Works, and the Chief of Police; at the end the strike committee sought the mediation of the newly-constituted National Labour Department, which at first it had refused.

The anarchists in this period of acute labour unrest and eager, if erratic, union organisation were more or less willing participants in almost all types of trade union activity. The terms in which they defined their theoretical viewpoints remained anarchist, but their activities in practice

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1. La Protesta 22 Jan. 1905; Chapter 2pp.52-53.
2. Oddone Gremialismo (1975) pp.278-289.
3. See Chapter 2pp.65-70.

embraced a variety of modes of action. Most anarchists wanted to avoid formalising the practical unity of the working class in action; however, by the 1907 congress many FORA unions wanted unity, and the condemnation of FORA's sectarianism by the Italian anarchist leader Luigi Fabbri was echoed in Argentina.[1] Not all the components of FORA favoured its anarcho-communist stance; even so, after the FORA split in 1915, when only committed anarchists remained in FORA V, their practical modes of action still differed little from those of the syndicalists of FORA IX.

Within FOF, the influence of anarchism was most prominent in the debate on the formation of sindicatos por ferrocarril; this echoes other debates on centralism versus federalism.[2] The element favouring the establishment of united organisation among all railwaymen by means of a company-based, rather than a trade-based, unionism, was known after 1918 as 'divisionist'; however, it is a mistake to equate divisionism with anarchism. The separatist railway sindicatos were supposedly a federalist and more democratic alternative to the reformist syndicalist bureaucracy of FOF. In fact, their components were so temporary and vacillating in their importance that these sindicatos proved a breeding ground for individual opportunism, corruption and embezzlement. If anything, centralised control was less answerable to the rank and file than it was in the larger syndicalist federation.

Anarchist strength among railwaymen appeared most consistently in the north and west of Argentina. In the earlier years it was evident in Santa Fe and Tucumán, but the major centres of organised labour like Rosario and Buenos Aires were also affected. After FORA IX was formed, dissent from the mainstream of syndicalist thinking in and around the federal capital was mostly isolated and opportunist, and not anarcho-

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1. Marotta op.cit. Vol I pp.309-313.
2. See Chapter 7 pp.267-270.

communist.[1] In Rosario the local divisionists were incorporated occasionally in the anarchist sindicatos, but it is more usual to find them opposing and undermining FOF policy from within.[2]

On the most important State Railway, the FCCN, the sindicato shows some sign of being genuinely anarchist. Its most consistent supporters were San Cristóbal and Laguna Paiva; the former's independent line was clear even in 1915.[3] All the working class press agreed that the sindicato was anarcho-communist, but any connections with local anarchist federations or continuity among its leaders were ephemeral. Other indicators suggesting a connection with anarchism are the extensive coverage of FCCN strikes in La Protesta, and the high level of violence and sabotage in movements on this line.

The statutes of the Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados del Ferrocarril Santa Fe survive; they call for direct action, and denounce arbitration.[4] The Santa Fe sections left FOF in disgust at the settlement of the 1917 general strike, having remained on strike with the help of the local anarchist federation.[5] Their secretary-general, Gaspar Tochi, was not an anarchist, to judge by the condemnation of anarchist negotiators and maladministration by assemblies of that union.[6] The Santa Fe sindicato attempted direct fusion negotiation with La Fraternidad; its differences with FOF were tactical, more than anything else, despite the independent tradition in Santa Fe (first demonstrated in 1915),[7] and the sindicato lost several sections back to the Confraternidad in the winter of 1921.[8]

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1. See Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) pp.129-130 on Junín; La Vanguardia 15 Apr. 1918 on Liniers; La Organización Obrera 13 July 1918 on Caballito.
2. See the Rosario delegates' conduct at the 1922 Tráfico y Talleres Congress, described in more detail in Chapter 4 pp. 178-179.
3. La Organización Obrera 7 Sept. 1918; El Obrero Ferroviario March 1916 was very critical of the independent line of some sections.
4. La Vanguardia 5 Mar. 1918.
5. La Protesta 21 Oct. 1917, 23 Dec. 1917; see Chapter 3 p.130.
6. La Vanguardia 22 June 1918, 16 Feb.1919; La Protesta 18 Feb. 1919.
7. FORA IX Actas 18 July 1915; see Chapter 3 p.109.
8. La Organización Obrera 21 May 1921.

The Federación de Sindicatos Ferroviarios was formed at a meeting in Liniers in June 1921; the location is interesting since divisionist activity in Buenos Aires was exceptional. Its pronouncements were anarchist and it produced a monthly paper, Vía Libre, but the federation struggled constantly for existence.[1]

Movements with anarchist characteristics, and conducted unilaterally without consent of FOF, Confraternidad or La Fraternidad, occurred intermittently between 1918 and 1922. The strikes were long, like the two-month strike at Rosario and Pérez in 1921-1922 and the three-month FCCN strike sparked off by the Semana Trágica.[2] They tended to fail, leading to shut downs and mass sackings; such a disaster induced sections of the Rosario sindicato to rejoin the Confraternidad in May 1922.[3] Settlements of one sort or another were attempted, though the sindicatos' statutes would proclaim direct action and a fight to the death;[4] on the FCCN, said La Fraternidad's CD,

> 'they proclaimed communism and the use of dynamite, without this preventing the very men who had uttered such a thing from going down to Buenos Aires, to beg for a wage rise from the government authorities'.[5]

There is nothing remarkable about this divergence of theory from practice. In any case, the sindicatos published very little anarchist literature, and their papers tended to attack the national union leaderships rather than deal with theoretical matters.[6]

It is very hard to identify any anarchist leaders among railway divisionists. The Rosario leader Manuel Vázquez was apparently one of the anarchists bought off by the Compañía Argentina de Tabacos to end the boycott of 1914-1915.[7] He was involved in divisionist movements in Rosario

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1. La Organización Obrera 6 Aug. 1921.
2. La Protesta 7 Dec. 1921; La Vanguardia 12 Apr.1919; La Protesta 28 Jan.1919.
3. Vía Libre Oct.1923.
4. La Vanguardia 5 Mar. 1918.
5. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance (1918) p.5.
6. El Obrero Ferroviario Feb.-Mar. 1919; see also Vía Libre 1922-1924 passim.
7. Oddone Gremialismo (1975) pp.145-6.

in the years 1917-1922, and consistently opposed FORA IX. However, perhaps the PS and FORA IX described him as an anarchist because of his involvement in several frauds; the only evidence that he was genuinely anarchist is that he wrote periodically for La Protesta.[1] Juan Glinsky was another Rosario anarchist, once arrested for his part in a bomb plot;[2] as well as working for the FCCA and playing a leading role in the divisionist activities of 1919, he was first president of a group known as Sociedad Unión Obreros Rusos.

FORA V did not organise railwaymen except in federations of all trades, for instance in Patagonia. After the 1917 general strike it appealed to railway sections to leave FOF and join the anarchist federation; its general strike in sympathy with the railwaymen collapsed through lack of support within a few days;[3] the moves of winter 1918 for a general strike in support of sacked railwaymen met the same fate.[4] Sometimes a sindicato would seek FORA V help locally, but they remained autonomous; in 1922 FORA V hoped to capture the FCCA sindicato,[5] but up to that time the anarchists' efforts had been far from concerted.

Syndicalism

The syndicalist movement in Argentina originated historically in the ranks of the Socialist Party, where the conflicting claims of electoral and trade union organisation were a constant source of dissention.[6] However, this fairly narrow base was soon broadened out so that by the establishment of FORA IX the syndicalist movement was thoroughly, indeed sometimes aggressively, independent of PS influence. FORA IX's mainstays

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1. For example in La Protesta 27 Aug. 1922. 'Anarchist' could be a term of abuse.
2. Caras y Caretas 27 Oct. 1917; La Vanguardia 13 Oct. 1917.
3. La Protesta 2 Oct. 1917, 4 Oct. 1917, 19 Oct. 1917.
4. See Chapter 4 pp.138-139.
5. La Protesta 21 Mar. 1922.
6. Jacinto Oddone Historia del socialismo argentino (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1934) Vol II pp.369-380 gives the PS view of the rise of syndicalism.

were the seamen's federation, FOM, and the railwaymen's federation, FOF. The dominance of these groups, joined later by the municipal workers and the post office employees, was crucial in shaping the new federation. All these large unions had a greater or lesser connection with government through the work they performed, which helps to explain why they adopted reformist tactics. Both the historical and the structural aspects are important to the understanding of FORA IX's moderate line. However, perhaps most important is that this moderation was part of the same pattern that has been shown in the case of the anarchist unions; while utterances, particularly in the comparative security of a congress, were orthodox in their ideological content, the deeds of unions and their approach to specific events reflected a different attitude.

Syndicalists were not averse to opportunities to negotiate a better deal with either state or capital. More and more, immediate gains took precedence over the underlying theory of the movement, as the achievements of seamen and railwaymen through legal and even parliamentary channels began to make an impression on more intransigent groups.[1] These lines of communication dated right back to the 1890s; their use intensified after 1916, partly because of the imagined promise of the novel government,[2] but more because of the substantial growth in union organisation and membership that occurred under the energetic tutelage of FORA IX.

FORA IX's moderation can be seen from its hesitant use of the general strike tactic, generally regarded as the core of syndicalist theory.[3] It decided against the general strike in 1916, suggested as a protest against the trials of workers arrested in a frigorífico strike in Berisso.[4] In 1917, when the general rail strike broke out, FORA IX threatened a general

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1. Hobart Spalding Organised Labor in Latin America (New York, NYU Press, 1977) p.61 on política obrera.
2. See La Fraternidad's initial favourable reaction to Torello, in La Fraternidad 15 Apr. 1917 and Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1916 p.3.
3. J.H.Harley Syndicalism (London, 1912).
4. FORA IX Actas 14 Apr. 1916, 18 June 1916.

strike if government violence and repression escalated, but in the end compromised by supporting a sympathy strike of seamen.[1] In 1918, when a general strike was mooted after the sacking of 1500 railwaymen by the FCS and FCP and the anarchist FORA demanded a quick response from the syndicalists, FORA IX decided not to support the move because there was almost no prospect of success.[2] FORA IX was not concerned to demonstrate a revolutionary commitment, but to get the sacked men reinstated.

It has been suggested that FORA IX explicitly abandoned its commitment to the general strike at its Tenth Congress in December 1918.[3] If this occurred, it would be an important indication that the movement's active members were willing to abandon syndicalist rhetoric. Late in 1919, FORA IX announced that national industrial unions were not to be expected to make common cause with local strikes, because such stoppages could not be effective and would only damage national organisations like FOF.[4] However, a specific ruling like this on one of the main unions of FORA IX is a rather different matter from a general declaration of principle passed at a union congress.

The conduct of FORA IX in the Semana Trágica of 1919 was consonant with its moderate syndicalist position. It declared the general strike with reluctance, and reached an official settlement only two days later. The willingness of FORA IX to explore violent acts by extremists, despite provocation from the unprecedented bourgeois reaction to the conflict, shows how determined they were to use any means at their disposal to avert the threatened declaration of the state of siege.

Perhaps inspired by the growth of FORA IX, Argentine labour leaders still sought after a united, non-political but revolutionary federation. In the course of the foundation of the Unión Sindical Argentina, completed

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1. See Chapter 3pp.124-125.
2. See Chapter 4 pp.138.
3. David Rock, 'La semana trágica', Desarrollo Económico (1972) p.183.
4. La Organización Obrera 13 Dec. 1919.

in March 1922, a fiasco of a general strike took place in Buenos Aires in May 1921 and the centralised union movement lost the support of a vital component, the general rail union. USA took FORA IX to the left, but its ideological statements and (perhaps more important) sectarian and personal attacks, lost it the support of FORA IX's right wing, notably the rail union, as well as that of Communists and much of what remained of the anarchists.[1] USA did not build on the practical achievements of FORA IX. It suffered greatly from the weakness engendered by its divisive conduct, as well as the problems for organisation created by the relative affluence of the twenties.

The Socialist Party

The Socialist party declared its concern in labour organisation from the start. However, it never had official ambitions to create a Socialist union organisation. In 1902 the PS expressed its disapproval of the dissention among Socialists in FOA, and resisted the formation of UGT until hostile anarchist manoeuvrings forced the breach.[2] Nevertheless, important sections of the party wanted a more wholehearted commitment to organised labour than the requirement that Socialists join their appropriate trade union; the first breach on this question occurred in 1899.

Four Socialist groups withdrew from the party, protesting that the political emphasis established in the first two congresses was a mistake. The so-called Federación Obrera Socialista Colectivista denied the usefulness of electoral activity in times of fraud and lack of working class consciousness, and in view of the preponderance of foreigners without voting rights in the working class.[3]

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1. See Chapter 4 pp.174-176.
2. La Vanguardia 8 Feb. 1902; Oddone Socialismo (1934) Vol II pp.100, 117.
3. Rosáenz' report of provisional committee to FOSC Congress, 18-19 Nov. 1899, in Oddone Socialismo (1934) Vol II pp.213-215. I am indebted to Michael Mullaney of Essex University for much incidental information about individual Socialists, and for guidance on the summary of PS activity in trade unions presented here.

The Federación Obrera Socialista Colectivista survived independently for less than a year. However, its dissatisfaction with PS policy on organised labour was to be a constant theme of discord within the party. The existence of a group with such opinions continued, even after the syndicalists were invited by the majority to leave the PS at its Seventh Congress in 1906,[1] and despite the increased preoccupation of the PS with its electoral and then parliamentary function.

One of the consequences of continued interest in labour organisation was the establishment of the Trade Union Propaganda Committees or Information Committees at various stages in the period. These committees were to encourage trade union participation by Socialists, so that the party could maintain a base in working class movements. This base was hard to maintain in the face of the insuperable problem of nationality, which disenfranchised the bulk of the working class in the urban areas where the PS had hope of success, and the strength of the anti- or apolitical movements in organised labour.

Individual Socialists were at the forefront of railway labour organisation; Antonio Zaccagnini, José M. Lemos and Vicente Rosáenz were active from an early date. FORA IX's CF always had Socialist members; the CF of FOF was dominated in 1918 by two Socialists, Jerónimo Della Latta and Alejandro Comolli. Both these men's party political work estranged them from the union movement in the end, but not before they had defended FOF against attacks from Socialists in 1918, notably from the engine drivers' union leaders and from Juan B. Justo himself.[2] FORA IX responded to the involvement of Socialists in both union and party activity with a resolution (later passed by FOF) banning holders of political office from its CF.

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1. Oddone Socialismo (1934) Vol II p.232; motion presented by Repetto.

2. Justo delivered an important speech on railway organisation at the Liniers Socialist Centre. See La Vanguardia 15 Apr. 1918; Marotta op.cit. Vol II pp. 216-222; Rodolfo Puiggrós El Yrigoyenismo (Buenos Aires, Jorge Alvarez, 1965) p.207; and note 1 , p.209 below.

This restatement of syndicalist political neutrality was definitely directed against Socialists; however, the congress was probably at least as concerned about the risk to sound permanent organisation from such divisions of time as about the risk of undue PS influence.[1] In response to PS criticism of the lack of Socialist influence in FOF, Della Latta, conceding that some of the 'anarchist style' conflicts had damaged the union, pointed out that

> 'the delegates who comprised the recent congress of FOF [December 1917] were mostly Socialists. However, nearly all the business was dealt with according to anarchist and syndicalist proposals, and the CF emerged composed in large part of such elements'.[2]

Thus he blamed PS ignorance and inactivity for the dominance of other ideological interests in the union.

The Socialist party played an invaluable part in labour organisation throughout this period. The party's branch offices were often put to use; in Cordoba in 1906 an entire railway strike and a week-long local general strike was run by the Socialist Centre, which had shown an interest in organising the railway workers from the 1890s.[3] The PS was the most consistent supporter of the footplatemen's strike in 1912; La Fraternidad rewarded the Socialist Deputies for their 'disinterested labours' on behalf of the working class with commemorative medals of the great strike - an act whose political significance the union somewhat unconvincingly denied.[4] The Socialists provided lawyers to defend trade unionists of all ideological persuasions, including anarchists, in disputes; Mario Bravo served as railway union lawyer almost throughout this period.

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1. La Organización Obrera 14 Dec. 1918, 23 Jan. 1919; Oddone Gremialismo (1975) p.374; Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.237.
2. La Vanguardia 15 May 1918. The assertion that most delegates to the Congress were PS members is uncheckable and seems unlikely, but must be seen as testimony to the strength of the party among railwaymen.
3. La Vanguardia 4 July 1896; 4 Aug. 1900; 13 Dec. 1906, 20 Dec. 1906, 22 Dec. 1906. See also Chapter 2 p.58.
4. La Fraternidad 15 July 1913, 1 Aug. 1913; see Chapter 2 pp.83-84.

Not all the Socialist influences were harmless or beneficent, though some unfortunate episodes can hardly be blamed on the party; in particular, the PS provided some dishonest employees and even leaders for railway unions. José San Sebastián, the caudillo of La Fraternidad from 1912 to 1920, was a case in point, though he was on the party's extreme right wing, and left it before his misdeeds were exposed.[1] San Sebastián surrounded himself with his cronies, some of whom were ejected by the union in 1916 and others only narrowly escaped.[2] In 1919 he took one of the union's two seats on the Board of the National Railway Pensions Fund. Two years later he was disowned by the union in disgust at his conduct there, and a long record of fairly modest embezzlement of Fraternidad funds was exposed.[3] His close associate and secretary of the union, the Socialist Américo J.Baliño (brother of a PS Deputy for the Province of Buenos Aires whose record was not spotless), managed to escape censure for his silence about San Sebastián's activities.

Not only the footplate union was subject to the unexpected phenomenon of these dishonest Socialist adventurers. The Confraternidad employed one José S. Basanta as secretary. The most embarrassing aspect of the exposure of his fraud after little more than a year for the PS was that his appointment had been engineered by the party's Trade Union Information

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1. In Justo's speech to the Liniers Socialist Centre in April 1918 he described San Sebastián's resignation in these terms:
'I do not approve the offensive terms in which he framed his decision, but I believe exactly as he does that railway strikes cannot be everyday affairs, and that a grave responsibility falls upon those who call them. His resignation has deprived the party of a member of the greatest importance on account of his position in one of the strongest and most mature organisations in the country. He has presented the party as uncertain in its appreciation of trade union conflicts, conflicts in which we do not assert any direct interference, but in which we must aspire to serve as a spiritual guide, especially where there are differences of opinion between the trade union bodies themselves.'
(La Vanguardia 15 Apr. 1918).
San Sebastián had presumably attacked his fellow Socialists among the FOF leadership for standing by their union in the disagreements with La Fraternidad, and over the persistent strike movements from October 1917 to April 1918 (see the polemics in La Vanguardia Dec. 1917-Jan. 1918 and Apr. 1918). Justo may have regretted the loss of an important influence in La Fraternidad but the PS were swift to condemn San Sebastián and emphasise their lack of connection with him when he was exposed.

2 See Chapter 3 p. 109

3 See Chapter 6 pp 232-233

Committee, which had been very active at the constituent congress of the Confraternidad in June 1920, entertaining all the PS delegates to dinner.[1] A PS lobby in the congress was thus set up; yet another Socialist union employee was dismissed for using work time to organise it. The Confraternidad soon produced a strong declaration stating that party political group meetings within the union were counter-productive and must not take place.[2]

Relations between the syndicalists and the Socialists, especially the Propaganda Committee, were periodically strained from 1912 onwards. The Socialists were intent on propagandising for labour organisation a base múltiple, whereas the syndicalists tended to organise for resistance alone, though FORA IX left unions free to adopt friendly society functions if they wished.[3] On the railways the matter came to a head in 1915, during the consolidation of FOF as a general rail union, when the PS supported the organisation of LFA.[4]

At this same period the PS promised FORA IX that its Propaganda Committee would not interfere with the work of the syndicalist federation;[5] relations remained quite good for some years, partly because the PS was preoccupied with the split which occasioned the departure of the internationalists who also comprised many of the activists from the Propaganda Committee.[6]

In 1918, as a gesture of support for FORA IX, the Socialists' Fourteenth Congress declared that party members should act in existing unions to strengthen and improve them. Mario Bravo circulated the unions

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1. La Vanguardia 3 July 1920. This is the only list extant which gives a reliable account of the political affiliation of railwaymen at any time in this period.
2. See Chapter 4 p.161.
3. See Chapter 7 pp.258-261.
4. See Chapter 3 pp.101-103.
5. FORA IX Actas 17 Sept. 1916, 21 Oct. 1916.
6. Richard J. Walter The Socialist Party of Argentina 1890-1930 (Austin, Univ. of Texas Press, 1977) pp.143-146.

on their attitudes to political parties, and to the PS resolution to assist the organisation of unions.[1] La Fraternidad was in absolute agreement with the organisational principles favoured by the PS (a base múltiple organisation), and with their recent declaration. The CD added that

> 'labour organisation must have no other objectives than to serve the trade union interests of its members; whatever other function which may be added to this complicates, impedes and delays the prime object of trade union organisation, which is the conquest of better working and living conditions for its members.'[2]

FOF's CF gave its opinions in a rather more cautionary tone. It maintained that FOF's attitude to political, cooperative and friendly societies had always been one of 'cordial neutrality', and hoped that this attitude was reciprocal. However, it warned that it could not share the party's reservations about

> 'syndicalism, which for us is working class organisation itself, whether or not it is revolutionary (which depends on actual circumstances and not on mere declarations). For this reason, it seems to us that to propitiate its removal is equivalent to propitiating disorganisation'.[3]

The CF also warned against allowing irresponsible sectarian publicity to impede the progress of organisation. Unlike La Fraternidad, the general railway union did not express its wish that individual members should participate actively in other political areas.[4]

In August 1919 FORA IX and the Socialists cooperated on a massive demonstration in Buenos Aires as well as lesser protests nationally against government proposals to introduce several restrictive labour laws. This is the solitary instance of such wholesale cooperation; generally, FORA IX refused to act jointly with the PS.[5]

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1. La Organización Obrera 30 Nov. 1918.
2. Agnelli and Chiti op.cit. p.88; La Vanguardia 30 Nov. 1918.
3. La Vanguardia 24 Nov. 1918; La Organización Obrera 30 Nov. 1918.
4. Agnelli and Chiti op.cit. p.88; La Vanguardia 30 Nov. 1918.
5. See Chapter 4 pp.154-155. For instance, FORA IX did not join the PS demonstration against the municipal authorities in 1916 (FORA IX Actas 31 July 1916).

From 1920, relations deteriorated once more. The lobbying of the 1920 railwaymen's congress aroused considerable suspicions of the motives of the PS Trade Union Information Committee; protests came from Socialists as well as syndicalists.[1] FORA IX's Circular 14A asked its members to express their opinion on the question of cooperation with the PS or other groups, in the light of the party's repeated overtures, and of the frequent criticisms of the functioning of the Information Committee.[2] The Committee retorted that the Socialist railwaymen of Buenos Aires had asked them to persuade Socialist delegates to the congress to support the entry of the Confraternidad into FORA IX; moreover, such separate meetings were commonplace in European trade union congresses and perfectly legitimate.[3]

Unions responses to this question varied. Though there was a clear majority in favour of FORA IX's neutrality, support for the principle of cooperation in any potentially profitable circumstances was quite strong, especially among the railway sections.[4] Strong anti-Socialist sentiment in some groups was thus matched elsewhere by the sort of laissez-faire pragmatism which is a constant theme in this period.

Further controversy broke out in June 1921, when La Vanguardia spoke out against the attempted general strike and made an attack on Pedro Alegría, a former Socialist who was secretary of FORA IX at this time.[5] Increasingly angry articles appeared in La Vanguardia and La Organización Obrera, both of which lost sight of their obligations to mutual non-interference,[6] and La Vanguardia refused to print La Organización Obrera on their presses.[7] The irony of this destructive dispute emerged less than a year

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1. La Organización Obrera 14 Aug. 1920, 21 Aug. 1920.
2. La Organización Obrera 11 Sept. 1920.
3. La Vanguardia 23 Sept. 1920. This explanation helps to account for the fact that men like Francisco Aló supported the idea of entry into FORA IX (see Chapter 4 p.161).
4. La Vanguardia 12 Nov. 1920.
5. La Organización Obrera 18 June 1921, 9 July 1921.
6. FORA IX Actas 7 July 1921.
7. FORA IX Actas 18 July 1921. Fuller details appear in Walter op.cit. pp.171-172.

later, when El Obrero Ferroviario was being printed on the PC presses of La Internacional, by then the most implacable opponent of the reorganising movement inside Tráfico y Talleres.

The increasingly outspoken PS support for the railwaymen's adoption of personería jurídica in 1922 further estranged the party from the syndicalist movement.[1] This estrangement also occurred within the railwaymen's leadership. Despite the disputes and incidents since the foundation of the Confraternidad, the PS viewpoint was well represented on the committee of both rail unions and the JC of the Confraternidad.[2] In 1922 the PS actually asked the rail unions to circulate an appeal for funds for the elections among their sections, a request which La Fraternidad at least granted.[3] By this time, such an appeal was acceptable to the rail unions, or at least aroused no outcry. This was not only because there were Socialists among the union leaders, for these were still outnumbered. By 1922, the Confraternidad and its components were well enough established as permanent class organisations with their own coherence and raison d'être to cooperate with a political party on their own terms without fear of undue influence, and could ignore the insinuations of anti-Socialist elements.

The Communist Party

The Communist Party was not founded under that name until the end of 1920, but its predecessor the Partido Socialista Internacional was formed in 1918. It was a small party at first, but many of its first members were ex-Socialists who had been active in the party's trade union

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1. See La Vanguardia 4 May 1922 and La Fraternidad 20 Apr. 1922, 20 June 1922 for articles on the model organisation of La Fraternidad (the last by the PS union commentator Joaquín Coca). Throughout June and July 1922 La Vanguardia carried this sort of material, some of which is quoted in Chapter 4.
2. See the account of the vote on aid to Russia in 1921 as an example, Chapter 4 pp.172-173.
3. Tráfico y Talleres CC CC Actas y Circulares 17 Feb. 1922; CD Fraternidad Actas y circulares 21-23 Feb.1922.

work. The Communists' strategy was to involve themselves energetically in working class organisation on a broad front, but the policy was scarcely enunciated when the Third International was formed and, more important, the Red International of Labour Unions. FORA IX was associated with the Second International in Amsterdam, but at its Eleventh Congress, in January 1921, the question of the international orientation of the federation was raised by Communists and others in the light of the Zinoviev circular.[1] The majority report of the congress committee on the matter advocated adherence to the Red International in Moscow, but no decision was taken because most of the delegates had left and it was felt that the matter was too important to be dealt with in haste.[2] A few days later five of those elected to FORA IX's fifteen-man council refused to take up their duties because the question of international relations had been held over; it was to be discussed after the formation of the new federation which would result from the work of the newly-established Unity Committee with the anarchists.[3]

There was considerable support for the Red International, and not only from Communists; even the moderate rail union (Tráfico y Talleres) voted by a majority of only 10 to 7 to continue supporting the Amsterdam organisation.[4] The anarchist FORA V had decided at its congress in October 1920 to back Moscow.[5] However, during the sessions of the Unity Committee there were obvious advantages in remaining unaligned, so that the maximum number of unions would continue to support the new entity. When it became

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1. La Organización Obrera 18 Sept. 1920, 2 Oct. 1920, 9 Oct. 1920 contain (largely hostile) commentaries on the Zinoviev circular.
2. Marotta op.cit. Vol III pp.31-32.
3. Marotta op.cit. Vol III pp.35-36; La Organización Obrera 19 Feb. 1921.
4. CC CC Actas 19 Jan 1921. Not all PC sympathisers resigned on the question of the internationals. Ricardo Bauleo remained on the CC CC of Tráfico y Talleres from 1921 to mid-1922, and indeed served for two months as an employee of the union after the May 1922 congress (which had appointed him). His repeated attacks in La Internacional and La Unión Sindical against the work towards the foundation of Unión Ferroviaria led the CC CC to force his resignation (see Chapter 4 p.182; Tráfico y Talleres Actas y circulares 18 Aug. 1922).
5. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.10.

obvious that the Unión Sindical Argentina would continue outside both organisations, despite PC propaganda, the Communists became thoroughly alienated from the new labour federation.

The early Communists in general seem to have been over-anxious to pursue a sectarian line. It seems, though there is little hard evidence for this, that they did well among railway workers even at this early date; this can probably be accounted for by the former PS component of the PC, and possibly some railwaymen were attracted by the party's pledge to nationalise the railways and other public services.[1] One of the first Socialist Centres to declare for the International Party was in the railway district of Rosario,[2] and the town of Cañada de Gómez, whose main industrial activity was the railway, became something of a PC stronghold. In 1921 two Communist railwaymen (one of whom, Ramón Cuello, later turned to the Radical Party)[3] organised the Cañada de Gómez railway section into a campaign against the discussions on uniform pay and promotion scales being sponsored by the union. Francisco Trujillo, the representative in these talks from the town, claimed that if he had been willing to join the PC, and if the railway section had allowed itself to be absorbed wholesale into the party, the attacks would never have occurred.[4] The Cañada de Gómez attacks were taken very seriously by the CC CC; other criticisms made at the same time did not receive comparable attention.

The Radical Party

Before the UCR came to power in October 1916, it had taken little interest in the cause of the labour movement;[5] subsequently, unlike the PS and the PC, the Radicals' relationship with unions was conditioned by

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1. Partido Comunista Esbozo de la historia del PC (Buenos Aires, Anteo, 1947) p.38 note 54. This was not, however, a burning issue: see Chapter 3 pp.120-121.
2. PC Esbozo (1947) p.25 note 38.
3. Vía Libre May 1923.
4. La Confraternidad August 1922.
5. Rock Politics (1975) p.117; see Chapter 6 p.228.

the fact that it was the party of government. The Radicals abhorred class politics; in this sense their ideology (whose overall barrenness was remarkable)[1] ran against the prevailing thinking in the union movement. At the same time, the UCR needed working class votes, particularly in the federal capital where they always risked being outflanked by the PS.

Rock has suggested that the Yrigoyen government (1916-1922) set out to win the working class vote through selective support of strikes.[2] The recognition of unions as negotiators was more explicit under the Radicals than their predecessors; Pablo Torello, the Minister of Public Works, seems to have been genuinely interested in government-union collaboration for industrial peace, and cultivated cordial relations with FORA IX, FOF and La Fraternidad at first.[3] However, the Yrigoyen government did not share this view consistently, and after the FCCA strike of August 1917, which was settled in the workers' favour with the help of the National Labour Department, Yrigoyen did not consult the DNT again. Future conflicts, including the general rail strike of 1917, were characterised by the prompt and not always controlled use of troops, government assistance to capital to enable companies to normalise production or services, and decrees forcing strikers back to work.[4] In March 1918 the government obliged strikers of the FCP to return to work with a decree effective on election day; such an action could not form part of a strategy to win the votes of organised labour.[5]

The Radicals' popular pretensions were at all times ambiguous and their concessions to the labour movement in strikes were the exceptions, not the rule. Their highly successful committee organisation involved mostly the middle class, though the subsidised meat and bread, so much despised by the PS, must have found a market among the working class.[6]

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1. Ibid p.57.
2. Ibid p.128 and passim.
3. Paul B. Goodwin Los ferrocarriles britanicos y la UCR (Buenos Aires, La Bastilla, 1974) pp.71, 99, 118.
4. See Chapter 3 p.112 onwards.
5. La Vanguardia 2 Mar. 1918.
6. Rock Politics (1975) p.57; Rock 'Machine Politics in Buenos Aires and the Radical Party' Journal of Latin American Studies, vol.4 (Nov.1972) pp.233-256

The UCR's answer to FORA IX, the Federación Obrera Radical 'Alberdi' seems to have had only limited success.[1] The close contact between the Radical administration and the amarillo Asociación Ferroviaria Nacional, on cheap railway housing and reform of the pensions law in 1922, for instance,[2] made it more difficult for the government to conciliate the railway unions.

Nevertheless, railwaymen on the FCCN in Córdoba and perhaps other provinces formed a Comité ferroviario radical to prepare for the gubernatorial elections, much to the unions' and the PS' distress.[3] Some union members obviously voted for the UCR, though it was perhaps more likely that they gained most support from unorganised rather than organised labour. Radical confidence in the feasibility of upward social mobility,[4] and their rejection of class politics, appealed to the dreams which had brought so many to Argentina; even for the disillusioned, they offered more than the conservatives. Most unions did not organise almost half their constituency, as did FOF at its strongest, and the Radicals did not need to make their appeal through the existing union movement. In any case, the leaders of successful unions were far too committed to apolitical unionism to declare the wholehearted support for the UCR which would have been required to influence the union voter.

Conclusion

This discussion of the influence of ideology in the development of trade unions in Argentina suggests that previous interpretations have bred a number of misconceptions. It has become a truism that the anarchists

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1. Rock Politics (1975) p.124.
2. El Ferroviario 15 Oct. 1921, 15 Dec. 1921, 20 July 1922, 5 Aug. 1922, 25 Sept. 1922. However, AFN was disgusted at its exclusion from the wage-scale talks (El Ferroviario 15 Nov. 1920, 1 Apr. 1921).
3. El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Feb. 1920; La Vanguardia 3 Aug. 1921. It is probable that Mansilla was involved in this; see Chapter 3 p. 114 note 7.
4. Rock Politics (1975) p.119.

dominated the labour movement in Argentina until around 1915.[1] If the premise is accepted, the railwaymen must be treated as the exception. There was no major anarchist railway strike in this period; however, there were strike movements displaying certain anarchist characteristics,[2] and anarchists occasionally took leading parts in the organisation of railway labour.[3] This suggests a second point, which is more fundamental; the organisations described as anarchist are perhaps not properly so called. Some of the detailed problems of this have been pointed out here, and their implications for the study of the rest of the labour movement cannot be overstated. Even if Argentine anarchism is redefined in the terms of Gori's philosophy (which was by no means the only ideological current in theoretical anarchist literature in Argentina) the inconsistency between theory and practice remains. La Protesta Humana maintained that the men of the FCCA in Rosario were '90% blacklegs, 8% riff-raff, and 2% anarcho-communists'. Quoting this once more 23 years later, the anarchist paper said that nothing had changed; if there is any truth in their analysis, the traditional interpretation exaggerates the ideological consistency of the early labour movement, as is argued here.[4]

Much the same conclusions can be drawn in the case of syndicalism. Argentine syndicalists did not act according to the theoretical models, at least during the years of greatest progress for Argentine organised labour. The theory of the revolutionary general strike was overshadowed by a reformist preoccupation with the establishment of collective bargaining mechanisms. A narrow economic view of trade union function, perhaps bred

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1. Oved 'El anarquismo en los sindicatos obreros' (1975) p.374; Solomonoff Ideologías (1971) p.296; Rock Politics (1975) p.77; Julio Godio El movimiento obrero y la cuestión nacional (Buenos Aires, Erasmo, 1972) p.111 and many others.
2. For instance that of Banfield-Sola, 1907-1908; or on the FCCN, Dec.1920-Jan.1921 (for which see La Protesta).
3. The example of Gori; also some of the leaders of the 1896 strike.
4. La Protesta 2 Sept. 1922, quoting La Protesta Humana 25 June 1899.

of the fear of involvement in political or cooperative movements, tended to prevail over the idea of trade unions as a vehicle for the transformation of society; syndicalist leaders claimed to recognise the latter role as paramount but did almost nothing to further it in practice.

The relationship which developed between the political parties and the labour movement was quite different, because of the parties' electoral ambitions. The Socialists wanted a good relationship with organised labour, and they hoped to avoid any implication that they were making a takeover bid or trying to interfere with the political neutrality of unions and federations. Their role was limited by the fact that their electoral base had been consolidated in heterogeneous sectors; the PS was not only a party of the working class. On the other hand, Socialists in Congress consistently defended working class interests and advocated progressive legislation to improve the workers' economic lot.[1] Within the unions, a number of Socialists distinguished themselves and those that did so tended to put union before party; however, the PS also produced some notorious exploiters of working class organisation whose unexpected presence suggests that the party was not as well disciplined as might have been expected. Overall, there are numerous examples of cooperation between Socialists and both anarchists and syndicalists in labour unions; this was PS policy, and when it was adhered to it benefited organised labour. Socialists were almost certainly more influential in the railway unions than in any other large union (except perhaps the municipal workers' union). In the case of the footplatemen, this can probably be explained by the long history of reformist trade union activity in La Fraternidad, the comparatively high status of these workers (both in material terms and in terms of the demand for their specific skill) and the high proportion of Argentine citizens in this group - some 60% in 1913.[2] Some of these

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1. See Chapter 6 passim; Nicolas Repetto Mi paso por la política: de Roca a Yrigoyen (Buenos Aires, Rueda, 1956); Enrique Dickmann Recuerdos de un militante socialista (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1949).

2. La Fraternidad 15 July 1913.

explanations hold for workers in the general union; for instance PS leaders like Della Latta and Comolli were highly skilled. Furthermore, in the centres of the interior, where railway workers were often the only consistently organised group, there was likely to be a greater overlap between political activists and trade unionists than in the more mobile and less cohesive communities of the capital.

The PC's role was scarcely developed before 1922. There are signs of early PC influence in the railway trades, and the party also made headway in other sectors (like the printing industry) through the ex-Socialist internationalist militants in these unions. The PC was quite surprisingly successful in overt political infiltration, at least in the case of Cañada de Gómez, even though the pronouncements of the party on labour questions (such as the Semana Trágica) were almost totally ignored by the union movement in general, and their support of the Red International met with no response.

As the party of government, the Radicals made only the most ephemeral and opportunist links with trade unions; their position depended on fostering a good relationship with the working class, but laid the party open to criticism for its repressive or partial acts in government. It undoubtedly had a working class electoral following, but this depended upon its vague progressive and laissez-faire notions rather than on a concerted bid for trade union support.

This chapter has emphasised the limitations of the influence of ideology in the labour movement. Most accounts refer correctly to the preponderance of immigrants in the working class at this time, but do not consider why workers came to Argentina. They did not, generally, come to participate in the class struggle and to create an infrastructure for that struggle based on pure theory; they came to make better lives for

themselves, with expectations of upward social mobility. Their interest in overthrowing the existing social structure could never be wholehearted as long as they had dreams of becoming part of the upper echelons of that structure; on the other hand, the attraction of labour organisation for material improvements, job security and other superficial checks on the cruelly free market economy into which immigrants were plunged were obvious. In this context, the modest goals of organised labour in action are that much more comprehensible.

Chapter 6. The railwaymen and the state

The railway unions had closer links with government powers than other labour sectors from their foundation. These links, setting aside formal legal relationships, resulted from the importance of the railway network to the economy as a whole, and to statesmen in particular, most of whom were landowners and concerned with the growth of exports. The earliest legislation dealing specifically with labour outside the civil service concerned railway employees, regarded as workers of particular social and economic importance in Argentina. Railway companies had arranged their rights, privileges and duties with Government - even to the extent thatmuch of their land was obtained from the state; the links were cemented in legislation. The workers, likewise, came to expect concessions to be made through the government, and by law. Revolutionary unions and anarchist leaders abhorred this approach, but it prevailed. Direct action from anarchist rail unions in the first decade of the century had less result than the more measured attitude of the Confederation, and was much less efficacious than La Fraternidad's tactics. Later, the divisionists of the period after October 1917 were as often found negotiating with government officials as the 'burócratas sindicorradicales' they condemned.[1]

Before considering the principal areas of sustained contact between the government and organised railwaymen, it is appropriate to note the formal ties which existed between the footplatemen and the state, and which were introduced in the founding statutes of Unión Ferroviaria in 1922.

Personería jurídica, or legal status, was the subject of regular controversy in the labour movement, and is discussed more fully in the

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1. See Chapter 5 p. 202 . Compare, however, La Organización Obrera Nov. 1915, which attacked labour legislation because it always defended those already privileged.

next chapter.[1] The rail unions had more contact with the legal and institutional apparatus of the state than most industrial sectors, which was recognised implicitly when La Fraternidad acquired personería jurídica in 1889. When the Board of the Pensions Fund was established, and only unions with personería jurídica could be represented, the extra-legal position of the general rail union became a handicap.[2] By this time negotiation with government was commonplace, not confined to crises or strikes, and often involved accepting the force of law and using it in the workers' interest. In these circumstances, it was necessary and not illogical for Unión Ferroviaria to seek personería jurídica.

However, during most of this period there appears to have been no practical advantage in possessing legal status. Occasionally the railway companies would refuse to recognise a union without this status, but La Fraternidad too was denied recognition as the mouthpiece of the footplatemen, for example in the 1911 negotiations on the regulation.[3] While attempts to strip La Fraternidad of its legal status, in 1907 and 1912,[4] were regarded gravely, in 1921 La Fraternidad asserted that the legal status of the Confraternidad was immaterial, and what counted was its de facto representative status.[5] Overall, the uses of personería jurídica appear to have been somewhat ambiguous. Much more important in the story of the dealings between government and organised railway labour were the importance of railways to the economy, the growing strength and stability of the unions, and their increasing interest in protective legislation.

Pensions

La Fraternidad's founding statutes embodied both a pensions scheme and a general railway regulation as aims for the society.[6] These aims were

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1. See Chapter 7 pp.255-257.
2. See below pp.231-232.
3. See below pp.237.
4. On 1907 see Chapter 2 p.64 , RRP 7 June 1907, Buyán Una avanzada obrera (1933) p.54; on 1912, see La Prensa 12 Jan. 1912.
5. See Chapter 7 p.257.
6. Buyán op.cit. p.13.

closely linked, and first aired when Victor Bassi of the FCO set out proposals for both in 1900.[1] Schemes were discussed with the government and by a committee of La Fraternidad's honorary members, but the matter seems to have been shelved after 1903.[2] Meanwhile, company pensions schemes of an arbitrary and intentionally divisive nature continued to reward some workers, mainly those in skilled trades or white-collar jobs.[3]

In 1911, La Fraternidad asked some Deputies (of undisclosed political persuasion) to express opinion on the need for railway pensions as these could no longer be left to the caprice of the companies.[4] Their reply, if any, cannot be traced. However, a new project was put to Congress after the general footplatemen's strike. It was perhaps electioneering, and certainly a reaction to the strike.[5]

> 'In fact, this project was born as a result of a strike and in the face of evidence that a powerful and strongly organised trade was disposed to defend its rights. The bill was produced to silence its demands momentarily rather than to enact a scheme for social benefits; hence its relative inefficacy in the latter respect.'[6]

The project was criticised by La Fraternidad on several grounds. First, the lower age limit for eligibility was too high; secondly, all railway service, with whatever company, should count towards years of service; thirdly, pensions should not be contributory; fourth, fewer years of service should be required for eligibility from manual workers than sedentary or non-travelling personnel; and lastly, pensions should relate to the wage at retirement.[7] Only the third and fourth requirements were lacking from

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1. Fraternidad Memoria y balance 1900pp.6-7 ; Fraternidad CD Circulares 4 July 1900, 21 July 1900.
2. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1903 p.9.
3. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1911 pp.9-10.
4. Tello, secretary of La Fraternidad, described the situation in 1911 thus: 'At present the London director is the one who decides whether or not to grant the pension. To get it, the driver must have been submissive, anti-strike, and incapable of any act to improve his personal image' (La Vanguardia 19 July 1911).
5. La Vanguardia 5 Apr. 1912, 21 June 1912.
6. La Vanguardia 7 June 1915.
7. La Fraternidad 15 Aug. 1912, 1 Sept. 1912.

the Law 10650, though the third was clearly of central importance. La Fraternidad also named two prior conditions for union acceptance of a law; assurance against arbitrary dismissal and regulation to 'establish reasonable hours of service daily and rest in proportion'.[1]

Reaction was guarded. The Review of the River Plate welcomed the fact that the Legislative Committee's proposals would discourage strikes but wanted foreigners to be able to take their pensions home if they wished.[2] On the whole, the companies opposed the scheme.[3] The newly-formed FOF expressed its determination that the railway workers should organise their own pensions scheme without the intervention of capitalists and establishment legislators.[4] They had proposed to organise thoroughly before becoming involved in the issue at all;

> 'But now that Parliament, on the pretext of legislating on pensions, interferes in our affairs, we have called a temporary halt to our normal activity to define our attitude and advise our comrades what to do.'[5]

La Fraternidad was involved from the start in lobbying legislators and the government, and was proud of the fact that it championed the cause of other trades and the daily-paid workers.[6] The CD dealt closely with Socialist legislators, including Del Valle Iberlucea (the lone PS Senator), over the proposals - and was appreciative of the efforts of the PS Congressmen on the workers' behalf.[7]

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1. La Fraternidad 15 Nov. 1912.
2. RRP 6 Dec. 1912. Fraternidad took the line that pensioners should stay in Argentina and be useful as consumers if not producers (La Fraternidad 20 July 1922). A petition in 1922 seeking permission to export pensions apparently collected 26000 signatures (RRP 1 Sept. 1922).
3. La Vanguardia 17 Nov. 1912
4. El Obrero Ferroviario January, February 1913.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario November 1913.
6. La Fraternidad 15 Nov. 1912; Fraternidad CD, Memoria y balance 1913.
7. La Fraternidad 1 Oct. 1913; La Vanguardia 15 May 1913, 6 Aug. 1913. The CD said the Socialists had had the law extended to cover obreros as well as empleados French railway unions also lobbied sympathetic legislators before most other unions; see their efforts in 1894, described in Elie Fruit Les syndicats dans les chemins de fer en France, 1890-1910 (Paris, Les éditions ouvrières, 1976) p.87.

The Senate, many of whose members were closely connected with the interests of foreign capital, proposed to add to the bill a clause effectively curtailing the right to strike.[1] Article 11 was included under the auspices of Meyer Pellegrini, author of the 1910 Social Defence Law; indeed,'the companies could not have found a more appropriate man to entrust with such an unhappy mission'.[2]

Article 11 read as follows:

> 'Employees or workers who voluntarily abandon service or give it in such a way as to interrupt or disturb the continuity and regularity of the running of the railways, shall be treated as if they have left employment and need to be replaced, forfeiting all right they might have acquired to pensions or severance pay that this law refers to, and to the contributions they might have made, without prejudice to any further liabilities they might have incurred.
>
> Employees or workers affected by this disposition will have the right to appeal before the committee created under Article 7. This committee, constituted as a tribunal, will resolve definitively in each case, and will have the authority to waive totally or partially the sanctions established in the previous paragraph if in its judgement the abandonment of service occurred by force majeure or was justifiable.'[3]

With this, the companies stopped advocating delay of the pensions scheme on the grounds that it satisfied neither employees nor capital.[4]

> 'One of the principal motives of the present legislation was to prevent strikes or minimise their possibility by securing a contented body of railway employees. It is only reasonable to expect a quid pro quo, by establishing a strong deterrent',

states the Review.[5] In other words, capital must coerce the employees into contentment by limiting the constitutional right to strike - a right much cited by the Socialist Deputies in the debates of June 1915.[6]

By the outbreak of the Great War, the companies complained that with declining traffic receipts they could not afford their contribution to the fund.[7]

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1. La Vanguardia 7 Sept. 1913.
2. Ibid.
3. From Ley Num. 9653, sanctioned 21 June 1915, quoted in Alejandro Bunge, Ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires, 1918).
4. RRP 15 Aug. 1913.
5. RRP 19 Sept. 1913.
6. Diario de Sesiones, Cámara de Diputados 9 June 1915, 14 June 1915.
7. RRP 10 July 1914, 17 July 1914.

The unions - or at least FOF - still maintained that the pensions should be non-contributory for the men.

> 'The project ... does not recognise the right of railwaymen to receive a pension; instead it sets up a savings bank, which is quite different.'[1]

July 1914 makred the beginning of campaigns by La Fraternidad, the Liga Ferroviaria Argentina, and FOF against the offending article 11.[2] In particular, La Fraternidad and LFA held a big meeting addressed by the two union secretaries and Zaccagnini, once secretary of the Confederation and now the PS Congressman who took the most sustained interest in the railwaymen's cause.[3] The agitation about pensions was highly technical and less urgently appealing than more immediate issues, especially in the hard times of mid-1914,[4] but protests about the bill, especially Article 11, began to come in from sections of both FOF and La Fraternidad. La Fraternidad's only opposition to the pensions law concerned Article 11, according to the CD.[5] FOF's position was less clear cut, for though they too were above all opposed to Article 11, at least before 1916 when the legislation was already enacted and a fait accompli they objected to contributory pensions and to schemes organised by capital and/or government on principle;[6] La Fraternidad's leaders certainly did not.[7] Later, FOF confined its protests

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario August 1914.
2. La Vanguardia 17 July 1914, 23 July 1914, 1 Aug. 1914.
3. La Vanguardia 1 Aug. 1914.
4. See Chapter 1 pp.23-24; Chapter 3 pp.105-107.
5. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1914.
6. Message to President of Chamber of Deputies from FOF illustrates this - cited by Zaccagnini, Diario de Sesiones (Diputados) 9 June 1915.
7. The rank and file of both unions expressed a wide spectrum of views on the pensions bill; the papers allowed for a relatively high degree of 'free expression' on the matter, as compared with issues like fusion and sindicatos por ferrocarril. Not surprisingly, though, the Fraternidad leaders expressed more monolithic viewpoints than the CF of FOF.

to particulars of the law.

The amended pensions bill returned to the Deputies in the 1915 session. The PS Deputies energetically opposed the legislation, notably the limitation on the right to strike, from a number of points of view. Zaccagnini urged the Chamber to enhance the reputation of Congress:

> 'Let us have it seen that the first time Congress spontaneously votes a law which favours the workers it has thought to yield up a right, and not to punish them with a new tourniquet, applied treacherously and revengefully.'

He went on to describe the efforts of the party 'in the street, in the square, in the meeting, in the people's forum' to encourage the working class to have faith in the parliamentary road.[1] Despite the Socialists, the bill was passed intact and returned to the Senate. Nearly all the Radicals supported Article 11.[2]

The unions' campaign against the law was intensified. The CF of FOF called for a joint meeting with the CD to discuss tactics to combat the law. Eighteen more FOF sections protested against the legislation,[3] and FORA IX pledged its moral and material support for the campaign.[4] Another big name meeting was held in September (addressed by Marotta and Senra Pacheco of FORA IX, Zaccagnini, and De Todaro for FOF) though again attendance was disappointing.[5]

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1. Diario de Sesiones (Diputados) 9 June 1915.
The Socialists said something about themselves in this debate. Enrique Dickmann is one case; he maintained that the pensions benefits should not go to the upper echelons, as these groups had wages from which they could save and so did not need to be a burden on state charity. He also pointed out the PS belief in the strong union as a guardian of good order;
'strikes, very frequent among unorganised workers, become difficult, even rare, in strongly organised trades because the bosses recognise the workers' power and try to reconcile their differences before having recourse to strikes' (Diario de Sesiones (Diputados) 14 June 1915).
2. La Vanguardia 22 June 1915.
3. CF Meeting 1 July 1915 quoted in El Obrero Ferroviario August 1915.
4. La Organización Obrera 1 Aug. 1915.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario October 1915.

Deductions - at 3% of nominal wages - began in October 1915; even the Economist felt that this was unjust, since the administration of the fund had not yet been settled.[1] La Fraternidad's CD began to make statements accepting the law as a fait accompli,[2] and warned that the men must insist on its just administration.[3]

Almost a year later, after many delays,[4] the Congressional Technical Committee issued its report on the practical aspects of the law.

> 'This committee had to diverge from the basic law every time it wanted to set out wise, logical and necessary dispositions in the organic law,'

commented La Vanguardia,[5] which approved the increase in the men's contribution from 3% to 5% as a realistic measure.[6] FOF, however, issued its last general attack on the pensions law, reiterating that all costs should be borne by the employers and pointing out the important fact that in the prevailing recession a man's nominal wage was usually more than his actual pay.[7]

The financing of the pensions scheme remained in disorder. The British actuary Burn, employed by the companies, concluded that much more money was needed to put the fund on a secure basis;[8] meanwhile AFN produced

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1. Economist 6 Nov. 1915.
2. Fraternidad CD Circulares, 6 Oct. 1915; La Fraternidad 15 Nov. 1915.
3. Various abuses occurred. For instance, 21 engine shed workers were dismissed from Santos Lugares (FCP) as soon as they had paid their first contribution (La Vanguardia 18 Nov. 1915). A temporary worker - with 27 years' service - was excluded from the scheme (La Vanguardia 1 May 1917).
4. Questionnaires to ascertain the age structure of the labour force were slow to come in; the employers said the men were dilatory, but Zaccagnini accused the companies of obstructing the investigation.
5. La Vanguardia 11 Sept. 1916.
6. The companies paid 8% of their wages bills (Raúl U. Pretto Ley y reglamento general de los ferrocarriles nacionales (Buenos Aires, Peuser, 1929) p.312).
7. Manifesto 15 Sept. 1916, quoted in El Obrero Ferroviario Oct. 1916 and La Vanguardia 26 Sept. 1916.
8. Alejandro E. Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires, 1918) pp.404-406 for Burn's full conclusions.

a financially suicidal plan for high pensions and low contributions, possibly a Radical electoral gambit.[1] The companies were not paying their contributions, though they had failed to persuade the courts to declare them a tax (illegal under the Mitre Law of 1907).[2] Finally, a mass meeting heard from Zaccagnini that up to February 1917 a total of $5.6 million had been deducted from railwaymen's wages, of which the companies were still holding $172,000.[3]

The agitation, strikes and violence of August-October 1917 stirred even Congress into a sense of urgency about railway regulation and, by transference, pensions provision. After the setbacks of 1917 and 1918, this urgency transmitted itself to La Fraternidad at least. The law might be imperfect,

> 'but it is certain that the general desire is that the law be sanctioned once and for all, to allow for the granting of pensions to those who really need them at present, and so that the trade can pursue its campaign to achieve a more humane pensions scheme'.[4]

In 1918 La Fraternidad petitioned the Senate for early sanction of the organic law, and AFN too saw Yrigoyen with the same purpose.[5]

The Pensions Law number 10650 was promulgated on 30 April 1919, after its final sanction in the Senate and a few minor adjustments.[6] La Vanguardia thought it fairly satisfactory in its final form, since Article 11 had been removed by a combination of Radical pressure (with electoral results in mind) and the events of 1917-1918; it was, wrote the PS railwayman Inocencio Pailles, a triumph for socialist thinking - even if the initiative had come neither from the party or the unions.[7] Even La Organización Obrera

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1. La Vanguardia 4 Oct. 1916.
2. Article 12, Reglamentación de la ley 5315, in Pretto op.cit. p.237; Economist 11 Nov. 1916 (report dated 10 Oct. 1916).
3. La Vanguardia 1 May 1917; speech given 16 Apr. 1917.
4. Fraternidad CD, Memoria y balance 1918 p.4. Compare the similar reaction of the French railway unions to the passage of their pensions law in 1909 (Fruit op.cit. p.151).
5. Fraternidad CD, Circulares 1918 Num.14 30 Apr. 1918.
6. RRP 2 May 1919, 30 May 1919.
7. La Vanguardia 25 Feb. 1919, 6 Apr. 1919.

was printing articles by Pailles at this time, cautiously supporting the legislation. This is at least as much a change of attitude as that which shook the Senate into action after the events of January 1919, according to the FOF interpretation.[1] Railwaymen were seen in the public galleries of Congress when immediate legislation became probable; there were no signs of ideological scruples about the propriety of legislation on labour issues.[2]

Once the law was enacted, more problems presented themselves. These were no longer of a general nature; instead they concerned primarily the composition of the Board of Directors of the Pensions Fund. Three representatives from the companies and three from the unions were to be chosen, but the employees could only be represented through organisations with personería jurídica;[3] hence only La Fraternidad and AFN could send representatives, two from the first and one from the latter. The unions argued, and with reason, that for La Fraternidad to have two seats was out of proportion with its small size (if not its importance) and that the AFN representative was in effect another voice for the companies on the Board.[4]

FOF claimed that its lack of representation made no practical difference[5] - but at the same time a number of delegations were sent to the Minister of Public Works and even to the President to try and obtain a reversal of policy on the need for personería jurídica.[6] The CF claimed that their exclusion virtually gave the companies carte blanche to break the law.[7]

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario March 1919.
2. RRP 25 Apr. 1919.
3. Art.5, Reglamentación de la ley 10650, in Pretto op.cit. p.329.
4. El Obrero Ferroviario July 1919.
5. Ibid.
6. A delegation saw Yrigoyen on 2 Jan. 1920; sections petitioned him during the winter of 1919 (El Obrero Ferroviario 16 July 1919, 16 Aug. 1919, 1 Sept. 1919).
7. Circular of CF 6 Dec. 1919, quoted in El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Dec. 1919.

The protests continued and intensified after the foundation of the Confraternidad, referring to the strain on the men's patience caused by the government's prevarication on the composition of the Board and on the pay-scale discussions.[1] However, in mid-1919 FOF could have taken a place on the Board by the back door. The Minister, Pablo Torello, offered a seat to Antonio Tramonti who refused on the grounds that the union's representative should be elected by general vote, and not appointed privately. The CF nominated Tramonti because they believed the government would accept an Argentine-born candidate from FOF, as had been intimated at one point - the CF's original choices of José Negri and Isidoro Suárez Sánchez being ineligible by nationality.[2] Somehow, Tramonti did not take up this place; perhaps it was because the government line hardened, or perhaps he, or the union, decided against accepting an ad hoc seat, preferring to concentrate on the principles at stake.[3]

The rail unions were considerably embarrassed in their struggle for representation of the general union on the Pensions Board by the conduct of La Fraternidad's two representatives. Muñiz resigned from the Board in the winter of 1921, without much publicity, but San Sebastián held on.[4] Both men had earned $800 a month[5] for a notoriously easy job, and though they had been elected to serve the union, they consistently toed the company line. San Sebastián was also apparently corrupt; he was certainly corrupt while president of La Fraternidad.[6] These incidents made the unions' case for further representation no easier, though AFN said San Sebastián had been expelled from La Fraternidad purely to enable the Confraternidad to stir up trouble over the composition of the Board.[7]

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1. La Confraternidad September 1921.
2. CF meeting 20 June 1919, reported in El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Aug. 1919; Tramonti's statement to JC Confraternidad 19 Sept. 1922 reported in La Confraternidad 26 Sept. 1922.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario July 1919.
4. The CD expelled San Sebastián on 6 Sept. 1921; this was notified to the Minister of Public Works 17 Sept. 1922 (La Vanguardia 18 Sept. 1922).
5. Over three times as much as they could earn as senior engine drivers, and twice the wage of La Fraternidad's President.
6. See Chapter 5 p.209.
7. El Ferroviario 1 Oct. 1921.

San Sebastián remained on the Board; the union could deny his representative function, but they could not yet remove him. Individual negotiations for pensions did at last start to yield results, though there were a number of accusations of prejudice and arbitrary action.[1] The Fraternidad accountant Antonio Casacuberta was appointed as full-time negotiator for footplatemen's claims by the union's Congress of May 1922 which delivered the final condemnation of San Sebastián.[2]

Meanwhile Arturo Bas, one of the authors of the 1913 project and pillar of AFN, was agitating for reform of the law. A petition seeking reform was circulated in August 1921,[3] and the reform was considered in Congress a year later. The unions and the Socialists were strongly against the proposals, which threatened the stability of the fund in their extravagance and increased the pensions of the higher paid more than those of the average or lower paid.[4] However, about 15,000 attended the AFN demonstration in the Capital to appeal to Congress for these changes, despite the Confraternidad's boycott of the meeting.[5] In the end, Congress did not sanction the Bas-AFN revisions.

The story of the achievement of a railway pensions law illustrates clearly the ambivalent attitude of the unions to government or legislative intervention in their relation with the railway capitalists. Railwaymen were the first group outside government service to receive pensions by law; their success sparked off a series of claims from commercial employees, tramwaymen and seamen. However, the scheme itself took over six years to become law, and the workers paid contributions for nearly five years before the first railway pensioner received his due. In the course of the dealing,

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1. La Confraternidad 7 Nov. 1921; La Vanguardia 10 Nov. 1921.
2. Fraternidad CD, Actas 29 May 1922.
3. La Vanguardia 8 Aug. 1921, 12 Aug. 1921.
4. The new scheme raised the maximum pensionable salary, so that it gave a 5% increase on a wage of $100 per month, 14% on $200, 15% on $400, 19% on $1000, and 72% on $1500 (La Vanguardia 29 Aug. 1922).
5. RRP 8 Sept. 1922; El Ferroviario 25 Aug. 1922; La Vanguardia 6 Sept. 1922.

railwaymen narrowly escaped losing all right to strike or work to rule; this escape was brought about by a volte face in the ruling Radical party, whose upholding of Article 11 in the Deputies had prevented its early death in 1915. In this period, this pioneering legislation was certainly not perfected; but a start was made, and it was a start which would have been unthinkable without the particular relationship that the rail unions had with government.

Working regulation

The General Railway Law of 1891, and its administrative code of 1894, were the first steps towards government regulation of the working conditions of railwaymen.[1] The details of the law soon began to give rise to disputes over interpretation, and the early pensions scheme of Bassi, favoured by La Fraternidad, included some new working regulations,

> 'which would put an end to the complaints and claims which are constantly arising from excess hours of work, lack of rest periods, etc'.[2]

Reform of Article 18, on wages and hours, in October 1903 was intended to iron out some ambiguities in the law, but instead lay behind many disputes, from the 1904 strike on the Amalgamated Companies[3] to trouble on the FCP in 1911, mentioned below.

The general footplatemen's strike of May-June 1907 triggered the demand for a full national regulation. The government took the initiative, and even invited the men to take part in formulating a scheme. La Fraternidad welcomed the opportunity, maintaining that adequate regulation would put an end to the 'multiplicity of differences which arise daily';[4] they advised careful consideration of the men's viewpoint to avoid errors of drafting, and condemned those who opposed any regulation on principle,

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1. Raúl U. Pretto op.cit.p.44; Ley 2873 and its reglamento.
2. Fraternidad CD Circulares 4 July 1900.
3. See Chapter 2 pp.45-50.
4. Fraternidad CD Circulares 1 Nov. 1907.

before any opinions had been aired. Such opponents of legalism did exist, therefore, even in the footplatemen's union.[1]

Representatives of the men were elected, but these were not necessarily from La Fraternidad, whose intervention was officially sought by the General Railway Directorate (DG FFCC) in February 1909.[2]

Progress was very slow. Even La Fraternidad's patience was exhausted after the appointment of a new delegation, and the presentation of fresh proposals, had yielded no results.[3] The CD regarded the question of the regulation as its major task in 1910, interrupted by the crisis on the French Santa Fe Railway which almost provoked a general strike.[4] The regulation issue was important in this dispute, and central to arguments in 1911 with the Pacific Railway (over article 18 of the Railway Law, relating to hours of work); it was indeed an urgent question which absorbed much of the union's growing energies and influence.[5]

The companies opposed the talks between government and footplatemen, by trying to prevent delegates attending the meetings.[6] They themselves were prepared to meet the executive, and as a result of a meeting with the DG FFCC, a regulation which was unacceptable to the union was produced and brought matters to a head.[7] This revelation followed the publication of a code which took account of the workers' viewpoint, which La Fraternidad had approved in general.[8]

The regulation proposed by Ingeniero Schickendantz, the Director-General of Railways, and the company representatives with whom he had worked was

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1. La Fraternidad 1 Dec. 1907.
2. La Vanguardia 1 Apr. 1911.
3. La Vanguardia 1 Apr. 1911; RRP 7 Apr. 1911.
4. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1911; see Chapter 2 pp.72-73.
5. La Vanguardia 21 Feb. 1911.
6. La Fraternidad 1 May 1910.
7. La Vanguardia 1 Apr. 1911.
8. La Vanguardia 11 Feb. 1911.

> 'a farrago of unacceptable stipulations, where nothing has been taken into account except the basest and easiest way of putting pressure on the locomotive men, to exact from them the maximum effort with a minimum of liability for capital.'[1]

La Fraternidad's CD told the DG FFCC that the fundamentals of the law were unacceptable, and refused to make a detailed critique until the whole basis of the proposals had been changed.[2]

The footplatemen felt that their patience for over three barren years had been betrayed by the government, whose connections with the interests of foreign capital (especially in the case of the Minister of Public Works) were well known. Protests were sent at once from sections of La Fraternidad to Ramos Mexía, Schickendantz and Nogués (deputy Railway Director), and 4000 signatures collected for a petition;[3] meanwhile the companies prepared to implement the code that was so favourable to them.[4]

La Fraternidad believed that the proposed code would endanger life,[5] and resented that no penalties were laid down for the companies' infringements, whereas for example the men could be obliged to work overtime with severe punishments for resistance or refusal.[6] La Fraternidad addressed its criticisms respectfully to the government,[7] while the sections more outspokenly declared their willingness to strike against the scheme.[8]

The footplatemen then considered a change of tactic and toyed with a direct approach to the companies.[9] Neither government nor capital wanted the men to exclude the DG FFCC from the discussions, and La Fraternidad only regarded this threat of direct negotiation as a last resort - national and uniform legislation was what they sought.

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1. La Vanguardia 16 Mar. 1911.
2. La Vanguardia 19 Mar. 1911; statement issued 18 Mar. 1911.
3. La Vanguardia 28 Mar. 1911, 1 Apr. 1911.
4. La Vanguardia 29 Mar. 1911.
5. La Fraternidad 1 Apr. 1911.
6. La Vanguardia 1 Apr. 1911.
7. La Vanguardia 1 Apr. 1911, 2 Apr. 1911.
8. La Vanguardia 12 Apr. 1911.
9. La Vanguardia 26 Apr. 1911, 28 Apr. 1911, 11 May 1911.

The union's proposals were published in May 1911 as a first step towards talks. Aside from detail, they included such general principles as the establishment of an arbitration tribunal for disputes, an appeal court to be run by the DG FFCC to guard against unfair demotion or dismissal, restrictions on the contracting of staff from abroad except in cases of genuine shortage, and sick pay.[1]

Nearly two months passed without incident, and without action. The footplatemen's leaders, angered by delays and the continuing abuse of existing laws which made the new proposals still more urgent,[2] persuaded the Minister of Interior, Gómez, to promise a definitive code within a month.[3] On 5 August the CD sent the union's draft claims to all 86 sections for modification.[4]

The men favoured the decision to deal direct, and set about the task of organising effective propaganda.[5] La Fraternidad decided that negotiation

> 'will be without the official participation of the union, entrusting the negotiation of the claim to the staff of each railway, in which they enjoy the fullest autonomy, while counting on the moral leadership and effective backing of the society if the need to unify action and put pressure on the railway capitalists arises'.[6]

The issue of union recognition was seen as a red herring at this critical stage in the proceedings. This decision in a sense belies the charges that La Fraternidad was centralist in structure and conservative and hierarchical in its methods, while emphasising its flexibility in matters of ideology. It was certainly not hide-bound by any formal left-wing or trade union principles - a feature that La Vanguardia was swift to applaud.[7]

The causes and results of the great general strikes of both 1912 and 1917-1918 are inseparable from the history of the three-cornered negotiation

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1. La Vanguardia 23 May 1911, 24 May 1911, 28 May 1911.
2. La Prensa 7 Jan. 1912.
3. La Vanguardia 5 July 1911.
4. La Vanguardia 9 Aug. 1911.
5. La Fraternidad 1 Sept. 1911, 1 Oct. 1911.
6. La Vanguardia 10 Aug. 1911.
7. La Vanguardia 10 Aug. 1911.

on the working regulation; this fact serves as a reminder of the importance of the establishment of a working regulation to the railway unions. Mass strike movements on the railways involved the intervention of the government and in particular of the DG FFCC, the technical department concerned with railways. Settlement of these disputes almost invariably involved the existing legislation (or proposed modifications to it), no matter where the rhetorical statements of unions or capital would suggest the causes of the trouble should be sought.

The last months of 1911 saw increasingly urgent attempts on the part of all three interested parties to settle the dispute without loss of face. La Fraternidad's demands were presented, company by company, on 15 November, by representatives elected from among all the footplatemen on each line; in practice, of course, these delegates tended to be active unionists. The scheme they presented was identical in most important respects to the internal regulation in use on the Central Argentine Railway which had been held up as a fair basis for discussion throughout the dealings.[1] A fortnight later most of the companies - the FCCA included - had rejected the demands (though they had all agreed to receive the delegations) and the government was back in the picture.[2]

> 'Too closely linked to the railway companies, it does not enjoy the absolute independence that cases as delicate as the present demand from statesmen who intend to serve the true interests of the country, which, of course, are not exclusively those of the railway capitalists.'[3]

La Fraternidad was prepared to accept Gómez as mediator at one stage in December 1911; Ramos Mexía, who as Minister of Public Works was a more

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1. La Vanguardia 15 Nov. 1911; note, however, that despite its acceptable regulation the FCCA was one of the most strike-prone companies. Perhaps this was to do with frequent breaches of the regulation - or with the fact that its employees were concentrated in areas where there was a considerable amount of labour militancy, like Rosario. In Argentina, a private company led the way in introducing a humane working regulation, whereas in France the State Railways were most progressive in this respect (Fruit op.cit. pp.133-134).
2. La Vanguardia 30 Nov. 1911.
3. La Vanguardia 2 Dec. 1911.

likely candidate, was never acceptable because of his various posts with the English companies.[1] His anti-union attitude came to prevail in the Cabinet, however, where Gómez was eclipsed during the course of the strike. The footplatemen's movement of 1912 did not bring about legislation on a working code. However, discussion of the pensions bill in Congress emphasised the need for regulation, preferably enacted before the pensions law.[2] The government's regulatory scheme, produced in April 1913, only found favour with La Reforma Ferroviaria, the amarillo footplatemen's association,[3] but the regulation of railway working had been recognised as a matter of some urgency.

The new Radical government was apparently convinced of this urgency. In January 1917 a Fraternidad delegation saw the Minister of Public Works, Pablo Torello.[4] The Minister promised to consult the men about his plans, and won cautious approval from the PS, though they warned that this was perhaps another of the many promises the Radicals were wont to make.[5]

Torello's conduct contrasts with that of the Director-General of Railways, Nogués, who had kept the job he held since 1911 and was unpopular with the unions.[6] The Director received a curt hearing at La Fraternidad's

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1. Buyán Una avanzada obrera (Buenos Aires, 1933) p.98 ; La Vanguardia 7 Dec. 1911, 8 Dec. 1911.
2. La Vanguardia 19 July 1911, 15 June 1915; De Tomaso (PS) in Diario de Sesiones 14 June 1915, Zaccagnini in ibid. 18 Sept. 1917.
3. Economist 10 May 1913, report dated 14 Apr. 1913.
4. Fraternidad CD Circulares 1917, nos. 5 and 6, 17 Jan. 1917, 20 Jan. 1917. See also Paul B. Goodwin Los ferrocarriles británicos y la UCR (Buenos Aires, La Bastilla, 1974) p.70. At this time, Reforma Ferroviaria presented a 'ridiculous and shameful project designed to the taste of and in collusion with the companies' (Fraternidad CD Circulares 1917, No.6, 20 Jan. 1917).
5. La Vanguardia 28 Feb. 1917. The unions' optimism on Torello's appointment parallels the French railwaymen's pleasure when the Radical Pierre Baudin became Minister of Public Works in 1899, and was instrumental in the acceptance of several regulatory decrees between 1899 and 1902 (Fruit op.cit. p.136).
6. Goodwin op.cit. p.17 note 19; p.85, p.117. For differences between Torello and Nogués see Goodwin Chapters 1-4 passim.

General Assembly where his proposed legislation was criticised in detail,[1] and he angered guards on the Pacific Railway by claiming that article 18 of the Railway Law applied only to footplatemen and not to the traffic department (which was manifestly incorrect).[2] Torello meanwhile invited the CF of FOF to help him outline the regulation scheme.[3]

The Radical government pressed the Deputies' railway legislation committee to consider its scheme for working regulation. This committee produced its final proposals, based on a bill of Zaccagnini's, in an atmosphere of near-panic in government and company circles, for the general strike of August 1917 on the FCCA had shaken public complacency about the ability of the populist UCR to appease labour. The committee's scheme, which barred the amarillos from nominating negotiators,[4] went to the lower Chamber on 18 September and was passed seven days later; the conservatives had been bought with a promise to clarify the part of the Mitre Law relating to local taxation liability for the companies, a long-standing claim opposed strenuously by Zaccagnini on the railway legislation committee.[5] The code was referred to committee for further study by the Senate - a predictable reaction in the emergency of the full general strike from the conservative élite, many of whom had interests in the foreign railway companies.[6]

The reactions of the Left to the Deputies' passage of the regulation were mixed. The editorial in La Vanguardia is worth quoting at length, being instructive both as a likely indication of the position of many railway union leaders (especially in La Fraternidad where PS influence was strong) and as a statement of the current PS attitude to the relationship

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1. La Vanguardia 27 Mar. 1917.
2. La Vanguardia 18 Mar. 1917.
3. El Obrero Ferroviario June 1917.
4. La Prensa 28 Aug. 1917.
5. Diputados Diario de sesiones 18 Sept. 1917, 21 Sept. 1917. See Goodwin op.cit. pp.109-110, but some of his dates are faulty.
6. Goodwin op.cit. p.112.

between legislative and direct action.

> 'We would deny the efficacy of our own work if we did not believe that the field of parliamentary action, without yielding as yet all the fruits that we hoped, is now more fertile than in the past for the constructive action that the popular interest demands ... The state of mind of the railwaymen, the enthusiasm and decisiveness with which they have risen against the dominance and greed of the companies, must have influenced the resolution of the Chamber. There is no reason to conceal it. On the contrary, we should proclaim it loud and clear; and the Chamber itself, which does not always respond to healthy influences, and many Deputies who on numerous occasions are inspired by disgraceful sentiments and interests, can be proud and satisfied that they listened this time to the needs and legitimate hopes of a vast group of useful and unusually competent workers, who, with their families, form a considerable portion of the Argentine population.'[1]

The anarchists saw the events differently:

> 'the regulation of labour on the railways which the Socialist parliamentarians defend with such ardour and the government accepts as the only solution to the present conflict, is a further noose about the throats of men who are struggling for the emancipation of all humanity'.[2]

With the legislation held up in the Senate, the executive hastily devised a decree regulating railway working, published on 11 October. In the end the unions unwillingly accepted it as a basis for solving the conflict.[3] A definitive version followed on 21 November

> 'which satisfies nobody because of its many obscure points which lend themselves to capricious interpretations by the companies'.[4]

La Fraternidad alone had over 200 members suspended over disagreements on the provisional code, before the 21 November decree.[5] The companies, in turn, insisted that it was unconstitutional for government to regulate labour except in matters directly affecting public safety, thus denying the right to interfere in the running of workshops or the

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1. La Vanguardia 26 Sept. 1917.
2. La Protesta 6 Oct. 1917.
3. For details of the making of the regulatory decree see Goodwin op.cit. pp.109-135.
4. La Vanguardia 23 Nov. 1917.
5. Zaccagnini interviewed in La Vanguardia 24 Nov. 1917, 25 Nov. 1917.

telegraph.[1] They emphasised the need to avoid creating a privileged class of workers, especially without hindrance of the right to strike, claimed that conditions in Argentina were less stressful than in the industrialised countries whose regulations were taken as models, and doubted that the Argentine economy could bear costs. Furthermore they maintained that

> 'the rash reduction of hours, the conceding of pensions at an early age, etc., foment in men the tendency to laziness and have unfavourable repercussions on the economy as a whole'.[2]

The imperfections in the government's regulation soon became obvious, and most of the disputes between November 1917 and May 1918 arose from differing interpretations of the new code. Every single article had led to some dispute, said La Fraternidad in its 1918 report, and while the footplatemen had been prepared to negotiate painstakingly, FOF indulged in damaging strike action. The latter sought a fundamental reappraisal of the regulation;[3] this the government would not countenance. Negotiations on interpretation were ruptured by FOF calling a strike on the Pacific Railway in March 1918, and the government decreed a return to work in this dispute on the very day of the elections.[4]

The government attitude to the regulation did not change.

> 'The working regulation - imposed by the strike of September and October 1917 - which was worth a 22% rise in rates to the companies, remains a dead letter, whereas the companies have made this increase permanent, an increase which the government only authorised provisionally in that crisis.'[5]

The government was not only prepared to allow increased railway rates.

> 'The national government - either in compliance with the companies or out of sordid and mean egotism - rather than safeguarding their moral authority, imposing on railway capital the fulfilment of the decree, has preferred to make

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1. Alejandro E.Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (Buenos Aires, 1918) pp.353-361 (companies' reply to government of 7 Nov. 1917); pp.391-392.
2. Bunge op.cit. p.355.
3. See Chapter 3 p.130 on FOF Congress of December 1917; La Vanguardia 12 Feb. 1918.
4. RRP 1 Mar. 1918; Goodwin op.cit. pp.141-142.
5. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 July 1919; for discussion of railway rates see Goodwin op.cit. Chapter 6 and passim.

> common cause with the subversive attitude of the private companies ... The companies and the government - which so much fear the revolutionary spirit of the masses - by absolving themselves as in this case from the fulfilment of the legal dispositions, openly foment rebellion and disrespect for the law.'[1]

While they railed against the injustice of the regulation, both unions laboriously negotiated small modifications and clarifications in the law. This activity continued during the negotiation of national wage and promotion scales[2] - scales which, like pensions, were difficult to establish without standardised labour practices. The number of clarifications and modifications to Article 18 alone (on hours) which were communicated by government circular shows how much work was being done:

Year	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
No. of circulars	5	15	7	9	4	7

Source: Raúl U.Pretto Ley y reglamento general de los ferrocarriles nacionales (Buenos Aires, Peuser, 1929) pp.54-55.

The story of the working regulation has many of the same features as that of the pensions law. La Fraternidad supported legislation in principle from the first, whereas FOF accepted it only reluctantly in 1917, having initially opposed government interference in matters affecting working conditions. Once a regulation existed, FOF was as eager to defend it as the footplatemen, and the general union recognised the possibility of using the legal processes they officially despised in the workers' interest. However, legislation on railway working was not completed for many years, and abuses continued, for it was much more complex and less easily enforceable than the pensions law.

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario 1 Dec. 1919.
2. For details on wage-scale negotiations, see Chapter 4 pp.163-167.

Arbitration

Arbitration as a method of solving labour conflicts enjoyed a certain vogue in Argentina, as elsewhere, among progressives and 'constructive' conservatives; Australian experiments spurred this interest.[1] It was thought to be especially well-suited to conflicts in the public service industries. Most Argentine unions, however, preferred to deal direct with representatives of capital - a preference in principle rather than in practice on the railways, where the government was invariably involved in important disputes.[2]

In 1907 a bill on compulsory arbitration in disputes involving transport companies was introduced in Congress, following the general footplatemen's strike. It owed much to events in Italy, where the government had responded to a railway strike in 1905 by outlawing strikes in public service industries and providing compulsory arbitration in disputes.[3] El Ferrocarril noted that the bill implicitly recognised labour organisations by providing that workers' arbitration representatives should be elected from the appropriate trade union; at the same time the bill proposed sanctions against organisations with personería jurídica which abused the law.[4]

This bill was never passed; however, arbitration was imposed on La Fraternidad in 1907 and accepted under duress.[5] The union did not favour compulsory arbitration at this (or any other) time,[6] though it advocated

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1. See the González Labour Code of 1904, discussed fully in Jose Panettieri Los trabajadores (Buenos Aires, Alvarez, 1967) pp.149-154; Juan B.Justo Teoría y práctica de la historia (Buenos Aires, Líbera, 5th ed. 1969) p.482 on arbitration in Australia and New Zealand.
2. However, before FOA's fourth congress (in 1904) the acceptance of arbitration was a matter for individual unions to decide (Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) pp.86, 114); the 1902 Rosario general strike was settled with the arbitration of the municipal intendant, with the anarchist unions' agreement (Spalding Clase trabajadora p.86).
3. Christopher Seton-Watson Italy from liberalism to fascism (London, Methuen, 1967) pp.255-256.
4. El Ferrocarril 1 July 1907.
5. See Chapter 2 pp.63-64.
6. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1907 p.4; Agnelli and Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.101.

the inclusion of arbitration mechanisms in legislation on working regulation, perhaps comparable to the British Conciliation Boards established in 1907, which catered for nearly all railwaymen by 1910.[1]

The 1907 strike was the first opportunity for a public airing of a new government department, the National Labour Department or DNT. Its president, Dr. Matienzo, summed up a situation which prevailed almost throughout the period before 1922 in a report to the Minister of the Interior in 1907:

> '[the rail strike] demonstrates yet again the lack of laws which adequately regulate the collective contract of labour in general, and which consider in particular the means of preventing and settling the disputes between transport firms and their employees .... And while we lack laws, we also lack customary practices in industry which fill the vacuum pointed out here. Masters and workmen find themselves in a state of isolation and latent war in this respect, having recourse only to more or less violent methods to obtain justice when a conflict breaks out.'[2]

The DNT mainly functioned as a statistical and analytical department, staffed by a group of progressive professionals and academics, including some Socialists, on the periphery of government circles. Dr. Ruzo, president of the department in August 1917, was called upon to report on the Central Argentine Railway strike and his controversial conclusions laid him open to charges of bias. The DNT played no important part in the events that followed in that year.[3]

Arbitration was considered in 1911-1912, and the general strike could perhaps have been averted if the companies had accepted it at once instead of at the last moment, by which time the footplatemen would not risk trusting the government or capital.[4] Likewise,

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1. G.D.H. Cole & R.Page Arnot Trade Unionism on the Railways (London, Fabian Research Dept., 1917) p.21; H.A.Clegg, Alan Fox & A.F. Thompson A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 (London, OUP, 1964) pp.426-427.
2. Boletín del Departamento Nacional del Trabajo 30 June 1907, p.54.
3. See Chapter 3 p.117ff.
4. See Chapter 2 p.75.

the crises of August 1917 was much influenced by the men's refusal to accept arbitration. La Vanguardia expressed the case of the men who were not intransigent opponents of arbitration:

> 'Before arbitration pure and simple, the conciliatory mediation of the authorities is appropriate, and it should make itself felt in a suitable tone when it concerns companies who profit from a public service and resist the most moderate claims of their wage labour.
>
> 'The government should bear in mind when deciding its attitude the intransigence of the companies in the face of the workers' demands, which they will not even consider, rejecting them absolutely, rather than the distrustful unwillingness of the workers to accept arbitration.
>
> 'If the companies sincerely want arbitration, they must begin by declaring up to what point they are disposed to accede to the workers' claims.'[1]

The government's refusal to decree arbitration was used by the companies as a weapon against the administration, blaming it for falling receipts and demanding compensatory increases in tariffs.[2] Government weakness was emphasised by the Right; one commentator maintained that the men's refusal to consider arbitration demonstrated their 'contemptuous arrogance', a logical consequence of 'ineffectual repression by the Public Authorities'.[3]

Despite union weakness after the 1917 general strike, La Fraternidad effected a successful arbitration with the Compañía General, the French-owned company that exploited many profitable tracts of the province of Buenos Aires. La Fraternidad had the DG FFCC impose arbitration over a matter of interpretation of the new regulation because the company would

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1. La Vanguardia 19 Sept. 1917.
2. An opinion voiced by Jerónimo Della Latta in La Vanguardia 7 Oct. 1917.
3. La Nación quoted in and translated by RRP 21 Sept. 1917.

not deal directly with the men.[1] San Sebastián (for the union), Ingeniero Noailles (for the company) and Ingeniero Eduardo Huergo met and reached agreement in August 1918, after a month's negotiation.[2]

> 'After laborious and prolix discussions, the tribunal has just given its verdict, which we transcribe with satisfaction, not only because it improves the workers' economic position considerably but also, and especially, because it demonstrates how the grave questions which divide the railway companies from their staff can be resolved legally, peacably and directly, without the need to appeal to extreme measures.'[3]

The arbitration was thus approved by the PS, who saw it as revolutionary, and the establishment praised La Fraternidad for this further manifestation of its maturity.[4] FOF remained suspicious for a time (to the chagrin of La Vanguardia[5]), but the precedent was set and railway leaders of both unions never again spurned the possibility of using arbitration in a particular case; they did, however, maintain their stand against compulsory arbitration by law.

Conclusion

The development of the formal aspects of the relationship between governments and the railway unions, embodied in the pensions law, the decrees on railway working, and the use of arbitration, was not a smooth process. There was constant and insurmountable distrust of the government by both protagonists in railway disputes. The companies were particularly wary of the Radical administration until its disillusion with a conciliatory attitude to labour unrest became apparent. They had expressed grave discontent at government pro-labour bias before, in the dispute on the FCPSF in 1910.[6] The men expected to be betrayed by the government,

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1. RRP 10 May 1918.
2. Agnelli and Chiti op.cit. p.102; RRP 16 Aug. 1918.
3. La Vanguardia 3 Aug. 1918.
4. La Vanguardia 5 Aug. 1918; La Prensa 24 Apr. 1918.
5. Joaquín Coca writing in 'La semana gremial' in La Vanguardia 5 Aug. 1918.
6. RRP 16 Dec. 1910. See Chapter 2 p.73.

both before and after 1916; cases date from the earliest footplatemen's stoppages of 1888-1890. Time and again, the men agreed to a government settlement which was never properly enforced, the most notable example perhaps being the failure of the authorities to ensure that the companies kept their promise to the President to reinstate dismissed strikers after the footplatemen's dispute of 1912.[1] The early years of the Yrigoyen regime have been seen as a honeymoon by comparison. It is, however, necessary to distinguish between apparent expressions of goodwill between government and labour and the reality. For instance, a FOF statement said that the 1917 strike was settled out of respect for the President; in fact, the leaders were impatient for a solution because of divisions in the CF and apathy in the ranks,[2] and Radical partisanship almost certainly had nothing to do with the end of the conflict. If the FOF leaders were flattering the President, it was not consonant with their constant protest that the decreed regulation was not what they sought.

State involvement in labour issues included the government's obligation to maintain law and order, which was yet another area which bred distrust in both companies and unions. The unions rightly feared repression, exemplified by the persecution of the Confederation leaders in 1905;[3] the injudicious use of troops by national and provincial governments encouraged violence, as in the strikes of 1917,[4] while government connivance with vigilante forces, in 1910, 1921, and above all 1919,[5] created further obstacles to reasoned cooperation between unions and the government authorities. For their part, the companies complained

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1. See Chapter 3 pp.89-91.
2. See Chapter 3 p.123 n.2.
3. See Chapter 2 p.54.
4. See Chapter 3 pp.125-126.One stratagem the Argentine government could not employ, because too many railwaymen were foreigners, was to call up all army reservists among railway strikers, as occurred in Italy in 1902, France in 1910, and Spain in 1912 (Seton-Watson op.cit. p.239; Manuel Tuñón de Lara El movimiento obrero en la historia de España (Madrid, Taurus, 1972) p.514; El Obrero Ferroviario Nov. 1912).
5. See Chapter 4 pp.150,169-170.

repeatedly that governments failed to attend to their appeals for troops to keep order.[1]

Considering the antipathy to accommodations with government in the union movement and among foreign capital interests, based partly on ideological grounds and partly on experience of betrayal, the progress made in railway labour legislation is impressive. Organised railwaymen pioneered union participation in labour legislation, an area largely ignored for ideological reasons by union federations after UGT became syndicalist.[2] Their example was followed by such mainstays of FORA IX as the maritime and municipal workers when they acquired sufficient strength; power, rather than legal status, governed the outcome of these initiatives. Government willingness to deal with unions was not simply the result of changed political leadership; in the crises of 1902 and 1905, governments of the conservative élite met anarchist union representatives who were much less respectable, and much less representative, than their bureaucratic successors of the post-Reform years. The unions' social and political status grew as they became a permanent force in the working class, and with this growth governments became more willing to recognise their role. The rail unions were among the earliest to gain such status; this, coupled with the economic importance of their work and the tradition of government intervention in railway affairs, ensured that they should be in the vanguard of the development of a relationship between governments and unions in Argentina.

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1. Among complaints recorded are those in 1896 (RRP 26 Sept. 1896, 28 Nov. 1896), in October 1905 at Rosario (RRP 6 Oct. 1905), in the 1907 footplatemen's strike (RRP 31 May 1917) and in the FCCA strike of July 1917 (RRP 27 July 1917, 3 Aug. 1917).

2. The demonstration against the UCR proposals for a labour code in 1919 was the first action by any federation concerning labour legislation since 1904 (for details see Chapter 4 pp.154-155).

Chapter 7. Trade union growth and organisation: debates and comparisons, Argentina 1887-1922

It is appropriate in this last chapter to draw together some of the essential background to the history of the struggles and achievements of organised railway labour, to make some comparisons with other unions, and to place the railway unions in their national context.

First, the growth of union membership and the mechanisms of propaganda are set out, to provide the necessary background for a discussion of the practical and theoretical differences which arose over modes of organisation. These themes, as well as the numerical strength of the labour movement, helped to shape inter-union relations, which are the final concern of this chapter.

Growth of union membership

It has proved very difficult to collate reliable data on the numerical strength of trade unions, even in the railwaymen's case where documentation is relatively copious and continuous. Organisations, especially before 1910, were ephemeral and isolated; union federations and individual unions made exaggerated claims;[1] records have either not survived or never existed. The discrepancy in the figures for paid-up members and for 'affiliates', 'associates', or other non-paying supporters makes accurate data elusive. Spalding's estimate that about one-third of workers who supported their union in Buenos Aires in 1907 actually paid a subscription tallies well with the superficially puzzling assertion that in 1915 FOF had 4,000 'members' and 15,000 'associates'.[2] The table after p.250 demonstrates that steady growth in paid-up membership, like La Fraternidad's, was rare before 1914; the characteristic fluidity was both cause and effect of the prevailing modes of organisation of the period, discussed below.

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1. For instance the Commercial employees' union was accused at the second UGT congress of inventing 1700 members to increase its entitlement to delegates (Marotta op.cit. Vol I p.272).
2. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.330; Marotta op.cit. Vol II p.182.

Trade union membership in Argentina, 1896-1926

Year	Trade union federations		Railway unions		Total railway workforce	% unionised	Other trade unions		
	FORA/USA	UGT/CORA	General unions	Fraternidad			FOM	Rodados	Stevedores
1896			290	761	34056	3.09			
1897				1117	n.a.	-			
1898				1025	n.a.	-			
1899				711	n.a.	-			
1900				783	43486	1.80			
1901				1057	45876	2.30			
1902	7630			1262	46595	2.71			3200
1903	5071	3430	3300	1660	47488	10.44		15000	
1904	10964	6156	5700	2255	51826	15.35			
1905		6236	7500*	2680	61215	16.63			
1906		8549	10000*	3174	76635	17.19			
1907		3346	15500	4138	85237	23.04			
1908		2385		4919	88804	5.54			
1909		4714		5645	101255	5.58			
1910		5744		6274	107162	5.85			
1911		5625		7447	117468	6.34			
1912		6883	n.a.	7567	122248	-			
1913		5844	1500*	8378	132810	7.44			
1914			3000*	8874	120557	9.85			
1915	2660		3500	9125	117066	10.78			
1916	3427		9322	9200*	112175	16.51	2000		
1917	15070		50000*	9200*	102619	57.69			
1918	35726		20000*	9200*	112239	25.83			
1919	39683		30000*	9500*	120311	32.83	9000		
1920	68138		48449	10000	n.a.	50.00*	13000		
1921	40390		n.a.	11000*	n.a.	55.00*			
1922	26878		59960	13000	119462	61.08			
1923	26290								
1924	29914								
1925	15926								
1926	16156								

Note: figures marked * are my estimates.

Sources: Marotta op.cit.Vol I p.257, Vol II p.156, Vol III pp.92,137,204; Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) pp.91,146,166; Rock Politics (1975)pp. 130,160,190-191; Oddone Gremialismo (1975) pp.202,244,262; Spalding Clase trabajadora pp.330, 372; Panettieri Los trabajadores (1967) p.131; La Vanguardia; Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario; El Ferrocarril; Boletín del DNT; FOF CF Memoria y balance; Bunge Ferrocarriles argentinos (1918)p.312.

Figures suggest that two periods of union vitality can be identified in these years: the first from 1902 to about 1907-1908, and the second between 1917 and 1921. During both these periods railway unions flourished, though the temptation to extrapolate from the short-term booms and slumps in railway union growth turns out to yield misleading results. To take just one example, the problems of reconstruction facing FOF after April-May 1918 were internal, and its stagnation and slow recovery were not general experiences among Argentine unions at this time; FOM grew strongly throughout 1918, whereas a meat packers' union had been formed, had flourished and expired during the same period.[1]

The inactivity which afflicted organised labour between 1908 and 1917 is not easy to explain; again the strength and relative militancy of La Fraternidad appear exceptional.[2] Some tentative explanations can be adduced. The vigorous activity of 1902-1908 was fuelled by relatively prosperous economic conditions. Paradoxically, both ideological divisions and attempts to overcome them may have provided unions with an impetus to organise, whereas disillusion after the abortive Unity Congress of 1907 - attended by 152 unions[3] - affected both syndicalists and anarchist federations adversely. Severe repression of a weakened movement in May 1909 and again in May 1910 held back recovery, which was stifled until repeated attempts to unite the working class bore fruit in April 1915 with the formation of FORA IX. At the same time, powerful national and industrial unions superseded local craft organisations, notably in the transport sector, changing the power base of the national federation and stimulating more permanent growth.[4] Finally, the hardships of the war period furnished

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1. FORA IX's affiliates grew in number from 15,070 in 1917 to 35,726 in 1918; see table after p.250.
2. See Chapter 2 pp.71-85.
3. Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) p.159.
4. Samuel L. Baily Labor, Nationalism and Politics in Argentina (New Brunswick, Rutgers Univ.Press, 1967) p.33; compare the Italian case, with the growth of national federations in 1901-1902, in Daniel L. Horowitz The Italian Labor Movement (Cambridge, Harvard U. Press, 1963) p.62.

ample economic grievances, and initially at least there seemed grounds to expect a sympathetic hearing from the Yrigoyen government.

Estimates suggest that about 11% of Buenos Aires workers were paid up union members in 1907, reaching perhaps 24% by late 1919;[1] national figures must have been lower, especially early in the period, before the national federations were successful. Within this framework, the level of organisation among railway workers - when substantial unions existed - was exceptional. By about 1914 it was claimed that some 80-90% of footplatemen were members of La Fraternidad; in 1924, some 94% of those eligible to join the union were members.[2] No separate figures exist for the total number of footplatemen in Argentina, but from the Great War onwards the conventional estimate was about 10,000.[3] In comparison, ASLEF, the British counterpart of La Fraternidad, organised only 47% of footplatemen in 1916.[4]

The general rail unions were not so dominant, but their failure to collect regular subscriptions means that figures for paid-up membership tend to underestimate their strength. Even so, the proportion of all railwaymen in unions from 1904 to 1907, during the Confederation's most active period, was not much lower than in Britain, where 24% of railwaymen were organised in 1901, and 31% in 1910.[5] In 1917, and again from 1920,

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1. Spalding Clase trabajadora p.330, Rock Politics (1975) p.191. Compare the national figure for France of about 10% of the industrial working class in 1912 (Bernard H. Moss The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914 (Univ.of California Press, 1976) pp.149-150). In Italy, 11.7% of organisable workers were unionised in 1910, but about half of these were agricultural workers, hardly organised at all in Argentina (Maurice F. Neufeld Italy: School for Awakening Countries (Ithaca, 1961) p.350).
2. La Razón Anuario 1924 p.47.
3. Discrepancies in the figures for footplatemen arise from the exclusion or inclusion of peripheral trades like the engine cleaners.
4. G.D.H. Cole & R. Page Arnot Trade Unionism on the Railways (London, Fabian Research Dept., 1917) p.13.
5. Clegg, Fox & Thompson A History of British Trade Unions (1964) p.468. In France, 18% of railway workers were unionised in the period 1884-1897 (Edward Shorter & Charles Tilly Strikes in France, 1830-1968 (London, CUP, 1974) p.151).

the general union organised about half of those eligible.[1] The only body with comparable strength in Argentina was FOM, which claimed to organised 95% of some sectors within its scope.[2]

Propaganda

In a country the size of Argentina, and in a section of the working class as geographically scattered as the railwaymen, permanent union organisation relied heavily on effective propaganda. The Confederation's efforts were particularly impressive at a time when other organisations, because of the dominance of local groups, were much less active. Its free monthly (or sometimes fortnightly) newspaper, El Ferrocarril, had the largest circulation of any working class periodical; 12,000 copies of each issue were printed even in 1903.[3] It was the first regular newspaper produced by an individual union, and was circulated nationally with the courageous assistance of goods guards in the Buenos Aires terminals.[4] La Fraternidad began publication in 1907, though there is conflicting evidence of an earlier periodical;[5] it carried less political and international material (though it sometimes covered events in Britain) and more technical articles than El Ferrocarril at this time. By the time FOF was founded in 1912, union periodicals had become quite commonplace, and El Obrero Ferroviario was widely read; it provided exhaustive detail on railway affairs, as did La Fraternidad, leaving more sophisticated ideological debate to La Organización Obrera, published weekly by FORA IX from mid-1917.

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1. In France in 1909 the general rail union organised 23% of railwaymen (Elie Fruit Les syndicats dans les chemins de fer en France, 1890-1910) (Paris, Les éditions ouvrières, 1976) p.167); in Britain, the National Union of Railwaymen organised 59% of the trade in 1913 (Cole & Page Arnot op.cit. pp.12-13).
2. Rock Politics (1975) p.184.
3. El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1903; compare the 10,000 copies printed by FOF in 1912, the 16,000 circulation of La Protesta in 1910, and the 45,000 copies of La Organización Obrera printed for the special May Day issue of 1915.
4. El Ferrocarril 1 Aug. 1907.
5. Apparently an unofficial footplatemen's paper called El Conductor de Máquiñas was produced from 1902 (Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) pp.345-346. There was also a militant journal, critical of La Fraternidad, called El Nuevo Conductor, which was possibly the same thing (El Ferrocarril 15 Aug. 1905).

These periodicals were the only regular contact between the rail unions and their far-flung membership, and explained how the Confederation managed to maintain sections as far from Buenos Aires as Concordia, Santa Fe, Mendoza and Tucumán,[1] whereas at the height of FOF's power there was scarcely a town on a railway unconnected with the union. Less regular but equally important propaganda was conducted through tours by union officials, again a practice pioneered by the Confederation.[2] Tours were undertaken seriously by La Fraternidad after the 1912 strike, by which time the organisation of FOF had begun; the interaction of propaganda and membership drives by La Fraternidad, FOF and the syndicalist federations CORA and FORA IX constituted a notable advance in inter-union cooperation. FOF's central committee was housed for a year by FOM, founded in 1910 and led by a former railwayman, Francisco J. García.[3] CORA (and later FORA IX) lent FOF prominent orators like Sebastian Marotta and Luis Lotito, while Manuel J. Sumay was foremost among the Fraternidad leaders who toured on FOF's behalf, along with José Bazán and José San Sebastián.[4] In this way La Fraternidad repaired the damage done to itself by the 1912 strike, and helped to build FOF; the syndicalist federations took the opportunity to rebuild forces in the provinces.

Modes of organisation

The eventual success and strength of railway unions in Argentina was not achieved smoothly, nor did the general unions arrive at this strength by the same route as La Fraternidad. The continuous existence of the footplatemen's union naturally influenced railway labour organisation, though its relations with other railway groups were not always cordial.

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1. El Ferrocarril 1 Jan. 1908; not all these sections were well organised.
2. El Ferrocarril 1 Aug. 1906, 1 Mar. 1907. FORA was also sending delegations to the interior by 1907 (Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) p.170).
3. La Organización Obrera 1 May 1918; DNT Boletin Feb. 1919.
4. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1913 p.11, 1914 p.11.

Some of these groups had less in common with La Fraternidad than with other labour unions in their organisational aspects, and reflected the trends in the mainstream of Argentine organised labour.

La Fraternidad was founded in 1887; its statutes were consolidated in 1889, and it received personería jurídica or legal status from the government. It was organised a base múltiple; in other words it served both as a friendly society and as a society of resistance against capitalist exploitation, and the emphasis in the early years was certainly on the first function. The union was centralised in structure, and craft-oriented, confining its membership to engine drivers and firemen apart from a brief period of rivalry with FOF between 1917 and 1920. All these aspects of La Fraternidad's organisation were unusual, and all were subjects of controversy within the labour movement as unions strove to find the most effective mode of organisation; the general rail unions were particularly concerned with La Fraternidad's example, which makes it a useful basis from which to examine these themes here.

The arguments against personería jurídica, as a threat to autonomy of action, were advanced by Socialists as well as anarchists in the 1890s. By the First World War the PS had come to agree with La Fraternidad that the disadvantage of suffering the attendance of inspectors from the Ministry of Justice at union congresses (to see that the statutes were properly observed) was perhaps outweighed by the advantage of having legal redress against employees who indulged in fraud, for example. La Fraternidad's autonomy was not affected in practice by its legal status, though the intervention of the Ministry of Justice did cause occasional delays in making statutory changes.[1] Once the railway pensions law had been passed

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1. Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.62. In 1912 the Ministry of Justice tried to prevent the union from amending its statutes to allow for the expulsion of members who did not comply with the union's resolutions; Mario Bravo defended the change successfully in court for the union.

in 1919, and the Fund's Board had been established, the advantages of personería jurídica (which entitled a union to representation on the Board) far outweighed the disadvantages.[1]

None of the early general railway unions tried to acquire personería jurídica. La Fraternidad's refusal to participate in strikes with the Confederation - which had considered personeria juridica but decided against it[2] - was blamed on its association with the legal process and hence with the establishment. In 1904 the Confederation complained,

> 'What is the use of the famous personería jurídica to a trade union when it obliges it to act according to the will of the authorities and the companies?'[3]

La Fraternidad proved able and willing to conduct strikes (notably in 1907 and 1912), its legal status notwithstanding, but the Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera was founded on principles which excluded such status. By this time practical objections to personería jurídica, once voiced by the PS (which now advocated legal status for unions), were replaced by ideological arguments against it on anarchist and syndicalist lines. However, at FOF's 1916 congress a motion to seek personería jurídica put by General Pico section was rejected by 17 votes to 10.[4] This sizeable minority in favour of personería jurídica in a union that was fast becoming a senior partner in FORA IX reflects the wide base of both FOF and the federation. FORA IX, while it did not encourage the acquisition of personería jurídica by its members, certainly did not forbid it. FOM, who attacked the railwaymen's decision to seek personería jurídica in 1922, and which was generally regarded as more militant than FOF, had five components with legal status by 1922.[5]

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1. See Chapter 6 pp.231-232.
2. El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1903, 15 June 1904.
3. El Ferrocarril 16 Apr. 1904
4. El Obrero Ferroviario May 1916. The likely PS influence on this matter is not detectable because the delegates were anonymous.
5. Fransisco Aló in La Vanguardia 30 Aug. 1922; see also Chapter 4 p.184.

The majority still held that legal status was irrelevant to trade union function, and implied an unacceptable degree of association with the institutions of the bourgeois state. This view became more anomalous as unions, especially those in public service industries, found it necessary and even desirable to use legal channels in the interests of their members. The provisions of the Railway Pensions Law, which only gave seats on the Board of the Pensions Fund to unions with personería jurídica, forced the railwaymen to reconsider their position. The campaigns of the leadership of Tráfico y Talleres for the adoption of personería jurídica in 1922 were the result of this anomalous exclusion (the more damaging since the AFN was represented), coupled with the success of La Fraternidad in obtaining a national scale of pay and promotions which owed much to the union's legal recognition.[1] The matter was resolved with the foundation of Unión Ferroviaria, which sought and gained personería jurídica.

The Confraternidad never had such status. La Fraternidad itself claimed that it was unnecessary, during the work to rule of 1921, maintaining that

> 'a trade union acquires its status when it is important enough for its resolutions to matter to capital. It is beyond question that the Confraternidad matters to the companies'.[2]

A year later, La Fraternidad did advocate that the Confraternidad and all its parts should have personería jurídica,[3] but there was much ambivalence among labour leaders on the matter. Personería jurídica was regarded as a practical necessity, a means to some specific ends, rather than desirable in itself; the residual sense that it betrayed the tradition of resistance in the labour movement survived, even among some of the most eager apologists

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1. See Chapter 4 pp.163-164.
2. Fraternidad CD to Minister of Public Works, 29 Jan. 1921.
3. La Confraternidad May 1922.

of the reorganisation of Tráfico y Talleres into Unión Ferroviaria.[1]

The second major difference between La Fraternidad and most other Argentine trade unions of this period lay in its adoption of a dual role, as both friendly society and 'resistance society'. Mutual aid societies had been the basis for the foundation of many craft unions in Argentina as elsewhere, for instance in Italy, where the National Mutual Aid Society of Italian Railway Engineers and Firemen began to operate on both levels in 1885; the French case has the same features.[2] However, by the 1890s - in both Italy and Argentina - most friendly societies were separate from trade union organisations, which were described as resistance societies; in other words they were organised solely to resist exploitation by employers, and not to provide sick pay, unemployment benefits and other insurance facilities not yet furnished by the state.

La Fraternidad's organisation a base múltiple, as it was called, was despised by anarchists and also attacked by syndicalists; 'the panacea of mutual benefits' was thought to undermine collective consciousness.[3] The Confederation, which started life in 1902 as a mutual aid-cum-resistance society, shared this view; in 1904 the Central Committee suggested some statutory modification so that

> 'the Confederation can never be regarded as a mutual aid society and savings bank as some comrades seem to see it, seeking constantly to add to the sum of their rights, without understanding a single one of the duties inherent in their position as members'.[4]

Even La Fraternidad, which unlike the Confederation retained its a base múltiple organisation, felt obliged to warn new members in 1899 that

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1. La Vanguardia June-Sept. 1922 passim; La Confraternidad passim for same period.
2. Neufeld op.cit. p.188; Fruit op.cit. p.201. La Fraternidad's many honorary members were a feature of Italian (and presumably Argentine) friendly societies (Neufeld op.cit. p.175).
3. La Organización Obrera 1 May 1916. On the other hand, the anarchist Pelloutier encouraged the French bourses de travail to develop their friendly society activities (Moss op.cit. p.145).
4. El Ferrocarril 1 May 1904. Note also the statement of the committee 3½ years later:
'The Confederation cannot be a savings bank, a loan bank, or a friendly society, if it aims to fulfil its goal and resist capitalist exploitation' (El Ferrocarril 1 Nov. 1907).

> 'they are not becoming part of a mutual aid society whose aim is to assist them financially and provide given services; they join a society whose principal objective is to protect them in their work, sheltering them from the abuses to which they have been and will be subjected'.[1]

La Fraternidad believed that the provision of friendly society benefits through a base múltiple organisation was an effective way of breeding class consciousness, whereas resistance societies only appealed to the converted.[2] Friendly society benefits certainly ensured that La Fraternidad survived its first fifteen or twenty years, before it developed a more militant role. However, this base also depended upon the special characteristics of the footplatemen's trade, such as their relatively good rates of pay, their skilled status and crucial role in the running of the railways.[3] These distinctive features encouraged union consciousness, as did the fact that work on the footplate was a lifetime's career, not a casual job. These factors were absent from other railway sectors, and from most labour sectors.

The difficulties cited did not prevent the PS from pressing for a base múltiple organisation from about 1909 onwards. They felt that

> 'It is to display a narrow conception of organisation to limit it exclusively to a struggle against capital'.[4]

On these grounds they supported the abortive attempts to launch LFA in La Fraternidad's image as an alternative to FOF, and continued to praise the

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1. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1899 p.8; emphasis in original.
2. La Fraternidad 1 Nov. 1913. Compare the way in which exclusively mutualist societies paved the way for trade union organisation in Chile (Alan Angell Politics and the Labour Movement in Chile (London, OUP, 1972) p.15) and indeed in most other countries.
3. The Centro de Maquinistas Navales (Shipboard Engineers' Union), founded in 1897 on a similar basis to La Fraternidad, is a comparable example of a homogeneous skilled trade union.
4. La Vanguardia 1 Jan. 1916. This was an expression of the PS view that working class power would come through the tripartite adoption of political power through the PS, power in the workplace through unions, and power over middlemen and the capitalist economy through the establishment of cooperatives. For a fuller explanation of this see the Chilean Luis Recabarren Proyecciones de la Acción Sindical (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1917). Recabarren was later a founder of the Chilean PC.

footplatemen's mode of organisation until it was adopted by Unión Ferroviaria.[1]

There seems to have been little incompatibility between a base múltiple organisation and union militancy, for the real per capita benefits paid out by La Fraternidad declined only slightly as the union became more involved in 'resistance' activity.[2] However, the system depended on high subscriptions; drivers paid $2 a month to cover benefits for sickness, accident, death and some types of unemployment, whereas firemen paid $1 and received half benefits. For many years no new member was admitted after the age of 45, emphasising the insurance element offered.[3] These dues compared with $1 monthly for the Confederation, a rate which members subsequently tried to lower by referendum.[4] These subscriptions were much higher than the 30-50 ¢ asked by FOF, which was a usual rate for resistance societies; per capita subscriptions to FOA and UGT were only 3-5¢.[5]

Thus there were practical as well as ideological obstacles to a base múltiple organisation; the difficulties of collecting regular subscriptions from any but the most homogeneous group of workers were great, as even the Confraternidad found.[6] The same obstacles - lack of regular and substantial subscriptions and ideological resistance - meant that few components of the French CGT had benefit facilities for members.[7] However, the advantages of La Fraternidad's scheme and the propaganda of the PS did not pass unnoticed, and some FOF sections established friendly societies;[8] unfortunately information is too sparse to judge their efficacy or popularity.

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1. In 1913 San Sebastián (a PS member) told La Vanguardia that La Fraternidad hoped to influence the general rail union, and eventually other labour sectors, to adopt a base múltiple organisation (La Vanguardia 13 Jan. 1913).
2. Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1909-1915. In 1912 benefits were considerably lower than usual (about a third of normal payments).
3. Fraternidad CD Actas 15/16 Mar.1922 mention a special scheme with less sick pay for the over-45s.
4. General votes were held on subscription levels in 1904 and 1905; from 1906 those earning under $45 a month paid half subscriptions (El Ferrocarril 15 June 1904, 3 Aug. 1905, 1 Aug. 1906).
5. Marotta op.cit. Vol I pp.172, 177; Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) pp.73,89,115.
6. La Vanguardia 5 May 1922.
7. Moss op.cit. p.147.
8. La Vanguardia 1 Jan. 1916.

Suggestions that La Fraternidad should concern itself exclusively with friendly society benefits, while the 'resistance' role was performed for all grades by a parallel body, also recognised implicitly the desire of many railwaymen to secure benefits, though the footplatemen regarded the proposal as an affront.[1]

Outside the railway trades there were few unions sufficiently developed to consider a base múltiple organisation, even had they wished to, especially in the face of the hostility of the central federations. By the time Unión Ferroviaria had undertaken to provide friendly society benefits, and the aims and nature of the labour force become better suited to a base múltiple unions, legislative advances[2] had made such provision increasingly irrelevant.

Centralisation was a further feature of La Fraternidad's structure which was criticised by apologists of the prevailing federalist mode, though they usually agreed that it was essential to a base múltiple organisation.[3] Centralised control of finance, and checks on autonomous local action were theoretically anathema to all anarchist and syndicalist organisations. However, every national federation and national union inevitably had some sort of central committee in Buenos Aires; the arguments centred on the extent of control exercised.

La Fraternidad's CD, elected by each delegates' assembly until 1918 when annual direct elections were introduced,[4] had a slower turnover than most such bodies; 30% of the CD served three or more years in the period 1887-1922.[5] This was a very long tenure for an elected union leader in

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1. See Chapter 3pp.128-129.
2. Notably employers' liability in accidents, the various pensions schemes and, less important, control and provision of employment exchanges (See Chapter 1 pp.28-29).
3. Américo J. Baliño on La Fraternidad in La Vanguardia Almanaque del Trabajo 1919 p.171 sets this out very clearly.
4. Direct elections first developed on an ad hoc basis to fill interim vacancies (Fraternidad CD Actas y circulares 19 Mar. 1918, 4 June 1918); the system was later embodied in statute (Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) p.65).
5. Extrapolation from lists in Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) pp.523-529.

Argentina at this time, and tenures grew longer as time passed. However, since La Fraternidad suffered little persecution, there was less need for ad hoc co-option of replacements and its procedures were more democratic than the norm. Since they met every two or three weeks, members of the CD - like the Central Committee of the Confederation, or the CF of FOF - were elected from sections in or near Buenos Aires, but by the end of the period La Fraternidad could arrange for the companies to transfer CD members to posts near the capital.[1] Unión Ferroviaria required that members of the CD should live within six hours' travelling time of the capital; this attempt to increase the involvement of other areas still meant that Córdoba, for instance, was too distant to supply a union official.[2]

Even greater continuity at the centre was provided by the railway unions' paid employees. In this period La Fraternidad had only three paid executive secretaries; Guillermo Tello (1895-1913), Manuel Sumay (1913-1915), and Américo Baliño (1915-1924). The Confederation had two principal employees during its lifetime: Antonio Zaccagnini, who was secretary from 1902 to 1907, and José M. Lemos, his assistant from 1904, who took over as secretary in 1907. FOF's first secretary, Francisco Rosanova, was appointed in 1912 and remained in office until 1922, though his absence through illness from 1916 to 1918 was the cause of the unhappy interregnum of Giordano and Mansilla.[3] These long terms of office were not unusual; in Argentina, FOM was headed continuously by Francisco J. García from 1910 to 1924,[4] while Eugène Guérard led the Syndicat national for French railwaymen from 1891 to 1909.[5]

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1. On transfers arranged with companies, see CD Fraternidad Memoria y balance 1920-1921 in La Fraternidad 20 Apr.1921 p.13. When Juan Canalis of Rosario (FCCA) was elected to the CD he refused to accept a transfer to Buenos Aires, claiming that his continued presence in Rosario could help the CD improve its relations with the FCCA Complaints Committee. The CD agreed after discussion of the expense and difficulties involved in the arrangement (CD Fraternidad Actas 13 Oct.1921).
2. Unión Ferroviaria Estatutos.
3. See Chapter 3 pp.133-134.
4. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.181.
5. Fruit op.cit. p.63.

The rail unions paid employees well, especially La Fraternidad whose secretary was paid $400 a month in 1913, when senior engine drivers were lucky to be earning $250. In 1917-1918 the footplatemen's union cut its wage bill considerably, but throughout the period it seems that railway unions had a larger and better paid staff than the central federations, let alone other unions.[1] In 1922 the Confraternidad and its components employeed thirty staff, compared to the three employed by USA.[2] This unusually large bureaucracy can in part be justified in view of the a base múltiple organisation of La Fraternidad, the size of union membership, and the national spread of the unions.

Centralised finances also characterised in La Fraternidad, the Confederation and Unión Ferroviaria. La Fraternidad collected subscriptions at the centre and redistributed funds on a per capita basis,[3] and the Confederation allowed a maximum of 10% of sectional receipts for local expenditure (even less than La Fraternidad).[4] In France, the largest railway union, the Syndicat national, allowed sections to dispose of 25% of their subscriptions and nearly suffered a split in 1905 over the insistence of southern sections that they should have financial autonomy.[5] In contrast, FOF merely stipulated that 25% of sectional receipts be paid to the CF.[6] Other federations - like UGT, FORA and USA, and later the Confraternidad - were even less strict, requiring a simple and small flat rate per capita contribution; in the case of the Confraternidad it was 15¢ a month, while at the same time FORA V levied 20¢ (though only 6¢ of this was allocated to the centre).[7]

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1. La Fraternidad 15 Mar. 1918.
2. Unión Sindical 30 Sept. 1922.
3. Fraternidad Estatutos.
4. El Ferrocarril 15 Aug. 1905.
5. Fruit op.cit. pp.182-183.
6. Fernández Ferroviaria (1948) p.119.
7. La Razón Anuario 1924 p.45; Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) p.253.

La Fraternidad's considerable wealth reflected these differences, but the massive cost of benefits (especially during strikes) made it essential for the footplatemen to hold large capital sums, whereas FOF only had to balance the books.[1] From the material available, it seems that the Confederation did not succeed in paying out benefits. This suggests that the subscription was too high for many sympathisers to pay regularly, the labour force too mobile to value the a base múltiple organisation, and that the union's definite preference for 'resistance' activity was shared by the workers it set out to organise.

La Fraternidad's executive secretary, Guillermo Tello, maintained that outside the financial sphere the union was not centralised.

> 'The CD does not exercise absolute executive authority. The sections are entirely autonomous; they develop on their own account, hold their meetings, negotiate their own affairs with the management - enjoy in a word, real and effective autonomy. I assure you that in practice 83 footplatemen's societies exist in the country, with all their attributes, rights and duties, but supported by the society as a whole.'[2]

Sectional discipline in La Fraternidad was unsurpassed, nevertheless. Apologists of centralisation attributed this to the community of interests in the union and its democratic practices, while its critics claimed that the CD ruled with an iron hand. There is some truth in both these assertions; the Fraternidad sections were much more likely to obey the statutes and wait for a lead from the centre than other union members. The CDs were very influential when they chose; for instance, it was their scheme to raise money for the union's own building which was adopted after a barely formal request that the sections suggest alternatives - and the scheme was nothing less than a forced loan.[3]

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1. Agnelli & Chiti Cincuentenario (1937) pp.446-447; CF FOF Memoria y balance 1915, 1916, 1918.
2. La Vanguardia 9 Dec. 1910.
3. The money was raised by a levy according to income (from $3 from those earning under $150 to $10 from those earning over $210), followed up by a raffle later in 1915 (Fraternidad CD Circular 15 June 1915, Actas 16 Dec.1915).

The CD was very powerful compared with the Consejo Federal of FOF. Its role was limited to the coordination of action and policy and the exercise of statutory constraints on sectional autonomy, which though fewer than those governing La Fraternidad were more than those of some federations.[1] In practice the CF played an ever-increasing role in policy formulation; their preparation of proposals for the organisation of sindicatos por ferrocarril in 1918 is a case in point.[2] Even so, the contrast between the level of discipline achieved in the footplatemen's union and the efforts of FOF's Council to control the rank and file was considerable.

The establishment of the Confraternidad Ferroviaria in 1920 brought an even greater measure of central control to the rail unions. Internal administration was entirely autonomous for the three sindicatos (Tracción, or La Fraternidad, Tráfico and Talleres),[3] but each was answerable to the Junta Central of the Confraternidad before embarking on any strike movement or other activity 'which might compromise the stability of labour'.[4]

The Junta Central was, therefore, of key importance. It comprised five representatives from each sindicato, elected from the sections near Buenos Aires, and met about once a month. Among its duties were the coordination of relations between the sindicatos and, explicitly stated, negotiation with government authorities and the study of bills concerning railwaymen presented to national or provincial legislatures.[5]

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1. Compare the statutes of the Metalworkers' Federation (1905) where sectional autonomy was complete and no action could be prevented, even by an extraordinary assembly of the union (Spalding Clase trabajadora pp.227-230).
2. See Chapter 4 pp.139-140.
3. La Fraternidad was hardly ever referred to by its new name, Sindicato de Tracción. The former FOF retained a practical unity despite being split into 2 departments; the Central Committees (CC CC) always met jointly, and the only separate activity related to some areas of the pay-scale negotiations. For the sake of accuracy of nomenclature, the sindicatos are here known as Tráfico y Talleres; it does not signify any profound departure from the structure under FOF.
4. Confraternidad 'Bases de Unidad' Art.5 in El Obrero Ferroviario 16 May 1920.
5. Confraternidad 'Bases' Art.28 in ibid.

The JC's power was frequently a source of trouble in the sindicatos. La Fraternidad objected to the JC's decision to back the August 1920 strike on the FCCC declared by the sections and therefore not strictly in accordance with the rulebook; the JC was not supposed to authorise any movement without the approval of three-quarters of the Confraternidad's members in a referendum.[1] In February 1922 the Comités Centrales (hereafter CC CC) of Tráfico y Talleres were taken to task for authorising a work to rule by the sections Corral de Bustos and Firmat without consulting the JC - not the first instance of such action.[2] The syndicalist wing of the old FOF was deeply uneasy about the influence of the JC, an unease which turned to revolt and outcry after the reaction to the Congress of Tráfico y Talleres in May 1922 and the publication of Circular 34 by the Confraternidad.[3] At the local level, the Comisiones Mixtas of all trades were perhaps more successful. By early 1922 there were 108 of them, though the JC regretted that they were rarely run according to the statutes and orders.[4]

With the foundation of Unión Ferroviaria, the reservations about centralised control of unions were finally swept aside, though disputes about the role of the JC continued. The new union's CD was established on much the same lines as that of La Fraternidad.[5] Those groups which remained outside Unión Ferroviaria because of close ties with the Unión Sindical Argentina, notably the so-called Comité de Relaciones, were harshly critical of the abandonment of the federalist structure.[6] However, these and other separatist railway organisations in practice had a much less democratic structure than the established bodies because of their impermanent and ill-defined status.

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1. La Vanguardia 4 May 1922. Tráfico y Talleres in turn objected to La Fraternidad's completion of pay-scale talks without Confraternidad approval (El Obrero Ferroviario 16 Sept.1920, 1 Oct.1920).
2. Another case was that of Rosario and Casilda in August 1921 (CC CC, JC, CD Plenaria 23 Feb. 1922).
3. See Chapter 4 pp. 180-182.
4. JC Confraternidad Memoria y balance in La Vanguardia 2-6 May 1922.
5. Unión Ferroviaria Estatutos.
6. See Chapter 4 p. 181.

As the only truly national trade organisation in Argentina at this time, the railwaymen formed geographically disparate federations along trade lines, instead of the prevailing pattern of disparate trades forming local federations. A combination of these two forms of federal organisation was favoured by anarchists from the foundation of the Federación Regional de España in 1870,[1] and set out clearly for Argentina in Pellicer Paraire's important articles in La Protesta Humana of 1900, which were influential in the organisation of FOA.[2] The aim was a bicephalous organisation, like the CGT in France and the Central Secretariat of Resistance in Italy, which would combine the advantages of trade federations and local groups.[3] This dual organisation did not progress far in Argentina, though some FOA organisations like the Federación de Rodados ('Federation of Workers of Wheeled Vehicles') and the Federación de Estibadores (Stevedores' Federation) were attempts to create industrial unions;[4] the system caused jurisdictional confusion and rivalry in both France and Italy.[5]

The Argentine syndicalist movement, like its counterparts in France, Italy and Spain, encouraged industrial unionism rather than local, craft-orientated organisation.[6] This trend seems to have diminished the revolutionary fervour of organised labour, by diluting the old craft soidarity of closer-knit unions.[7] The problems of organising heterogeneous

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1. Temma Kaplan Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868-1903 (Princeton Univ.Press, 1977) p.82.
2. Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) pp.53-60.
3. Gonzalo Zaragoza Ruvira 'Anarchisme et mouvement ouvrier en Argentine à la fin du XIXe siècle', Le mouvement social, avril-juin 1978, No.103, p.25; Val R. Lorwin The French Labor Movement (Cambridge, Harvard U.Press, 1954) p.25; Horowitz Italian Labor Movement (1963) pp.64-65.
4. Marotta op.cit. Vol I pp.139, 144, 180; Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) pp.96-9
5. Lorwin op.cit. p.25; Neufeld op.cit. pp.330, 337.
6. Neufeld op.cit. p.337; Moss op.cit. p.152; Juan Pablo Fusi Política obrera en el país vasco, 1880-1923 (Madrid, Turner, 1975) p.315. Anarchists feared the ideological impurity of mass trade unions in Spain (Gerald H. Meaker The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914-1923 (Stanford Univ.Press, 1974) p.154).
7. Moss op.cit. p.151.

mass unions encouraged greater centralisation of policy-making (though it did not necessarily preclude some administrative devolution, like the regional congresses of French railwaymen in the 1900s and those of the Argentine rail unions from 1922).[1]

However, the basic components within the large amalgamations (like that of railwaymen finally achieved in France in 1917, or the Confraternidad) remained craft-based.[2] Footplatemen in particular were separated from other railwaymen. This pattern can be observed in France, and also in Britain, despite a strong all-grades movement in 1911 and the formation of the National Union of Railwaymen in 1913.[3] In the United States the American Railway Union, very popular after its foundation in 1893 but broken a year later, was an early and short-lived effort at industrial unionism, subsequently overshadowed by the craft-orientated Railroad Brotherhoods.[4] Rivalry between railway workers was deliberately encouraged by discriminatory regulations and bonuses, and not diminished by limited legislative regulation (such as the decrees of 1917 in Argentina).[5]

In Argentina the distinction between footplatemen and other railwaymen was strong, and only during periods when the ideas and methods of La Fraternidad differed greatly from those of the general unions, as in 1903-1907 and 1917-1920, did the most progressive footplatemen join the Confederation or FOF. Otherwise, the bulk of railwaymen were content to organise by trade, a format aimed at by the Confederation and favoured in the first 'bases' of FOF in 1912.[6] However, the left wing of FOF aimed to organise sindicatos por ferrocarril: in other words, industrial unions organised on each company,

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1. Fusi op.cit. p.315; Moss op.cit. p.153; Fruit Les syndicats dans les chemins de fer (1976) p.181. On regional congresses in Argentina, see Fraternidad CD Memoria y balance 1921 in La Fraternidad 20 Apr. 1921 p.14.
2. Fruit op.cit. p.203; Moss op.cit. p.152.
3. Bob Holton British Syndicalism 1900-1914 (London, Pluto Press, 1976) pp.166-167; Fruit op.cit. p.53.
4. Patrick Renshaw The Wobblies (New York, Anchor, 1968) pp.16-17.
5. Fruit op.cit. p.76.
6. El Ferrocarril 15 June 1904; see Chapter 3 p.96.

with their own executive and only a weak coordinating committee.[1] The scheme's apologists emphasised the working class's unity of purpose against capital, transcending trade barriers and rivalries which were rightly seen as an obstacle to united action by railway workers.[2] However, the companies were interdependent,[3] and the work of one could (as occurred on occasion) be done by another, if the men of the same trade were not alerted to act in sympathy. The decision to organise by trade finally prevailed after the Fourth Congress in December 1918.[4] The more centralised structure adopted by the Federación Obrera Maritima shortly before perhaps encouraged the rejection of the 'anarchist and autonomous spirit' by the railwaymen; another likely factor was the establishment of formal links among the employers with the foundation of the Asociación Nacional del Trabajo in April 1918.[5] Lastly, a decision to embrace increased centralisation

> 'would, as well as tempering the inexperience of the sections by concentrating the general running of FOF in the hands of the most competent comrades, bring the Federation closer to La Fraternidad'.[6]

The sindicatos por ferrocarril were discredited as anachronistic, and suspicions of divisionism cast on their apologists;[7] it was indeed left to divisionists to establish skeleton sindicatos por ferrocarril, normally with few sections outside the main centre of divisionism. The Central Northern sindicato seems to have been the most long-lived and organised of all, but important nuclei existed on many railways, such as the Santa Fe, the FCO, the FCP, and FCCC and the FCCA.[8] The only major railway without the

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1. The French railwaymen were organised on a company basis, but they also had committees for each trade (Lorwin op cit. pp.150-151).
2. Compare the trade rivalries that impeded the organisation of the Bilbao metal workers (Fusi op.cit. p.80).
3. See Paul B. Goodwin Los ferrocarriles británicos y la UCR (Buenos Aires, La Bastilla, 1974) for accounts of concerted action by railway companies, 1916-193C
4. See Chapter 4 p.140.
5. La Vanguardia 10 Sept. 1918.
6. La Vanguardia 8 Oct. 1918.
7. See Demetrio Figueiras in El Obrero Ferroviario Sept. 1918, and Vicente de Todaro (biography in note 1, p.129 Chapter 3) who favoured sindicatos por ferrocarril in principle.
8. See Chapter 5 pp.200-203.

nominal structure of a divisionist sindicato in this period was the FCS.

The idea of organising along company lines was definitely abandoned in 1922 when Unión Ferroviaria was formed. The discussion of uniform pay and promotion scales was organised trade by trade, and trade congresses were called to lay down the guidelines for negotiation.[1] The companies initially succeeded in having the talks conducted on a company-by-company basis; they too apparently agreed with the union leadership that such a division would weaken organised railway labour. In the event, government participation in the negotiations effectively brought about the trade-by-trade settlements that the union originally sought. The experience of Tráfico y Talleres in the two years of their existence as nominally separate entities demonstrated that in practice they acted more effectively as one; thus, when the statutes of Unión Ferroviaria were prepared, it was decided to organise all railway trades outside La Fraternidad under a single central directorate.

Inter-union relations

The preceding account of the evolution of railway union organisation describes the formation of the first national trade unions in Argentina. The differences in aims and structure between the footplatemen's union and those general unions which preceded the foundation of Unión Ferroviaria reflect the different constituencies with which organisers had to work. The railway labour force grew more stable and coherent in this period as the process of railway construction approached completion; the value of permanent labour organisation was recognised by workers who became increasingly aware of their strategic importance to Argentine prosperity, and the possibility of making 'small gains' was proved through painstaking negotiation as well as in notable strike movements. The correlation made by anarchist groups, between revolutionary consciousness and federalism, local autonomy and purity of purpose, gave way to an emphasis on the practical revolution being brought about by peaceful, centralised action on many fronts.

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1. See Chapter 4 p. 165 n.1.

The foundation of Unión Ferroviaria was a vindication of La Fraternidad's solid centralised structure and pacific mode of action. However, the footplatemen's union, isolated by its inward-looking methods and exceptional structure, only came into its own as part of the organised working class through the development of the general union as a kind of intermediary. It is misleading to regard the railway unions in isolation from the rest of organised labour, even if no formal association was made between any union federation and either of the two successful railway organisations before 1915.

La Fraternidad's inward-looking stance in the first twenty years or so of its existence was widely condemned. It was expressed at its most extreme in the CD's refusal to assist Fraternidad members who ran into trouble through their activity in another union, announced in a statement of 1904:

> 'the society will not take responsibility, and therefore will on no account intervene, in cases of dismissal or any other punishment which might be inflicted on a member for the fact of belonging to other trade union organisations, whose means of action are discordant with those of our institution and with which we have no bond or direct relation'.[1]

Within a month footplatemen of the FCPSF had joined their comrades in a strike, showing that the mood of the rank and file was changing. La Fraternidad was not impervious to the activities of the Confederation, which while it retained a centralised organisation and a reputation for moderation (much derided by the parallel anarchist groups)[2], was nearer to the norms of conduct of the resistance societies of the 1900s.

The Confederation remained outside either FOA/FORA or UGT,[3] though its links with the latter were close. Like its French equivalent, it feared

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1. Fraternidad CD Circulares 20 Oct. 1904.
2. La Protesta 5 Mar. 1904, 12 Mar. 1904, 11 Dec. 1904 and elsewhere.
3. The Federación Obrera Argentina changed its name in 1904 to Federación Obrera Regional Argentina to conform with the internationalist spirit of the anarchist movement (compare the Spanish groups); the organisation remained the same.

political commitment; opportunism demanded neutrality as long as two rival union federations existed, as FOF explained in 1914 when it gave its reasons for joining FORA.[1] Both FOF and the Confederation were at the forefront of efforts towards working class unity in 1907, 1912 and 1914. They were never dogmatic in their advocacy of particular modes of organisation, as FORA was when its sixth congress (in 1906) welcomed the establishment of the anarchist groups on the FCS and FCO with a declaration insisting on the importance of organising railwaymen in the autonomous-federalist mould.[2]

The Confederation, the biggest union in Argentina before 1910, played no formal part in the affairs or policy of either federation, though it willingly cooperated when to do so promised well. This non-participation must have affected the development of both FORA and UGT even if unionisation was proceeding apace, as it was at least until 1907. In France, and in a more complicated way in Italy, the participation of the railway unions in the central federations was already encouraging the growth of other national industrial unions, a process which necessitated a less uncompromising vision of the class struggle and a breakdown of narrow trade particularism.[3]

When the new initiative for organising a general rail union came in 1912, conditions for its success were much more favourable. FOM had begun to create a solid organisation for maritime workers in 1910 and was interested in building a national transport federation (a scheme also approved at La Fraternidad's 1912 assembly).[4] After the strike of 1912, in which an estimated 60% of the blacklegs were workshop employees, La Fraternidad awoke to the price of its isolation from other railwaymen.[5]

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1. El Obrero Ferroviario Oct.-Nov. 1914. On the French railwaymen, see Fruit, op.cit. pp.73, 95-96.
2. Abad de Santillán FORA (1971) p. 149; Marotta op.cit. Vol I p.268.
3. Fruit op.cit. p. 188, Moss op.cit. p.151. In Italy events were complicated by the railwaymen's brief and disastrous flirtation with the revolutionary position in 1905 (Neufeld op.cit. p.338).
4. See Chapter 3 p.94.
5. La Vanguardia 24 May 1912.

The existence of the Confederation in the previous decade both fuelled CORA's hopes of success for the new union and provided arguments to support the syndicalist case for a different mode of organisation, and one which they believed was more flexible.

The big federations, FOF and FOM, came to dominate FORA IX in the period 1917-1922. The same process occurred in other countries; in Spain the railwaymen formed 50% of UGT membership in 1910[1] and in France the principal rail union, the Syndicat national, provided 30% of the CGT membership in 1909.[2] FORA IX organised a higher proportion of the industrial working class than these European federations, partly because it had fewer rivals and partly because of the discrepancy in the dates for which figures were available. The dominance of railway and maritime workers in FORA IX is thus even more notable, whereas it is more to be expected in the context of an overall low level of unionisation.

To judge by the available lists, for 1921 and 1922, the general rail union usually paid subscriptions to FORA IX for only about half the union's total paid-up membership.[3] There is no way of discovering whether this was an average proportion, though the evidence suggests that FOM was more assiduous with its dues.[4] In any case, it appears that FOF (or Tráfico y Talleres) and FOM normally contributed some three-quarters of FORA IX's paid-up membership, with the railwaymen alone constituting at least half the membership (except in 1918); FOF sections constituted 29% of FORA IX's components in 1920, so must therefore have been larger on average than most member unions.[5]

This numerical preponderance was not reflected in the composition of FORA IX's Consejo Federal. Between December 1918 and the foundation of USA,

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1. Fusi op.cit. p.315.
2. Fruit op.cit. p.189.
3. La Organización Obrera 29 Jan. 1921; La Vanguardia 5 Mar. 1922.
4. DNT Boletín Feb. 1919 p.121.
5. La Vanguardia 1 May 1921.

there were never more than four out of fifteen councillors from FOF or FOM.[1] Nevertheless, it is noticeable that in the event of a crisis, especially in 1917-1918 when disturbances were at their peak, the CF of FORA IX often held joint meetings with its counterparts of FOF and FOM. Three such sessions took place in October 1917, revolving around the resolution of FOM to join FOF in the general strike, which they did on 13 October; four more occurred in the first seven months of 1918 concerning the frigorífico strikes, the threatened general strike of May, and a plea for solidarity from the Buenos Aires carters.[2] FORA IX had always to consult its two main industrial supporters before taking any large-scale action.

La Fraternidad was also interested in the activities of FORA IX, and vice versa. After the rail unions' Solidarity Pact of 1916, La Fraternidad was increasingly involved in FORA IX policy; the recriminations over the 1917 strike and La Fraternidad's conduct in the Semana Trágica were unhappy consequences of this. When the Confraternidad was founded, the general rail union's loyalties were divided between the federation of railwaymen - the realisation of a long-held ambition - and the federation of Argentine trade unions - where they had been able to influence policy and hoped to continue to dominate.

The harsh treatment of the railway leadership by the syndicalist congresses of 1921 and 1922 showed that the rest of organised labour found the railwaymen's caution an obstacle to their aims; other labour sectors did not necessarily depend on a solid national base with centralised communications for their survival, as FORA IX had recognised when it exempted the rail unions from the obligation to participate in local general strikes late in 1919.[3] The refusal of Tráfico y Talleres to participate in the

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1. La Organización Obrera 23 Jan. 1919, 12 Feb. 1921.
2. FORA IX CF Actas 1917-1918; these are handwritten, unnumbered, and could be incomplete.
3. La Organización Obrera 13 Dec. 1919.

general strike of June 1921 was a concrete manifestation of a breach that had already appeared; by mid-1922 the rail unions had severed relations with the central federation. FORA IX and its successor USA moved away from the flexible attitude towards their components' structure and organisation which had characterised Argentine syndicalism in the years 1916-1919, making it appear exceptionally reformist and ensuring the successful consolidation of FOM and FOF. At the same time, the railway union became more closely associated with La Fraternidad after its transformation into the Sindicatos de Tráfico y Talleres of the Confraternidad Ferroviaria; its strength depended increasingly on its own efforts in legal spheres or through negotiation, and less on the sort of combative action which required solidarity from other working class sectors.

This estrangement was temporary; the role of Unión Ferroviaria in the foundation of the Confederación Obrera Argentina in 1926 demonstrates their commitment - which had not wavered since the efforts of 1907 - to playing a central role in a federation which represented the prevailing currents in the mass labour movement of Argentina.

Conclusion

The exceptional structure and nature of the railway workforce governed the organisation of trade unions, though ideological considerations played a part; in organisational terms, railway workers were a special case in most countries with a syndicalist movement. They were highly organised in terms of the working class as a whole, though as mass unions they usually organised a lower proportion of their constituency than unions serving small-scale, craft-orientated groups.[1] Centralisation, much feared by anarchists for its effects on militancy, was essential for the cohesion

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1. Neufeld op.cit. p.351 examines the Italian case, where the hatters and printers headed the list in 1907.

of large national unions; even the statutes of FOF embodied practical checks on autonomous sectional or company-based action. A base múltiple organisation, as practised by La Fraternidad, was a distinctive feature of homogeneous craft organisations like the printers' and hatters' unions in France.[1] It was almost impracticable in general unions, as the Confederation discovered; as the general unions achieved sufficient stability to contemplate providing benefits, legislative advances in favour of precisely these strong unions made the establishment of internal schemes unnecessary.

The need to involve the general railway union in the central federation was soon recognised in Argentina; the participation of FOF contributed greatly to the vitality of FORA IX, despite FOF's difficulties in 1918,[2] whereas the absence of Unión Ferroviaria from USA was a considerable disadvantage to the central body. The alienation of the rail union from the syndicalists in 1921-1922 was perhaps the consequence of an attempt by the smaller, more militant unions to free their federation from the dominance of the reformists and to assert the purer forces of syndicalism. However, these forces were being eclipsed wherever syndicalist organisation existed.[3] The union movement in Argentina in the 1920s was in disarray; even FOM was fragmented after an internal dispute which arose in part from inadequate organisational advance,[4] so that the union could not afford its subscription to USA.[5]

The sort of organisation pioneered by La Fraternidad, and long scorned by other unions, served Unión Ferroviaria well in the difficult conditions of the 1920s. In 1929 the DNT reported that

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1. Moss op.cit. p.147.
2. David Rock Politics (1975) p.152 exaggerates considerably when he states that FOF had 'collapsed completely' in 1918.
3. The French CGT produced a 'minimum programme', late in 1918 (Lorwin op.cit. pp.52-53); in the same year the majority Catalan element of the Spanish CNT was modifying its syndicalist stance (Meaker Revolutionary Left in Spain (1974) pp.152-153).
4. Marotta op.cit. Vol III pp.178-182.
5. Marotta op.cit. Vol III p.206.

> 'Only the railwaymen have achieved worthwhile and permanent gains in this last year ...
> It is a fact that the bases of railway organisation are completely different from those which the other trades in the country continue to use to develop their forces. Discipline, control, statistics, direct and effective responsibility of the leaders, referenda, subdivision of organisational and internal tasks, centralisation of executive power and finances, are the elements of the railway union which have built up the strength which has permitted the union to develop intensively and extensively all over the country.'[1]

Any number of assertions of the superiority of the railwaymen's mode of organisation cannot obscure the fact that other unions also thrived with syndicalist backing and quite different structure. It was crucial for organised labour in general that the strategic railway sector should achieve successful organisation; it is by no means certain that the railwaymen's methods were suited to all trades.

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1. DNT Crónica Mensual Oct. 1929, pp.2991-2992.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

There can be little doubt that the strength of trade unions among railway workers in the formative years of the Argentine labour movement was exceptional; the level of organisation, matched only by some sections of the seamen's and port workers' trades, was an example to other labour sectors, and the railway unions were crucial to the strength of organised labour in general. At the same time, it must be stressed that outside the exporting industries - of which the transport services were indisputably a part - there were virtually no large-scale capitalist enterprises. The sugar producing companies were a possible exception, but here, as in the tannin factories of the Chaco, labour organisation was agonisingly slow. Agricultural workers in Argentina, unlike their Spanish or Italian counterparts, were barely organised; trade unionism in Argentina during these prosperous years of primary production for export was effectively an urban phenomenon.

The example of the rail unions' success was treated with much respect and a little mistrust by the rest of the union movement. La Fraternidad's organisational peculiarities have been outlined in Chapter 7, but though its moderation and centralisation were vilified by many leading syndicalist organisers, its high membership levels and its longevity were widely respected. Railway workers had a certain status not enjoyed by otherindustrial workers. At least until the War, their employment was relatively secure, especially in the skilled trades; wages for craftsmen were good, and generally regular. The conditions of work imposed by the foreign companies were no worse than those in native industrial enterprises,[1] and

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1. Compare Ferrocarril del Sud Reglamento interno (Buenos Aires, 1907) with the material cited in note 1 p.22. For the State railways, see FFCC del Estado-FCCN Reglamento interno (Tucumán, La Velocidad, 1910).

were less arbitrary and onerous than conditions on the State Railways, which from 1890 had the added disadvantage of being situated in remote parts of Argentina. Railwaymen were highly regarded and had pride in their work, unlike dockers and port workers, for example, despite the fact that their working and social lives had much in common. Both groups tended to live close to their work in communities whose livelihood (and even existence, in the case of railway colonies) depended upon it, and the children of both tended to follow their fathers in the same employment or even the same trade.[1] Although railway work was dangerous,[2] state interest in railway regulation gradually introduced more humane conditions. Enforcement of railway laws, like other labour laws, was erratic, but railway labour was legally recognised as a protected sector.

These factors set the railwaymen apart from other workers. At first the footplatemen certainly regarded themselves as a labour aristocracy.[3] As a group they possessed many of the attributes associated with the term, earning good wages, commanding respect in the workplace, and controlling with ever-increasing efficacy the conditions of employment of the trade. After 1912 La Fraternidad fostered the growth of the general rail union, when their strike failure demonstrated their vulnerability in isolation from other railway trades; nevertheless, the footplatemen remained distinct from other trades even after 1920, and relations with the general union were not always good. At first FOF found most of its organisers from the higher grades;[4] however, despite intentionally divisive regulation, internal trade rivalries did not disrupt the running of the general unions

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1. Torcuato di Tella (ed.) Estructuras sindicales (Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 1969) pp.74-75; David F. Wilson Dockers: the impact of industrial change (London Fontana, 1972) pp.50-51, 53.
2. One of the best accounts of the dangers of railway work appears in Rowland Kenney Men and Rails (London, 1913) pp.81-121.
3. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in Hobsbawm Labouring Men (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964) pp.273, 275, 290-291.
4. See Chapter 3 p.98.

in this period, which strove to organise all grades, from the lowliest and most casual workers to white-collar employees.[1] This preoccupation, and the general rail unions' consistent efforts to broaden the base of working class organisation, make it difficult to regard all railway unionists as labour aristocrats, though the term may be useful in the case of La Fraternidad.

Railway labour's attitudes to the prevailing modes of trade union activity have generally been regarded as cautious or reformist. One measure of the railwaymen's caution was their reluctance to undertake strikes.[2] The importance of the great railway strikes of 1896, 1907, 1912 and 1917 is clear from the narrative. The footplatemen's strikes of 1907 and 1912 were conducted by La Fraternidad alone, in sharp contrast to the two workshop strikes of 1896 and 1907-1908 and, of course, the 1917 general strike.

Large-scale strikes of railwaymen were rare occurrences, and their participation in strikes of other trades or local general strikes was by no means automatic.[3] Small-scale strikes - except perhaps short-term protests like the May Day stoppages, or some workshop strikes - were not effective. To disrupt services seriously, a railway strike had to be nationwide or at least company-wide.[4] By the same token, a full rail strike affected many

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1. Compare Henry Pelling, 'The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy' in Pelling Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (London, Macmillan, 1968) p.51. The organisation of white-collar employees has not been touched upon in this study. Before 1922 the general union made few concerted efforts to organise this section, though some meetings were held in 1919 and 1920; however, committed individuals were found in the union, such as Alejandro Comolli, interim secretary of FOF in 1918 (see Chapter 3 pp.133-134).
2. Strikes - as opposed to unrest - are rare in the railway industry in most countries. Possible explanations are government fear of the disruption caused by a rail strike, which tends to induce a more conciliatory attitude in the national interest; moreover, there is social pressure on railwaymen to avert strike action (Clark Kerr & Abraham J. Siegel, 'The inter-industry propensity to strike - an international comparison', in Kerr (and others) Labor and Management in Industrial Society (New York, Doubleday, 1964) pp.113-114).
3. The Spanish railwaymen declined to participate in the 1913 miners' strike (Juan Pablo Fusi Política obrera en el país vasco, 1880-1923 (Madrid, Turner, 1975) pp.346-347.
4. Company-wide strikes could be broken by transferring the work to another company; this was one of the main arguments against sindicatos por ferrocarril.

other trades adversely, laying men off and bringing hardship to workers not in dispute; this further differentiated railway strikes from stoppages in other trades.

Meanwhile, the importance of railway union support was recognised by union federations, and ignored at their peril - witness the general strikes of January 1907 and June 1921, both of which failed partly because they lacked the support of the railway unions. The sheer numerical weight of the general rail union in the syndicalist federation FORA IX was not matched in France, where the industrial sector was more diverse, or in Spain, where the railways were of less critical importance. Mass unions - like the railwaymen, seamen, and municipal workers in Argentina - were more moderate than unions which organised a smaller proportion of the workforce;[1] the stevedores, quite a large sector, were ill-organised by FORA V and as long as they remained unrepresentative of the total workforce, continued to pursue militant policies.[2]

The whole question of the nature of labour militancy in Argentine unions before 1930 needs careful examination. It has been seen that the anarchist orientation of FOA/FORA, regarded as the bulwark of Argentine labour in the first decade of the century, was frequently tempered by practical considerations. Even the violence of some strike movements, a feature associated with anarchism and revolutionary politics, was not necessarily revolutionary in aim. It has been suggested that sabotage and destruction of property was used in these years by the miners of the Spanish province of Vizcaya principally to reinforce their negotiating position;[3] this explanation would certainly fit the outbreaks of violence

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1. See Chapter 7 pp.167-168.
2. The casual nature of the work was a major obstacle to widespread and solid organisation of stevedores in Argentina; contrast the situation in the Port of London, where other dockers were casual labourers and therefore less easily organised (John Lovell Stevedores and Dockers (London, Macmillan, 1969) pp.126-127.
3. Fusi op.cit. pp.94-104.

to property in the rail strikes of 1917-1918, notably the FCCA strike of August 1917, and could probably be applied in many other cases. Violence of almost exactly the same type occurred in the British rail strikes of 1911, and cannot be seen exclusively as a manifestation of anarchist or syndicalist revolutionary ideology.[1]

The strength of FOA/FORA was undeniable, but it proved no match for the Confederation, the largest single union in Argentina, which took substantial steps towards creating the first mass national union. The anarchist rivals to the Confederation were weak and poorly organised because they depended too heavily on local bases, rather than a national and relatively centralised administration. There is no evidence that railway workers were intrinsically less inclined towards anarchism than other workers; in the state of ideological uncertainty within the labour movement at this time, and at this early and tentative stage of union organisation, it is reasonable to suppose that workers who wished to join a union should join the most effective organisation available. In the case of the railway unions, and of other mass unions - even FOM, an amalgamation of groups, several of which had been strong supporters of FORA/FOA - the autonomous-federalist structure proved unsuited to the development of a stable union.[2]

The struggle for survival of the divisionist sindicatos demonstrate the weakness of opposition to the more centralised unions. Some doubtless joined the divisionists in disgust at the ideological compromises of FOF and Trafico y Talleres, but it is also clear that faults in the structure of the principal unions played a part in splitting the movement. Strong

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1. Bob Holton British Syndicalism 1900-1914 (London, Pluto Press, 1976) pp.104-105.
2. FOM was more difficult to control than FOF, because its components were less interdependent than the railway trades. Much of the union's success in maintaining discipline depended upon its secretary, Francisco J. García, whose control of Buenos Aires docklands was regarded by a hostile observer as little short of tyrannical (José R. Romariz La semana trágica (Buenos Aires, Hemisferio, 1952).

local figures or groups, frustrated by their failure to penetrate the 'official' unions' power structure, could lead sections out of the union. Weak central control or simple geographical remoteness tended to encourage the growth of alternative leaderships, whose power was reinforced by the sense that the Buenos Aires union was out of touch with peripheral areas. Two most consistent centres of divisionism, the FCCN and the FCPSF, were never properly controlled by FOF; neither had a terminal in the federal capital. Overall, it is surprising how well FOF was able to control its far-flung sections. Independent and regular communications contributed enormously to the success of the two national transport federations. These unions' valuable role in union organisation added to their influence in FORA IX, where their numerical strength was already dominant.

As has been noted,[1] the evidence of a genuine ideological split between the 'official' rail unions and the divisionists is somewhat sparse. Moreover, the place of anarchism, widely regarded as the dominant influence in the labour movement before the First World War, needs re-examination. Anarchism in the labour movement has been linked with the size of the foreign element of the working class, and attributed to their alienation from the conventional political processes.[2] Railway unions, with perhaps a higher proportion of native workers than the overall average,[3] might thus be expected to escape the influences of this ideology. However, the apparent strongholds of anarchism in the railway unions - or at least those areas where opposition to the centralisation of the Confederation or FOF was most concerted - were precisely those where the highest proportion of workers were native-born. Trade unions of all

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1. See Chapter 5 pp.200-203.
2. Rock Politics (1975) p.78; Samuel L. Baily Labor, Nationalism and Politics in Argentina (New Brunswick, Rutgers UP, 1967) pp.22, 24.
3. See Chapter 1 pp.17-18.

political complexions flourished in Córdoba at the turn of the century, where 90% of the factory labour force was native-born and only 13.6% of the total population was foreign in 1906.[1] It seems, therefore, that anarchism was less a characteristic of foreign groups than of isolated groups, in areas where the trade union movement was least developed.

While the size of the foreign element in the labour movement has sometimes been exaggerated,[2] the importance of immigrants of various types in virtually all unions is undeniable. In La Fraternidad, British immigrants played a part in the first ten or fifteen years of the union's life.[3] By 1912, available information suggests that the footplate union's ethnic base was not markedly dissimilar from other unions', for the early importance of skilled technical labour from abroad soon faded. It is reasonable to suppose that in all skilled trades the immigrant element declined with the passage of time, as natives and second-generation immigrants acquired the necessary training in Argentina. However, and despi-e the interruption of the flow of immigrants during the war, foreigners continued to form a high proportion of the unskilled labour force.[4] The process by which the organised working class became more Argentine as time passed was very gradual; for instance, the railwaymen were badly affected by the arbitrary and discriminatory policies against foreign workers of the British and French railways during the War.[5]

Changes in the patterns of nationality may have had some effect on ideological developments in the unions. It is possible that second-generation immigrants acquired a strong sense of nationalism, valued their place in the conventional political process, and moderated their hostility to the government.[6] It is perhaps more convincing to suggest

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1. Ofelia Pianetto Industria y formación de la clase obrera en la ciudad de Córdoba, 1880-1906 (Córdoba, Univ.Nacional, 1972) pp.23-24.
2. Samuel L. Baily, 'Italians and the development of organized labor in Argentina, Brazil and the USA, 1880-1914', Journal of Social History, Vol.3, 1969-1970; see also Hobart Spalding Organized labor in Latin America (New York, NYU Press, 1977) pp.8-9 and note. These authors rightly draw attention to the part played by immigrants, but in view of the foreign dominance of the working class this phenomenon can be over-stated.
3. See Chapter 2 p.35. 4. See Chapter 1 p.16.
5. See Chapter 3 p.106. 6. Baily Labor, Nationalism and Politics pp.33-34.

that the union movement was strengthened as both native and foreign workers realised the limitations on opportunities for upward social mobility, and modified their aspirations for individual advancement in the interests of more modest collective economic goals.[1] As the most effective unions grew more representative of their constituency, their dependence on theoretical catholicity increased and their permanence rested on accommodations and gains at any available level, rather than on ideological commitment of a few. It was this growth in strong unionism, born of industrial concentration and the organisation of large-scale, economically strategic sectors, which moderated the attitudes of organised labour - though these attitudes had in practice been evident throughout the lifetime of FOA/FORA. Small, well-organised craft unions such as La Fraternidad or the graphical workers, which were highly representative of their trades and had considerable control of their working conditions, likewise preferred conciliation to militant action;[2] in terms of practical gains, these groups were highly successful.

The early unions federated in FORA IX sought a syndicalist role independent of political parties; their attitude to political action can be summed up with reference to a remark of the French railwaymen's leader, Guerard, in 1896, who maintained that

> 'Notre syndicat se sert de l'action politique, mais ne s'y mêle pas'.[3]

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1. One writer has emphasised that money, rather than improved status, was the main attraction of Argentina for prospective emigrants; this helps to explain the consistent concern of all unions, however revolutionary in theory, with immediate economic gains (Juan F. Marsal Hacer la América: autobiografía de un inmigrante español en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, di Tella, 1969) p.34; see also Baily Labor, Nationalism and Politics p.22).
2. Pelling loc. cit. p.56 suggests that craft unions are frequently more militant than mass unions. In Argentina, however, the labour aristocracy appears to have been reformist in method (Torcuato di Tella El sistema político argentino y la clase obrera (Buenos Aires, EUDEBA, 1964) pp.22-23). For instance, the graphical workers established formal collective bargaining and arbitration procedures in 1906 (Hobart Spalding Clase trabajadora (1970) pp.375-386).
3. Elie Fruit Les syndicats dans les chemins de fer en France, 1890-1910 (Paris, les éditions ouvrières, 1976) p.100.

This policy was difficult, if not impossible, to pursue, and the strong anti-political tradition of labour - born of anarchist and syndicalist theory - proved barely compatible with the needs of the mass trade unions it hoped to foster. This was by no means clear in 1917-1920, when the 'decline' of syndicalism appeared the least likely consequence of events. In Argentina, where a larger proportion of the organised working class was unionised by the syndicalists than in any other country, the reformist tendencies seen also in the French and Spanish syndicalist movements after the war were more pronounced than elsewhere, for the structural reasons already cited. Despite criticisms that the unions' links with the Radical government were too close, which tend in any case to underestimate the independent stature of the strong unions, FORA IX did appear to be developing a role as an independent pressure group. It seemed probable that other unions would win the rights which the railwaymen were gaining, either through government or through direct negotiation with employers. As a union movement faithful to revolutionary syndicalist theory,[1] FORA IX was a failure from its inception, but the strength and potential of its practical syndicalism was recognised by all political parties in government. Paradoxically, the efforts of the syndicalist movement to purge itself of the reformist political tendencies of FORA IX resulted in a more overt political splintering of the union movement in the 1920s.

The exceptional aspects of railway labour and railway unionism in Argentina have received enough attention in this study for the limitations on any general conclusions that can be drawn from it to be apparent; as pioneers of mass unionism in Argentina, the railway unions and their experience stand out even further from the general picture. However, some general points deserve to be made.

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1. A useful collection of syndicalist writings by Sorel, Berth, Lagardelle, Griffuelhes, Pouget and others is Carlos Díaz (ed.) Sindicalismo revolucionario (Madrid, Júcar, 1978).

The evolution of representative labour organisations in Argentina was a continuous process, which began before 1900. The true influence of anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist theory in the practical affairs of Argentine unions in this early period needs serious reappraisal; those elements of Argentine labour which achieved a measure of permanent organisation tended to succeed despite the guidelines of that theory. At the same time, it is mistaken to regard such unions as Socialist in orientation, for the nature of the Socialist party and the success of mass unaligned unions precluded a direct alliance of this kind. The growth of a responsible and responsive - or, from another viewpoint, a reformist and collaborationist - union movement occurred despite unfavourable social and political conditions. It developed despite an unparalleled influx of immigrants, the vast majority of whom aimed to benefit from the status quo, not to alter it, and despite the basic fears and repression of successive governments, even after 1916. The unity and solidarity of organised labour, clearly demonstrated from 1917 to 1919, was powerful but proved tenuous; the successful anti-political alliance of FORA IX was both essential for support and unmanageable in an atmosphere of ideological flux, and against a background of enthusiastic but undeveloped organisation. Unions had effected accommodations with government powers from the earliest stages, but the status of organised labour vis-à-vis the government remained ambiguous as long as union members themselves resisted the use of collaborationist methods. Meanwhile, the responses of the government to labour questions, with a mixture of repression and paternalist legislation, forged a model for subsequent regimes.[1] Events were to demonstrate that the development of a profitable relationship with the government and the maintenance of

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1. This view is expressed in Thomas E. Skidmore, 'A case of conspicuous neglect? The study of urban labor movements and elite responses in Latin America' (1978). I am grateful to Professor Skidmore for permission to quote this unpublished paper.

of political independence was an intractable problem, but before the dissolution of FORA IX there seemed to be good prospects for success within the terms of Argentine mass syndicalism.

The strength of Argentine unions before the 1920s was considerable, and owed much to the struggles of the railwaymen and their encouragement of organisation in other sectors. Even so, the very force of the rail unions and the success of their moderate methods almost certainly contributed to the dissatisfaction with FORA IX which led to its replacement in 1922. The contribution of other labour sectors to the strength of Argentine mass syndicalism, and the attitudes of smaller groups to the monolithic reformist unions, deserve detailed examination before the overall significance of these crucial early years for the later history of Argentine labour can properly be evaluated.

Bibliography

Note

The material for this thesis was collected in Oxford (at the Bodleian Library and the library of the Latin American Centre, St. Antony's College), London (at the British Library, especially the Newspaper Library), and Amsterdam (at the International Institute of Social History) in 1975, and in Buenos Aires in 1976-77. In Buenos Aires I consulted the collections of the Congreso Nacional, the Biblioteca Nacional, the Ministerio del Trabajo, the offices of the Review of the River Plate, and the Biblioteca Obrera Juan B. Justo, the last of which was the most profitable of the public collections. More difficult of access were the library of the Ministerio de Obras Públicas, also useful, and essential sources in the archives of the Confederación General del Trabajo, La Fraternidad, and Unión Ferroviaria.

A. Manuscript sources

These were very sparse, and in the case of the CGT in particular, were in very poor and incomplete condition.

Amsterdam, Institute of Social History. Nettlau collection:
Argentinien: Anarchismus, 1890-1910 (6 folders).
Buenos Aires, Confederacion General del Trabajo.
1. FORA Consejo Federal Actas (4 MS. notebooks, 1915-21).
2. FORA Consejo Deliberativo Actas (1915-1918).
3. USA Comité Central Sindical Actas (1922).
Buenos Aires, La Fraternidad.
1. CD Fraternidad Actas, Resoluciones, Circulares (1896-1907; 1911-1922), 10 vols.
2. JC Confraternidad Actas, circulares (1921).
3. Sesiones plenarias, JC, CD, CC CC (committees of all components of Confraternidad), 1920-1922.
4. CC CC Tráfico y Talleres Actas, circulares (1921-1922).
5. Huelga 1912 and Documentos Huelga; 2 bound volumes of circulars, posters, handbills, letters, etc. relating to the footplatemen's strike of 1912.
6. CD Fraternidad Memoria y balance; 1896, 1898-1911, 1913-1914, 1916, 1918, 1920/21.

B. Printed sources: 1. Press

Because of the lack of other sources, both narrative and analysis depend heavily on accounts in the working class press. These sources and their location are set out below:

(i) General

La Vanguardia (PS): weekly to Sept. 1905, then daily; 1894-1922. (Best collection Biblioteca Juan B. Justo; some in Amsterdam.)
La Protesta Humana (anarchist): weekly, June 1901-Oct. 1903. (Best collection in Amsterdam.) It became
La Protesta (anarchist): weekly to Feb. 1904, then daily; Nov.1903-Oct. 1907, July 1917-Nov. 1922. (Least incomplete collection in Amsterdam)
Humanidad Nueva ('Revista Socialista Internacional'): monthly, July 1910-March 1911. (Biblioteca Juan B. Justo.)
Nuevos Tiempos ('Revista de Buenos Aires'; PS): 1916-1917. (Biblioteca Juan B. Justo).

(ii) Union journals

El Ferrocarril (Confederación de Ferrocarrileros): monthly or fortnightly, April 1903-June 1908. (Biblioteca Juan B. Justo.)
La Fraternidad: monthly or fortnightly, Oct. 1907- Nov. 1922. (Fraternidad archive.)
El Obrero Ferroviario (Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera): monthly or fortnightly, June 1912-Oct. 1923. (Most complete at Unión Ferroviaria archives; good collection Amsterdam.)
La Confraternidad: monthly, Jan. 1921-Nov. 1922. (Biblioteca Juan B. Justo)
Vía Libre (Sindicato de trabajadores del FCP, Alianza - divisionist): monthly, May-Oct. 1922. (Amsterdam.)
Vía Libre (Federación Obrera de Sindicatos Ferroviarios): monthly, Mar. 1923-Feb. 1924. (Amsterdam.)
La Confederación (CORA): monthly, Mar.1910-Apr. 1914. (Amsterdam.)
La Organización Obrera (FORA IX): occasional, then weekly from Sept.1917, May 1915-Mar. 1922. (CGT has best collection; some copies in Amsterdam.)
La Unión Sindical (USA): weekly, Apr.-Aug. 1922 (CGT)
Bandera Proletaria (USA): daily, Sept.-Oct. 1922 (CGT)

Details of events in the years of greatest railway strike activity, 1912 and 1917, were cross-checked in La Prensa; Caras y Caretas proved surprisingly useful for the same purpose. Invaluable material appeared in the Review of the River Plate (weekly, Dec. 1894-July 1923), which should not be underrated as a source on the labour history of this period. As a starting point, accounts in the Statist and the Economist (both weekly, 1887-1922) provided insight from the point of view of foreign investors. Other useful points emerged from Diario de Sesiones (mainly for the Chamber of Deputies, 1915 and 1917), the Boletín of the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo (1907-1920) and the Crónica mensual of the same department (1919-1930), and the Boletín de servicios de la Asociación del Trabajo (1921-1923).

B. Printed sources: 2. Secondary works, books, pamphlets

This should not be regarded as a comprehensive bibliography of the subject; it merely provides details of those works which were consulted and proved useful.

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