

Social Networks and Urban Space: Worker Mobilization in the First Years of “New” Unionism in Brazil*

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ABSTRACT: In 1980, thousands of metalworkers from the region of greater São Paulo known as the “ABC” region carried out one of the most intense and lasting strikes in the history of the Brazilian working class. For forty-one days, striking workers resisted the repression that bosses and the nation’s military regime mounted against them, which contributed to the collective worker mobilization that spread throughout the spaces of the city – especially the streets of the São Bernardo do Campo neighborhood. Expelled from factories and major public spaces, workers were able to maintain the strike mainly in the neighborhoods where they lived, thus politicizing the spaces and relationships of their daily lives and redefining the geography of collective mobilization. This article analyzes aspects of this process, highlighting the importance of workers’ social networks to the notable (re)appropriation of urban space that characterized the strike movement.

On 1 April 1980, hundreds of thousands of metalworkers from the so-called ABC *paulista*, the manufacturing region of the greater São Paulo metropolitan area that then concentrated nearly all of Brazil’s automotive industry,¹ initiated a strike for salary increases and job stability² that

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1. In the late 1970s, the ABC region of São Paulo was composed of seven cities, the most important of which were Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, São Caetano do Sul, and Diadema.

2. The list of claims was composed of twenty-seven items. However, salary and job stability were the main topics. *Folha de São Paulo* (FSP), 26 March 1980. FSP, founded in 1921, is one of the major dailies of Brazil. Despite its initial support for the military coup of 1964, by the early 1980s it had adopted a clear stance against the military regime.

lasted for forty-one days (1 April – 11 May 1980). These workers thus became the protagonists of what has been understood for three decades as one of the most important mobilizations of the Brazilian working class. This assessment of the 1980 strike has been reinforced in recent years, as the idea has been repeatedly put forward that the cycle of metalworkers' strikes that took place in 1978–1980 was a central event in the construction of democracy in Brazil. The shared understanding of the enormous relevance of this event for Brazilian democracy does not only come from the fact that it was a dramatic episode in the struggle to end the military regime (1964–1985) in the country; the strike's importance also stems from the common understanding that it initiated the process that made Luiz Inácio da Silva, known as Lula, President of the Metalworkers' Union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo e Diadema – SMSBCD), the organization that led the strikers' movement, into a national public figure, bringing him to victory in Brazil's 2002 presidential election.

To understand the powerful impact of the metalworkers' mobilizations in 1978–1980, it is first necessary to delineate some aspects of the context in which they occurred. Following the military coup in 1964, the form of capitalist accumulation that took hold in Brazil brought about a period of major economic growth between the late 1960s and early 1970s – at an average growth rate of 11 per cent per year – that came to be called the “Brazilian Miracle”. This economic model both depended on and presupposed a climate that was amenable to foreign capital. In addition to changes in labor laws implemented by the military regime and the repression and bureaucratization of labor unions, Brazil's authoritarian government passed legislation to control both strikes and workers' salaries by decreeing new wage indices and readjusting wages accordingly. Workers' wages thus suffered real reductions during the period of military rule.³ Conversely, the military government's economic strategy acted to consolidate the market for consumer goods, thus intensifying the concentration of income among the upper and upper-middle classes.⁴ In addition to the hostile climate for workers in general, the authoritarianism that prevailed in the institutional politics of the era took hold in the spaces of industrial production. Workers were subjected to speed-ups, increased worker turnover, managerial despotism, and precarious standards of health

3. Ricardo Antunes, “As formas da greve: o confronto operário no ABC paulista (1978–1980)” (Ph.D., São Paulo University, 1986), pp. 60–124; Maria Helena M. Alves, *State and Opposition in Military Brazil* (Austin, TX, 1985), pp. 76–83.

4. In 1980, for example, the richest 10 per cent of Brazilian society claimed up to 50.9 per cent of total national income; João M.C. Mello and Fernando Novais, “Late Capitalism and Modern Sociability”, in Lília Moritz Schwarcz, *History of Private Life*, 5 vols (São Paulo, 1998), IV, p. 633.

and safety at the workplace.⁵ Under these conditions, workers suffered an extraordinary number of accidents during this period, the number of officially registered accidents in the country reaching 1,330,523 in 1971.⁶

From the mid-1970s on, this economic model began to show signs of wear. Growth rates slowed, the country's external debt reached unsustainable levels, and currency reserves were drastically reduced, mostly due to an unequal balance of payments. Furthermore, as the global terms of exchange rapidly deteriorated to Brazil's detriment, inflation increased at an accelerated rate, reaching 110 per cent in 1980. These elements aggravated the crisis of legitimacy that the military regime was going through, a crisis whose contours began to become clear after the government's various defeats in the parliamentary elections of 1974.⁷

Under the pressure of the economic crisis and the growing demands for redemocratization coming from diverse sectors of civil society, and despite internal dissent coming from the armed forces, the military regime began a process of controlled political liberalization that would become known as the *abertura* or "opening". In this slightly opened up public space, with the military regime in a growing crisis of legitimacy and political transition already under way, popular movements strengthened, among them the metalworkers and their trade unions. In this context, and while emphasizing claims of particular concern to workers, Brazilian workers interwove their own movement into the ongoing struggle for redemocratization that had, until then, failed to take the laboring classes into account.⁸

When in 1978 the metalworkers of the ABC region of São Paulo stood before their machines with their arms crossed and refused to work, they ended a decade of acquiescence imposed by force on Brazil's working classes, and they opened the floodgates to the thousands of strikes that would break out all over the country. It is true that, in the years before, other workers had undertaken numerous mobilizations at their workplaces. These actions, however, never reached the scale and the

5. John Humphrey, *Capitalist Control and Workers' Struggle in the Brazilian Auto Industry* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), pp. 87–103; Amnérís Maroni, *A estratégia da recusa: análise das greves de maio/78* (São Paulo, 1982), pp. 28–52.

6. See the following report by FUNDACENTRO, a governmental think tank focused on health and workplace security; FUNDACENTRO, "Conceito de acidentes, suas causas segundo o ponto de vista prevencionista", 1973.

7. Thomas Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964–1985* (New York, 1988), ch. 6. The holding of some direct elections (basically, for all levels of the legislature) and a political rhetoric of the rule of law were important features of the Brazilian military regime which sought to uphold a certain degree of constitutionalism. Such elements have been often skillfully exploited by the parliamentary opposition, leading to, for example, important electoral victories.

8. *Idem*, "Brazil's Slow Road to Democratization", in Alfred Stepan (ed.), *Democratizing Brazil: Problems of Transition and Consolidation* (New York, 1989), pp. 5–42; José Álvaro Moisés, *Lições de liberdade e de opressão: os trabalhadores e a luta pela democracia* (Rio de Janeiro, 1982), pp. 174–190.

visibility of the mobilizations of 1978. Similar circumstances would occur in the strike of 1979 and, in particular, the one in 1980, which assumed the character of an open rebellion against the authoritarian regime, thereby gaining support from a wide swathe of the population who favored the re-democratization of the country.

Just like the strikes in 1978 and 1979, the labor action that took place in 1980 became the subject of an avalanche of academic studies, carried out both during and after the event.⁹ Most of these studies focused their attention on the workplace, Brazil's political, economic, and social conjuncture, and on formal labor organizations. A great variety of explanations was brought to bear on the strikes of 1980: from a straightforward economic struggle against wage decreases, to causes such as extreme worker exploitation, worker resistance against the capitalist organization of the labor process, the recovery of workers' dignity, and even the formation of a new type of syndicalism.

The fact is that the strikes in the ABC region of São Paulo surprised a good number of Brazilian academics. After all, the sociology of labor of the 1960s and 1970s held out little hope for autonomous political action among Brazilian workers, owing, above all, to their predominantly rural and migrant origins.¹⁰ At the same time, once the new situation had been acknowledged, many militants and academics saw the emerging labor-union discourses and practices, especially those in the ABC *paulista*, as profoundly different from both the type of labor conservatism called *peleguismo* of that time, and the labor-union experiences common before the 1964 military coup that are often known by the shorthand term "populist syndicalism".¹¹ In the 1980s and even more emphatically in the 1990s, however, developments in Brazil's "new" syndicalism led to the

9. Some of the most well known are: Laís W. Abramo, *O resgate da dignidade: greve metalúrgica e subjetividade operária* (Campinas, 1999); Antunes, "As formas da greve"; Maroni, *A estratégia da recusa*; Aloizio M. Oliva, "Estado autoritário e desobediência operária: os trabalhadores metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo e Diadema" (M.A., DEPE-Unicamp Campinas, 1988); Luiz F. Rainho, *Os peões do grande ABC: estudos sobre as condições de vida e consciência de classe do operário metalúrgico (sem especialização e semi-especializado) ligado à indústria automobilística* (Petrópolis, 1980); Antonio L. Negro, *Linhas de montagem: o industrialismo nacional-desenvolvimentista e a sindicalização dos trabalhadores (1945-1978)* (São Paulo, 2004); and Maria H.T. Almeida, "O sindicalismo brasileiro entre a conservação e a mudança", in Bernardo Sorj and Maria H. T. Almeida (eds.), *Sociedade e política no Brasil pós-64* (São Paulo, 1984), pp. 279-312.

10. Indispensable studies emphasizing this connection are: Leôncio M. Rodrigues, *Conflito industrial e sindicalismo no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1966), and Juarez R.B. Lopes, *Sociedade Industrial no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1971). See also the special volume on Latin America of *Sociologie du Travail*, 4 (1961).

11. *Peleguismo* refers to the actions guided by a group of unionists known in Brazil as "pelegos" (conservatives who acted under the instigation of the Labor Ministry or pro-labor politicians). It is a term highly associated with the corporatist system of labor relations which had its origins in the Estado Novo dictatorship of Getulio Vargas (1937-1945).

view that some of its original “promises” had not been fulfilled. In this context, a number of studies appeared which revisited the period from 1945 to 1964, producing reformulated interpretations of “old” syndicalism and providing a critical vantage from which to re-examine various hegemonic theories from the 1970s and 1980s. Today, understandings of labor history in Brazil tend to paint a more nuanced image of the supposed contrasts between “new” and “old” syndicalism: where previously only ruptures had been seen, more recent analyses also see significant continuities.¹²

The factory, the historical conjuncture, and formal organizations have nonetheless remained the axes along which the attention of historians and social scientists who examine the ABC *paulista* is fixed. This article, by contrast, will focus primarily on the neighborhoods in which the metalworkers lived (especially on São Bernardo do Campo) and the social networks created therein, as well as the interrelations between these networks and the collective mobilization that resulted in the strike of 1980 from 1 April to 11 May of that year. These networks grew out of primary social ties, constructed in social and territorial space, which involved relatives, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and fellow countrymen. This article will explore aspects of the day-to-day life in which these networks were constructed as well as they ways in which these networks – during and through the strike movement – made an appropriation of the urban space possible.

SKETCHING OUT A “NEW” APPROACH TO AN “OLD” THEME

In this new approach to the “forty-one-days strike” this article will go beyond adopting the classic notions of social class associated with E.P. Thompson. In doing so, it will, among others, incorporate some of the more recent contributions of British historiography that have sought to continue Thompson’s thinking from where he left off, and to re-elaborate his research on the English working class. I thus take as a point of departure Mike Savage’s assertions that class formation is a complex process that involves the construction of two types of social networks, wide-ranging and dense. In the words of this British historian:

Class formation has a dual dynamic. Firstly, it involves the construction of social networks of wide range, linking members of that class across different local sites – workplaces, residential neighbourhoods, leisure venues, and so forth. In these situations information can be passed on, organisations built, ideas pooled, mobilisation co-ordinated. This perspective is congruent with the historical

12. See Marco A. Santana, “O ‘novo’ e o ‘velho’ sindicalismo: análise de um debate”, *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, 10/11 (1998), pp. 19–35; Paulo Fontes and Francisco B. Macedo, “Strikes and Pickets in Brazil: Worker Mobilization in the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Unionism, the Strikes of 1957 and 1980”, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 83 (2013), pp. 86–111.

sociologist Michael Mann's insistence that social class is based on "extensive" ties, in contrast to the "segmental" character of non-class social relations. Secondly, class formation also involves the construction of dense ties, which allows the forging of solidaristic and communal identities over time and in the absence of formal organisation. Here, classes can draw upon "community," face-to-face relationships, which are conducive to social solidarity.¹³

This focus – which the present article will adopt to study the strike of 1980 – has been much used in works of historical sociology on collective mobilizations in the United States, but not in Brazil.¹⁴ Since the 1980s, however, Brazilian scholars have undertaken studies that have sought to "understand patterns of behavior that are present in quotidian popular culture, from which social movements extract their energies".¹⁵ Some of these works have even made use – albeit unsystematically – of the notion of social networks to examine collective mobilization and class formation. José Sérgio Leite Lopes, for instance, commenting in 1987 on the ascent of worker mobilization since the end of the 1970s, observed that "the family and local networks for groups situated in popular neighborhoods in large cities are important to the constitution and the maintenance of a working-class culture".¹⁶

Such pioneering contributions notwithstanding, however, it was only in the past fifteen years that an analytical approach that privileges social networks has gained a more explicit theoretical and methodological profile in field research in the social sciences (including history) in Brazil.¹⁷ Notable among this recent research is Paulo Fontes's important study of the articulations between formal and informal ties in the formation of the working class from 1945 to 1966.¹⁸ His research focused on workers in a São Paulo neighborhood linked to the large chemical industry that had been established there in the 1930s, seeking to "explain the importance of social

13. Mike Savage, "Space, Networks and Class Formation", in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Social Class and Marxism: Defences and Challenges* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 58–86, 68.

14. For an introduction to this debate, see James Kitts, "Mobilizing in Black Boxes: Social Networks and Participation in Social Movements Organizations", *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 5 (2000), pp. 241–257. Two seminal studies of this issue are: Doug McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer", *American Journal of Sociology*, 92 (1986), pp. 64–90, and Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago, IL, 1995).

15. Eder Sader, *Quando novos personagens entraram em cena: experiências, falas e lutas dos trabalhadores da Grande São Paulo (1970–80)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1988), pp. 18–19.

16. José S.L. Lopes, "A formação de uma cultura operária", *Tempo & Presença*, 220 (1987), pp. 6–15, 7.

17. For examples see Dulce T. Baptista, "Nas Terras do 'Deus-Dará': nordestinos e suas redes sociais em São Paulo" (Ph.D., São Paulo, PUC-SP, 1998), and Eduardo C.L. Marques, "Redes sociais, segregação e pobreza em São Paulo" (Professorship thesis, São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2007).

18. Paulo Fontes, *Um Nordeste em São Paulo: trabalhadores migrantes em São Miguel Paulista (1945–1966)* (Rio de Janeiro, 2008).

networks and of community relationships for class formation”. Taking the daily lives of workers as his point of departure, he examined the intricate “relations between industrialization, urbanization, migration, and class formation in the context of Brazil in the 1940s through the 1960s”.¹⁹ This approach has proved to be equally fertile for studying the ABC region of São Paulo between 1950 and 1970 in general and the case of the neighborhood of São Bernardo do Campo in particular. Fontes’s emphasis on the articulation between “working” and “living”, and the impact of this connection on how workers constituted dense social networks and a class identity, has thus been very useful when attempting to analyze the experience of a large sector of the laboring classes of São Bernardo do Campo.

After the opening of the Rodovia Anchieta in 1947, a large highway that cut through the middle of São Bernardo do Campo along its north–south axis, the town began a process of profound transformation. Its location midway between the São Paulo coastline and the state capital, the water and energy supply ensured by the Billings Dam complex, the ready availability of a labor force, as well as the availability of cheap land and the intervention of local public administrators powerfully stimulated the arrival of industries in the city.²⁰ The municipality, whose principal productive activities had until then been agriculture and a few industries in the textile and especially the furniture manufacturing sectors, began a process of intense industrial growth, as shown by the multiplication of factories in the following decades:²¹ 133 (1950), 284 (1960), 589 (1970), and 1,099 (1980). In 1958, the city already had the third largest industrial production in the state of São Paulo.²² This brisk pace of growth was stimulated, in large measure, by the foundation of several automobile companies in São Bernardo beginning in the mid-1950s. These auto factories, as well as a number of other establishments linked to the auto industry’s production chain, made São Bernardo a pivot of Brazil’s vehicle production, claiming 70 per cent of the country’s national production by 1970.²³ Equally extraordinary was the growth in the number of industrial jobs in São Bernardo. For example, between 1967 and 1980 they jumped

19. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

20. Luiz E.S. Souza, “Políticas públicas em São Bernardo do Campo no pós-guerra: 1945–1964” (M.A., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2002).

21. For a discussion of the general constitutive processes of the conversion of the base of the Brazilian economy from agricultural exports to urban-industrial, a phenomenon that gained some pace in the 1930s and accelerated in the 1950s and 1970s, see Francisco Oliveira, *Crítica à razão dualista: o ornitorrinco* (São Paulo, 2003), and Odair Paiva, “Caminhos cruzados: a migração para São Paulo e os dilemas da construção do Brasil moderno nos anos 1930/1950” (Ph.D., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2000).

22. Souza, “Políticas públicas em São Bernardo do Campo no pós-guerra”, p. 170.

23. Marcelo L. Corrêa, “São Bernardo do Campo: descaracterização da paisagem urbano-industrial e a ‘nova pobreza urbana’” (M.A., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2000), p. 57.

from 62,067 to 124,627.²⁴ In light of these figures, it is possible to understand why some researchers have pointed to São Bernardo do Campo, and more broadly to the ABC region, as an important center of both the “developmentalism” of Brazil’s former president Juscelino Kubitschek (1956–1961)²⁵ and the “economic miracle” (1968–1973) of the military regime.²⁶

São Bernardo’s accelerated industrialization was accompanied by equally rapid urbanization and population growth. In 1980, 99 per cent of the municipal population was already living in urbanized areas.²⁷ Between 1950 and 1980, the city’s population grew from 29,295 to 425,602 inhabitants. While the city of São Paulo grew at rates of 4.8 per cent per year in the period 1960–1970 and 3.7 per cent per year in 1970–1980, São Bernardo do Campo experienced annual population increases of 9.52 per cent and 7.76 per cent, respectively.²⁸ Clearly, such rates were not the result of natural population growth; on the contrary, until the 1980s, migration was the principal factor driving population growth in the city.²⁹ Migrants headed for the city, often seeking employment in industries that were being established there. Since the early twentieth century, significant changes in the production process of a number of industrial sectors allowed factory production to absorb an increasing number of unskilled or semiskilled workers (the categories to which most migrants belonged).³⁰ In the course of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, these migrants encountered foreign immigrants and their descendants, mostly of Italian origin. Since the late nineteenth century these had populated a series of settlements in the region and had also inhabited the area of São Bernardo do Campo; it was from this encounter between “old” and “new” migrants that the working class in São Bernardo do Campo would form.³¹

24. Pedro R.C. Blum, “São Bernardo do Campo: um exemplo de desenvolvimento urbano condicionado por variáveis externas” (M.A., São Paulo, EAESP-FGV, 1985), p. 156.

25. Helen Shapiro, “A primeira migração das montadoras: 1956–1968”, in Glauco Arbix and Mauro Zilbovicius (eds), *De JK a FHC: a reinvenção dos carros* (São Paulo, 1997), pp. 23–74.

26. Antunes, *As formas da greve*, pp. 81–124.

27. Blum, *São Bernardo do Campo*, p. 114.

28. See Tereza P. Caldeira, *A Política dos Outros: o cotidiano dos moradores da periferia e o que pensam do poder e dos poderosos* (São Paulo, 1984), p. 19; and *Compêndio Estatístico 2005*, Seção de Pesquisa e Banco de Dados, Prefeitura Municipal de São Bernardo do Campo [hereafter, PMSBC], p. 25.

29. See Maria I.S. Pimentel, “O migrante em São Bernardo do Campo: experiências e expectativas de migrantes ingressos entre 1950 e 1980 em São Bernardo do Campo e sua integração à cidade” (M.A., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 1997).

30. See Leôncio M. Rodrigues, *Industrialização e Atitudes Operárias* (São Paulo, 1970), pp. 3–21; José S.R.C. Gonçalves, *Mão-de-obra e condições de trabalho na indústria automobilística do Brasil* (São Paulo, 1985), pp. 17–23. Rainho, *Os peões do grande*, p. 249, points out that in the mid-1970s, 85 per cent of workers in the “modern” automobile industry were semiskilled or unskilled.

31. As John D. French has observed in *The Brazilian Workers’ ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern Brazil* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), the organization and struggles of the

Considering the analytical focus of this article, one should note that the period between 1950 and 1970 was especially important for the mobilization and restructuring of the social networks of the workers of São Bernardo do Campo. In fact, during this period laborers turned to their relatives, friends, and fellow countrymen to make possible the migration process and to navigate the local labor market: they established new neighborhood ties; they reinvented forms of leisure; they knitted together the threads that made up their urban sociability.³² Likewise, even if a large segment of the city’s metalworkers did not live in São Bernardo in the mid-1970s, it is noteworthy that approximately 50 per cent of the economically active population who did reside in that city from 1950 to 1970 were industrial workers.³³ The increasing development of industries, around which numerous neighborhoods grew, made it possible for the residents of São Bernardo do Campo to live close to their workplaces, thus avoiding having to commute far away to neighboring cities. In 1972, for example, only 20 per cent of the municipality’s economically active population worked in another city.³⁴

Against this backdrop, this article investigates how the proximity between the locations of residence, work, and leisure, as well as the intense concentration of workers in the relatively small space that characterizes the city,³⁵ contributed to the workers’ construction of dense social networks, examining the impact that these networks had on the vigorous collective mobilization that sustained the strike in 1980. São Bernardo therefore presents an especially fertile case with which to consider the spatial dimensions of the process of class formation. As Savage observes, space is not just a setting or a locus where class formation occurs, but is itself part of this process: ultimately, classes also constitute themselves (by way of the social networks that people

workers of the ABC region date back to the first half of the twentieth century. The steelworkers’ union in Santo André, for example, which was the origin of the Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo e Diadema (SMSBCD) in 1959, was founded in 1933. Taking into account such continuities, as well as the impacts and characteristics of the processes that intensified from the 1950s onwards, perhaps the more appropriate term would be “the (re)formation of the working class”.

32. For further details on this process, see Francisco B. Macedo, “A Greve de 1980: redes sociais e mobilização coletiva dos metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo” (M.A., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2010), ch. 3.

33. Souza, “Políticas públicas”, pp. 143–145, and Pimentel, “O migrante em São Bernardo do Campo”, p. 47.

34. Sílvia C. Bava, “As lutas nos bairros e a luta sindical”, in Lúcio Kowarick (ed.). *As lutas sociais e a cidade* (Rio de Janeiro, 1994), p. 255.

35. Roughly speaking, in the 1970s, somewhere around 95 per cent of the population of São Bernardo do Campo lived in an area of approximately 53.47 sq. km; *Subsídios Estatísticos*, SPE, PMSBC, 1976, p. 10.

construct) through their differentiated appropriation of space.³⁶ This became evident in the strike of 1980, when collective mobilization galvanized factories and unions and spread throughout the urban space of São Bernardo – especially through the neighborhoods where workers were concentrated. This process, highlighting the multiple dimensions of class formation, demonstrated the interaction between the informal links already present in the movement – links forged both in factories and in other loci of São Bernardo’s urban space – and formal ties, particularly in unions.

Many of the aspects covered in this article have been touched upon in important studies of industrial strikes,³⁷ especially those of the 1978–1980 cycle. These observations, however, were never the central focus of those studies and were, therefore, not investigated in depth. This article takes an approach that seeks to contribute to the understanding of the remarkable (re)appropriation of local urban space and the prolonged and intense engagement of the São Bernardo metalworkers that marked the “forty-one-days strike”. As it developed, this strike attracted a base of support that went considerably beyond the membership of the metalworkers’ union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo e Diadema – SMSBCD).³⁸

WITH KNOWLEDGE THAT ONLY COMES FROM EXPERIENCE...

Christmas of 1979 had barely ended when the leaders of SMSBCD met in the union headquarters located in Rua João Basso in São Bernardo do Campo to prepare for their 1980 salary campaign. After some debate, they decided that they needed to “organize meetings in working class neighborhoods to clarify the situation for workers living there”³⁹ about the ongoing campaign for better wages. More than a decade later, the historian Kátia Paranhos commented on this decision and noted that in 1980, the “union leaders decided to conduct the salary campaign in a different manner”; to wit, “as well as meetings organized in factories or even sectors of each company”, they set up meetings in neighborhoods

36. Savage, “Space, Networks”, p. 59.

37. See, especially: Bava, “As lutas”, and Negro, *Linhas de montagem*.

38. It has been estimated that before the start of the 1978–1980 cycle of strikes the membership of the SMSBCD was around 40,000, which corresponds to approximately one-third of the area’s metalworkers; see *A Vanguarda*, 17 September 1977. This periodical was a local newspaper of liberal orientation.

39. Minutes of the regular meeting of the board of the SMSBCD, 26 December 1979; SMSBCD archive. The SMSBCD disposes of a well-organized archive with newspapers, photographs, reports etc., which offers valuable documentation for historians researching this important Brazilian trade union.

“with the intention of contacting workers where they lived”.⁴⁰ The unusual character of this procedure by the union did not go unnoticed by Paranhos, but she did not investigate further as this was not the focus of her study. For the purpose of this article, however, her observation is especially useful. What, then, drove union leaders to act “in a different manner”?

A fundamental part of the answer lies in the collective mobilization undertaken by workers and their union leaders during the 1979 strike. If the metalworkers’ strikes occurred inside factories in 1978, in 1979 they assumed the character of a general strike that spilled into the streets of São Bernardo do Campo and other cities in the ABC region. This was largely due to the repressive strategy adopted by factory owners after the 1978 strikes. Indeed, in early 1979, the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP) instructed its members to “try all methods to put the strikers into the streets”.⁴¹ Factory owners used such a strategy in order to exploit their alliance with the state security forces to undermine the workers’ actions. Once they were expelled from the factories and subjected to police repression, the workers developed new mobilization strategies, (re)appropriating urban space in São Bernardo and showing their union leaders the importance of neighborhood and friendship ties in supporting the strike movement.

Thus, on 25 March 1979, a critical moment in the strike following federal intervention against the SMSBCD two days earlier, Luiz Inácio da Silva, commonly known as Lula, then president of the institution, addressed 15,000 steelworkers in the square in front of the Church of São Bernardo do Campo, calling them to action: “Tomorrow, everyone knows what to do from 4:30, you must be at bus stops and bars. The most important thing is not to go to the factory gates. You know what to do, you have already done this for 10 days, little by little.”⁴² As the union, the main formal instrument of political expression and organization of the workers, was inoperative at that time, the most prominent leader of the strike movement indicated the decisive spaces where support for the strike would arise. Accordingly, bus stops located in the neighborhoods, and bars, spaces for the everyday sociability of workers, were presented as a new “public arena” in which the unity of workers and the continuity of the movement would be defined. It is essential, however, to point out that

40. Kátia R. Paranhos, *Era uma vez em São Bernardo: o discurso sindical dos metalúrgicos – 1971/1982* (Campinas, 1999), p. 193.

41. FIESP document directing their members about the procedure to be adopted in the event of the occurrence of new strikes (1979); quoted from: Luis F. Rainho and Osvaldo M. Bargas, *As lutas operárias e sindicais dos metalúrgicos em São Bernardo (1977–1979)*, 2 vols (São Bernardo do Campo, 1983), I, p. 213.

42. Quoted from: Rainho and Bargas, *As lutas operárias*, p. 141.

the union leadership was merely catching up in discourse rather than inventing new directives; the leadership was presenting as general guideline to its membership a strategy that workers had already been practicing since the strike began.

Fearful of a confrontation between steelworkers and police in the Paço Municipal, the main square of São Bernardo do Campo, Lula insisted, “Everyone has to do their work, in their homes, in their towns and neighborhoods, visiting comrades and talking.”⁴³ Despite the efforts of the President of the SMSBCD, the metalworkers went to the Paço Municipal and held a meeting that afternoon. Lula, still trying to avoid conflict in public spaces, and under police surveillance, reiterated the importance of neighborhood ties – and how they were already being mobilized – for the continuity of the movement: “everyone must meet in their own homes, making contact with comrades who live closest; anyone who says he does not know what to do is lying, no one can have forgotten”.⁴⁴

These guidelines were not an isolated position adopted by Lula but something that was shared by other strike leaders. In an “Instructional Bulletin” (“Boletim de Orientação”) dated 26 March and signed by “the SMSBCD Board” and the “Salaries Commission”,⁴⁵ among the ten statements listed in the document it was reiterated that “we should go to bus stops to convince comrades not to go to work”, and “we should stay at home with the family and visit friends to convince them to keep united”.⁴⁶ It was thus the entire bodies and actors leading the strike who indicated the same privileged “spaces” for operations by the workers (bus stops and the houses of friends). Also, all insisted on how the bonds of friendship should be mobilized to support the strike. In his “fictionalized report” about the 1979 strike, Antonio Possidonio Sampaio writes: “the order was to talk. At home, in bars, at the factory gates, on buses, on trains, in churches, wherever they could find strikers”.⁴⁷ At this point,

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

45. On the character of the Salaries Commission see e.g. the following statement from June 1980 by Frei Betto, responsible for organizing pastoral care among workers (*pastoral operária*) in São Bernardo: “The Salaries Commission is the deliberative organ of the metalworkers in São Bernardo and Diadema. Nothing is done here without discussion, and the decision of the Salaries Commission, which is comprised of 425 employees who represent the major industries in the region”; interviews with Frei Betto given to Heloisa H.T. S. Martins, Henrique Pereira, and Carlos A. Ricardo on 26 and 28 June 1980; “A Igreja na greve dos metalúrgicos – São Bernardo, 1980”, *Religião e Sociedade*, 6 November 1980, p. 18.

46. Quoted from Aloizio M. Oliva (ed.), *Imagens da Luta: 1905–1985* (São Bernardo do Campo, 1987), p. 175.

47. Antonio P. Sampaio, *Lula e a greve dos peões (romance-reportagem)* (São Paulo, 1982), p. 103.

such advice was stated as part of the overall strategy for conducting the strike. The subsequent development of the movement would confirm this. The metalworkers decided to suspend the strike for forty-five days on 27 March for negotiations with the employers to take place. On 6 May 1979, a few days before the meeting of metalworkers which was to decide whether an agreement with the employers was to be approved, the SMSBCD board distributed their “Instructional Bulletin” that stressed the need to “continue discussions with comrades inside the factories and with those who live close to their homes”.⁴⁸ Thus, by then factories and neighborhoods were already quite routinely seen as equally relevant spaces for collective mobilization.

The São Bernardo trade unionists quickly realized the potential for mobilizing informal neighborhood and friendship ties that already existed between workers in the city,⁴⁹ and sought to channel them to support the strike movement. Thus, the union leadership recognized and sought to mobilize important constituent links of existing workers’ social networks, suggesting the existence of a dense set of relationships in places where workers lived.

In large part, SMSBCD board members acted on the basis of shared experiences common to so many of the workers in São Bernardo. In addition to knowledge about tough daily life on the factory floor, other experiences that were external to the plant also seemed to play a decisive role in forming the SMSBCD leadership’s approach to labor organizing. If we consider the representatives elected to the board for the 1978–1981 term, we find that, in most cases, they knew what it was like to live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of workers, since two-thirds of them (sixteen out of twenty-four) were actual residents of São Bernardo,⁵⁰ where approximately seven out of ten industrial workers were both employed in the steelworking industry and living in the city, according to a 1976 municipal publication.⁵¹ Lula, for example, lived in the same neighborhood as three other directors who were elected in 1978: Nelson Campanholo, Salvador Venâncio, and José Joeste Fontes. It is worth adding that Campanholo was a personal friend of Lula and had been the

48. Quoted from: Rainho and Bargas. *As lutas operárias*, p. 234.

49. The published guidelines of the union leaders also served for metalworkers in other cities of the ABC region and even for those living in districts of the city of São Paulo (the south and east areas, basically). However, this article focuses primarily on the metalworkers living in São Bernardo, a municipality of high polarization and strong collective mobilization, and where the vast majority of the leaders of the SMSBCD lived.

50. Communication from Roberto Quass (Director of the Information Division of DEOPS) to Edsel Magnotti (Director of DEOPS) 11 May 1978, Doc. 4. OS – 0288, Archive of the State of São Paulo (Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo – AESP), State Department of Social and Political Order (Departamento Estadual de Ordem Política e Social – DEOPS).

51. *Subsídios Estatísticos*, SPE, PMSBC, 1976, p. 15.

best man at his wedding in 1974.⁵² Both of them, therefore, had deep roots in a community of both fellow workers and neighbors.

During the 1979 strike, however, it was the workers themselves, in the face of increasing police repression and other difficulties, who began to mobilize their social networks to keep the strike going, revealing to the union leadership the potential of these networks. In July 1979, Wagner Alves Lino, a metalworker and union activist, tried to summarize how this process worked:

At first you could see the picket line concentrated at the factory gate, because it was the place where people got off the bus and the workers themselves took charge of the strike as it was the result of a lot of preparatory work. [...] When the repression increased at the factory gates, the workers themselves said: “We will stop this right here” and flying pickets began to appear, who stopped buses in the middle of the road. And then you didn’t know where there would be a picket, guys would tell you where it would happen. Groups of pickets organized themselves here and there [...]. At a specific moment the workers themselves took control of everything because the business began to be done in the neighborhood, from house to house, in the market. Most company buses came out of the neighborhoods and the police were seizing people in markets and in neighborhoods. People began to go to bus stops in the morning to stop people from getting on the bus, helping out the people who were still stationed at the factory gate. The bus arrived, but 95% of the passengers were missing. [...]. At the last moment, when picketing was going on in the neighborhood, if a comrade knew that another worker was breaking the strike, he would go with his wife and talk to the guy and his family. The most important thing about this strike was that the São Bernardo union, with very firm leadership, managed to keep the movement reined in [...]. There were different ideas among the workers, but the idea of the union, the union’s leadership, prevailed.⁵³

By turning to their social networks to continue the strike, the workers demonstrated the flexibility of their socio-cultural practices. For example, in the middle of the strike, family visits became acts of collective mobilization. Alves’s testimony also emphasizes the relationship between forms of police repression and the mobilization of workers. As repression intensified, worker mobilization became more informal, which in turn made the state security forces’ work difficult, if not impossible. In a certain way, what Alves delineates is a process in which the “picket line at the factory gate” became the “picket at the house door”, and then the “picket at the bus stop”; these different modes of action were not separate from each other but in fact functioned together in many different ways,

52. See <http://goo.gl/liJCVp> (accessed 9 November 2009).

53. Wagner Lino Alves, interviewed by Maria Dolores Prades and Maria Aparecida de Paul Rago on 19 and 26 July 1979, in “O arrocho treme nas bases do ABC: debate com os trabalhadores das bases do Sindicato de São Bernardo”, *Escrita. Ensaio*, 4:7 (April 1980), p. 68.

depending on the circumstances. The actions of metalworkers who took part in this movement highlight the relationship between formal institutions and workers’ informal practices, which functioned in dialogue with both collective deliberations and the guidelines of union leaders. The leadership, for its part, recognized the effectiveness of social networks in mobilizing the workers of the city, who at times even surprised the leaders of the strike with their autonomy in taking certain actions, such as picketing in neighborhoods. According to Rainho and Bargas, these forms of action “sometimes included 200 or more workers who in many cases gathered independently, and even without the knowledge of the strike leaders”.⁵⁴

The strike movement of 1979 also showed union leaders the importance of the family and, more specifically, the wives of those involved in collective mobilization. The leadership stated that “it was necessary to involve the metalworkers’ families”,⁵⁵ and “a great ally, who enabled the strike to happen, were the female companions of the metalworkers”.⁵⁶ Like most metalworkers in São Bernardo, the official representatives elected to the management of the SMSBCD during 1978–1981 were married men.⁵⁷ Consequently, they experienced the same pressure from family – especially from wives – about their decisions. This helps us understand why Sampaio, in his hybrid “fictionalized report” on the strike of 1979 describes Lula as being concerned about the “visits that he and the other officials of the union would have to do on weekends to the wives of the most active comrades, before their opponents could catch them off guard and put doubts into their heads”.⁵⁸

The experience of the fifteen-day work stoppage in 1979 had a significant impact on both the preparation for the 1980 strike and the way in which it was carried out. The prospect of a long strike and, from its inception, the impending threat of federal intervention, according to previous statements from Minister of Labor,⁵⁹ created the circumstances in which workers’ social networks were given ample space within the SMSBCD leaders’ mobilization strategy. In fact, as preparations for the

54. Rainho and Bargas, *As lutas operárias*, p. 127.

55. Interview by the author with Gilberto de Souza Cunha, former director of the SMSBCD, 9 October 2008.

56. *Ibid.*

57. A study conducted in 1984 by Leôncio M. Rodrigues, at the Ford plant in São Bernardo indicated that 79 per cent of “hourly workers” of the company were “married” or “lived maritally”. See Leôncio M. Rodrigues, *Partidos e Sindicatos: escritos de sociologia política* (São Paulo, 1990), pp. 105–148, 110. According to Elisabeth Souza-Lobo, in 1976, in the metalworking sector in São Bernardo, women made up 9 per cent of the workforce; Souza-Lobo, *A classe operária tem dois sexos: trabalho, dominação e resistência* (São Paulo, 1991), p. 33.

58. Sampaio, *Lula e a greve*, p. 54.

59. *Folha de São Paulo*, 27 and 28 March 1980.

1980 strike were under way, the leadership did not conceive of workers as isolated individuals making decisions about their participation in the strike on their own but rather as “entangled” individuals, whose deliberations were pulled in different directions by pressure from their employers, and relationships with family, friends, neighbors and, of course, work colleagues. In that case, union leaders seeking to mobilize such bonds with their appeals called upon socio-cultural values and practices that were already rooted among workers; workers could thus relate (and respond) to these calls more directly.

It may have been in the “heat of battle” that the metalworkers’ union leaders formulated the idea that collective mobilization arose out of the articulation between multiple social ties and spaces, from militant unionism to family ties, from assemblies in public spaces to meetings in workers’ homes. Yet it was leaders’ and SMSBCD activists’ long and careful preparation for the 1980 strike that was truly essential for unleashing the potential in these social networks. In April 1980, the *Tribuna Metalúrgica*, the newspaper of the SMSBCD, emphasized the joint organizational effort of unions, factories, and neighborhoods: “Since the beginning, our wage campaign was discussed in favelas [slums], neighborhood societies, and in meetings attended by up to 400 comrades and their families.”⁶⁰

It is important to add here that the organizational structure developed by union leaders and activists to sustain the mobilization for the 1980 strike was configured as a pyramid,⁶¹ with the Board of the SMSBCD (24 members) as the apex and the base consisting of thousands of workers embedded in the neighborhoods in which they lived, relying on intermediate links such as the “Salaries Committee” (about 400 members) and a significant number (about 4,000) of “metalworker activists”. Once the decision to start or continue a strike was taken in a public general assembly, this structure began operating. Mobilization strategies would be defined by the Board of the SMSBCD, by the “Substitute” Strike Committee,⁶² and by members of the Salaries Committee.⁶³ The latter

60. *Tribuna Metalúrgica*, April 1980. The preparation for the wage campaign included “slow-downs” and reducing the amount of overtime performed by workers; *Folha de São Paulo*, 30 March 1980.

61. On the organizational structure of the strike see: *Folha de São Paulo*, 3 May 1980; Antunes, “As formas da greve”, pp. 207–208; Anon, 41 *Dias de Resistência e Luta: uma análise da greve feita por quem dela participou* (São Bernardo, 1980).

62. The directors of SMSBCD anticipated their own imprisonment and chose sixteen people to replace them in this eventuality. Most of these “substitutes” served in the Salaries Commission, and some were militant leftists from political organizations that had acted clandestinely in factories.

63. It is worth noting that the Salaries Commission had the substantial and active participation of workers with a background in leftist political organizations; author interview with Enilson Simões de Moura, 2 September 2009.

two committees, situated at the top of the pyramid, were to serve as a sort of benchmark to articulate the actions of other metallurgical activists,⁶⁴ finally reaching the other workers. The flow could also be reversed: information from the base, about, for example, the actions in the neighborhoods and the “spirit” of the strikers could reach the top of the pyramid and thus keep leaders aware of everyday progress in the strike.⁶⁵

To assure the possibility of a longer-lasting strike, a strike fund was created, an entity that was legally autonomous from the SMSBCD. Thus, even if there were federal intervention, the union leaders could maintain control of another institutional structure, which could play the important role of polarizing relations with other social sectors. Despite the multiple alliances and support that the socio-political situation of the *abertura* – the political “opening” in Brazil as authoritarian military rule tapered off in the early 1980s – offered, the union leaders of São Bernardo do Campo primarily hitched their expectations of success in the 1980 strike to the number of workers who actually joined the strike and their capacity to mobilize the metalworkers involved in it. It was in this context and based on previous experience that, with the beginning of the strike of 1980, leaders increasingly called on workers’ social networks.

SOCIAL NETWORKS IN SUPPORT OF THE 1980 STRIKE

Extensive documentation, including reports from the Department of Political and Social Order (DEOPS), the organ of São Paulo’s police charged with surveillance and investigation of social movements, reveals that from the first day of the 1980 strike, when 40,000 workers gathered in the Vila Euclides Stadium, union leaders in São Bernardo appealed explicitly to the mobilizing potential of the social networks of the workers. In his speech, “Lula reiterated the request that pickets should not appear at factory gates [...]. He said, however, that workers

64. Considering the workers who attended the union meetings immediately prior to the beginning of the 1980 strike (4,000 approx.) and those who were present at the meeting that ended the strike (also approx. 4,000), we can estimate a group with a relatively high commitment in relation to the SMSBCD. The intensity and mode of participation in collective mobilization of this group of so-called “metalworker activists” were extremely variable. For insights into this group of “metalworker activists” see, for instance, the following sources from the spheres of both the union and the states’ security apparatus: “Estatística do número de trabalhadores, por empresa, na assembléia geral extraordinária, do dia 29 [de fevereiro] e 1° [de março], às 3 seções, em convocação, referente à Campanha Salarial”, SMSBCD archive; and “Rel. no. 75/80 de Fox 06 para Del. Tit. da Del. de Sind. e Assoc. de Classe do DEOPS. Ref. Ass. dos Metalúrgicos do ABC”, 12 May 1980, OS – 1147, AESP, DEOPS sector.

65. Anon, 41 *Dias de Resistência e Luta*, pp. 27–28.

should approach their neighbors and friends, so that they would join the strike.”⁶⁶ Two days later, at another general meeting the President of the SMSBCD “asked the workers to take advantage of the public holiday [Holy Week] to visit other members and increase participation in the strike”,⁶⁷ and that for the next public meeting, “each worker should bring two others”.⁶⁸ Going in the same direction, the official newsletter of the SMSBCD recommended the following in its 8 and 10 April editions: “convince your metalworker neighbor to continue the strike. We will only return to work when we are victorious.”⁶⁹ On 12 April, a Saturday, Lula explained what workers should strive to do on Sundays, the day when assemblies usually did not occur: “Tomorrow is the day to visit friends and neighbors and ask them not to work.”⁷⁰ Similarly, on the previous Sunday, the President of the SMSBCD had advised workers that “everyone should go to the houses of colleagues to bring encouragement and moral support and to explain the purpose of the strike so that everyone can be aware and confident of victory”.⁷¹

During the “forty-one-days strike”, similar appeals permeated public speeches and documents prepared by union leaders and activists. On 14 April, hours before the Regional Labor Court (Tribunal Regional do Trabalho – TRT) would reach its decision that declared the strike illegal,⁷² the SMSBCD bulletin advised: “visit your fellow metalworkers. Keep them firm.”⁷³ Fifteen days later, in Vila Euclides, Juraci Magalhães, a leader of the SMSBCD, summoned workers to attend a meeting on 1 May, International Workers’ Day; he insisted: “everyone should attend, also

66. *Diário do Grande ABC* (DGBAC), 2 April 1980. The SMSBCD newspaper confirmed the instructions given to workers: “Overall, 70% of workers ceased working in the early hours of the 1st April. [...] As of today, it is necessary that the strike reaches 100%, members must engage with the ‘strike-breakers’ where they live, so that they are convinced not to go to work”; *Tribuna Metalúrgica*, April 1980.

67. *Folha de São Paulo*, 4 April 1980.

68. Telex from DEOPS (SP) to SNI, DRT, CIOP, IV Comar, II Army and Naval Commission about a “public act by striking metalworkers in the Vila Euclides Stadium, São Bernardo do Campo”, 3 April 1980; OS – 0099, AESP, DEOPS sector.

69. *Suplemento Informativo da Tribuna Metalúrgica*, official publication of the SMSBCD, 8 and 10 April 1980.

70. DGABC, 13 April 1980.

71. Resumo sobre a Missa Pascal dos Metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo e Diadema (Summary of the Easter Mass of the metalworkers of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema), 6 April 1980, Doc. 02. OS – 1148, AESP, DEOPS sector.

72. According to Brazilian law at the time, a strike could be judged by the Labor Court, a specific branch of the national judicial system. If it were understood to be “illegal”, the Ministry of Labor could intervene in a union and remove its board.

73. Bulletin entitled “Nossa luta continua até a vitória final, haja o que houver”, printed on paper with the SMSBCD stamp, circulated on 14 April 1980, Dossier 50-Z-341 (File 22), AESP, DEOPS sector.

invite your neighbors and friends”.⁷⁴ Such invitations were to be extended to families and relatives. Shortly before the strike began, the trade-union activist Alemão addressed workers at the gates of the Mercedes-Benz factory, urging them to attend the assembly and repeating what would become one of the central slogans of the 1980 Salaries Campaign: “take your children, wife, fiancée, father-in-law, and mother-in-law; take them all to the stadium”.⁷⁵ In the early days of the strike movement, Lula appealed to workers, “go, and take your relatives and friends” to the assembly.⁷⁶ A few days earlier, he had not missed the opportunity to make the same plea at the gates of the Volkswagen factory: “go out into the field, and let’s effectively gather an assembly of the workers’ women and children”.⁷⁷ As the strike was about to end, when the majority of the board of the SMSBCD had already been arrested, the strike newsletter made clear that “the place of the workers’ families, their wives, sisters, mothers, mother-in-laws and their children is already assured: not only at home, but shoulder to shoulder in the struggle”.⁷⁸

In the 1980 strike, as well as that of 1979, as state repression intensified against the strikers, the social networks of the workers gained more importance in the process of collective mobilization. A series of dramatic events occurred in April 1980 that had the effect of driving workers’ conceptions of political and social dissent further into the personal spaces of their lives: the declaration of the illegality of the strike by the TRT (14 April); the escalation of police repression throughout the city (from 15 April on); federal intervention in the SMSBCD (17 April); the start of arrests of union leaders and activists (19 April); the prohibition of assemblies in public spaces (20 April); and management’s threats of dismissal on the grounds that the strikers had been absent from work for thirty contiguous days thereby having officially “abandoned their jobs”⁷⁹

74. Report by informant (from security at Mercedes-Benz) to the Department of Analysis Operations and Information of DEOPS, referring to meeting held at São Bernardo do Campo main square, 29 April 1980 at 10.30; undated, OS – 1148, AESP, DEOPS sector.

75. Report by informant (from security at Mercedes-Benz) to the Department of Analysis Operations and Information of DEOPS, referring to summary of speeches held by the board of SMSBCD in front of the gates of Mercedes-Benz, 19 March 1980; undated, OS – 1148, AESP, DEOPS sector.

76. Telex from DEOPS (SP) to SNI, DRT, CIOP, IV Comar, II Army and Naval Commission about a “public act by striking metalworkers in the Vila Euclides Stadium, São Bernardo do Campo”, 3 April 1980; OS – 0099, AESP, DEOPS sector.

77. Transcript of a speech given by Lula at a rally of the SMSBCD board in front of the gates (P-II) of Volkswagen do Brasil, 11 March 1980 at 14.30, Dossier 50-Z-341 (File 22). AESP, DEOPS sector.

78. Bulletin entitled “Companheiros e companheiras! A luta continua [...]”, signed by “The Board/Salaries Commission”, printed on paper with the SMSBCD stamp, distributed a few days before 8 May 1980; Dossier 50-Z-341 (File 23), AESP, DEOPS sector.

79. *Folha de São Paulo*, 25 April 1980.

(from 23 April). These events contributed to an increasing politicization of the spaces and relationships within the workers' everyday lives. The dual role of strike leaders as both members and representatives of their class allowed them to move between a position of "talking within", a mode of communication based on such categories as family, relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and so on, and a position of "speaking out", one anchored in such overtly politicized terms as "working class". With this double movement,⁸⁰ they developed a class-based language built on a vocabulary of social networks, which, in the socio-political environment of the *abertura*, resonated widely in the socio-cultural ties, practices and values prevalent among the striking workers.

As we have seen, in the preparations for the 1980 strike, the leaders of the SMSBCD emphasized the role of the family, and not the individual, as the basic unit of collective mobilization. Employers also recognized wives and families as important allies in defining the direction of the strike.⁸¹ "Women as wives" were thus visible and addressed throughout the strike of 1980 – something that rarely occurred with the women who happened to work in the metal industry themselves. Employers and trade unionists thus both came to the same conclusion: even if absent from certain spaces consensually known as "public", women played a decisive role in sustaining the strike. The 41-day period of the work stoppage overwhelmingly indicates that the strikers' wives also supported the action. The public support that the local Roman Catholic Church offered to the strike movements in the ABC region of São Paulo since their outbreak in the late 1970s was immensely helpful in garnering the support of workers' wives for the action; references to the justness of the strikes in religious services and meetings with women and mothers in clubs were common.⁸²

The discourse of the union leadership was also significant in this process, however, since it was mainly driven by the socio-cultural practices and values prevailing among the metalworkers and their women. As Souza-Lobo points out: the key attributes of the male metalworker, represented in the documentation produced by the SMSBCD (newspapers, public speeches and newsletters), were: male, adult, heterosexual,

80. For some key points on the debate concerning languages as revealers/instigators of identity, see Paulo Fontes, "Classe e linguagem: notas sobre o debate em torno de *Languages of Class* de Stedman Jones", *Locus: Revista de História*, 4:2 (1998), pp. 77–91.

81. During the first days of the strike, the President of the Union of Metalworkers of Santo André "criticized the campaign that entrepreneurs had been running, through newspapers, radio, and television, calling on the women of the striking metalworkers to convince them to return to work"; *Folha de São Paulo*, 4 April 1980.

82. Nádía A.L. Camargo, "A geografia das lutas metalúrgicas no ABC paulista na virada dos anos 70 do século XX" (M.A., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2003), pp. 69–85.

married, father, and the (single) economic provider for the home.⁸³ In union documents, there is an insistence on the idea that workers were on strike to fulfill satisfactorily their status as male providers. In this sense, they were on strike because they were men striving to fulfill obligations that were, ultimately, the confirmation of their masculinity. However, participating in the strike endangered their employment, which threatened the effectiveness of the role of male provider. Striking workers faced the possibility that their wives would remind them of their masculine obligations and ask them therefore not to participate in the strike. To resolve this impasse, it was necessary to match the "needs of trade" with "the needs of the family", which meant recognizing the importance of the role of wives in the decisions of their husbands: "Support your husband. He is fighting with us for a fairer wage. He is fighting to provide more comfort for you and your children. You, companion, are our ally."⁸⁴ This was still construed as a man's struggle, but the extent of the support the movement received from strikers' female companions demonstrated that family obligations drew them into the struggle, too.⁸⁵

Strikers' women also played other, less evident, roles such as collecting food for the strike fund. They were also able to place their broad knowledge of the social dynamics of the neighborhoods in which they lived at the service of the strike. Traditional informal mechanisms of social communication (and control) could, for example, be used to mobilize workers in their neighborhoods by monitoring the movements of people, particularly strike-breakers and police, and the circulation of information.⁸⁶ Confirming the efficacy of such practices and demonstrating that they were not restricted to strikers' female companions, the metalworker Daniel, a member of the Salaries Commission, remarked in testimony given in June 1980 that:

The work in the neighborhoods during the strike was very similar to that of the work in the organization. I linked the Commission and the neighborhood. [...]

83. E. Souza-Lobo, *A classe operária*, pp. 17–40. While acknowledging that, on occasion, "the percentage of women metalworkers is relatively small in São Bernardo" (9 per cent in the sector and approximately 4 per cent in the automobile industry), E. Souza-Lobo, *A classe operária*, p. 38, does not hesitate to state that: "The idea of *unity*, in the concept of the 'unity of the working class', was confused [in the union discourse] with the idea of *identity*, which excluded the notion of *difference*" (italics in original).

84. Untitled bulletin signed by Luiz Inácio da Silva, printed on paper with the SMSBCD stamp and circulated between 1 and 19 April 1980; Doc. 1, handbook 149.689 (v. 2), AESP, DEOPS sector.

85. Two events appear as key moments regarding the involvement of women: the retaking on 1 May of the Vila Euclides Stadium, and the "walk of the metalworkers towards the resumption of negotiations" on 8 May; for coverage of these events see *Vanguarda*, 3 May 1980, and *Folha de São Paulo*, 9 May 1980.

86. Author interview with Maria da Conceição de Freitas Cunha, 21 October 2008.

There was great participation by the people in the neighborhoods. We were assisted in the distribution of bulletins and guidelines of the union by the people of the neighborhood, by the housewives, young people, and people who worked in other trades. [...] After the organization efforts got started in the neighborhoods, the police also started to assemble. The people warned us when there were a lot of police, on which streets they were gathering.⁸⁷

In the restrictive socio-political situation of the *abertura*, the strikers had to cope with government and employer interference in the transmission of information in the press. In the face of this challenge, workers had to rely on the resources at their disposal, including the distribution of newsletters in neighborhoods,⁸⁸ as well as meetings organized by trade-union leaders and activists in neighborhood associations⁸⁹ and churches.⁹⁰ Information obtained by such means, as well as from their own general public assemblies, represented new possibilities for dissemination through workers' social networks. Because of this, the strike leaders appealed to their members: "Do not believe the news from newspapers, radio, and television, which speak of the failure of the strike. DO NOT BELIEVE THE VOICE OF THE BOSSES. BELIEVE IN THE VOICE OF THE WORKERS."⁹¹ In their neighborhoods, in conversations in the streets and bars, and visiting the homes of other workers placed union members in situations that allowed them – continuing the metaphor – to listen to "the voice" of workers who brought news and opinions about the strike movement. Thus, everyday practices, and the sociability of the workers and of the popular classes in general were deliberately encouraged by union leaders in São Bernardo to encourage both class cohesion and adhesion to the strike.

The worker Ervício F., for example, when interrogated on 15 May 1980 by the state security forces (DEOPS), mentioned that he had spoken with a metalworker who wanted to go to work in order to persuade him otherwise because, "during the workers' assemblies, all the leaders who

87. Interviews with Daniel, by Heloísa H.T.S. Martins, Henrique Pereira, and Carlos A. Ricardo on 26 and 28 June 1980; "A Igreja na greve", p. 43.

88. Within a few hours, the Salaries Commission and board members of the SMSBCD were able to distribute 100,000 newsletters stating, for example, times and locations of public meetings; see, for instance, *Folha de São Paulo*, 22 April 1980.

89. "As far as São Bernardo was concerned, [affirmed Mário Alonso, President of Federação das Sociedades de Amigos de Bairro de São Bernardo (SABs) (Federation of Neighborhoods Associations of São Bernardo)] the support was almost total. In addition to the collection for the strike fund, which the SABs organised themselves, many leaders, who are also metalworkers, participated actively supporting the strike"; *Folha de São Bernardo*, 17 May 1980.

90. Nádia A.L. Camargo, "A geografia das lutas metalúrgicas no ABC paulista na virada dos anos 70 do século XX" (M.A., São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, 2003), p. 170.

91. *Suplemento Informativo da Tribuna Metalúrgica*, official publication of the SMSBCD, 8 April 1980.

spoke into the microphone [...] urged the workers to continue the strike and that everybody should speak with colleagues who intended to return to work”.⁹² In June 1980, José, a Mercedes-Benz worker and a member of the Salaries Commission, stated about the activities during the strike in his neighborhood, Vila São José of São Bernardo: “when a guy was known in the neighborhood, we went to his house to ask why he was breaking the strike”.⁹³ Dorgival Ferreira da Silva was a member of the same commission and a resident of a nearby neighborhood, and he participated in the 1980 strike along with his father, brothers, uncles, and cousins, all metalworkers: “often we went to the house [of a strike-breaker] to talk to him, have a coffee with him”.⁹⁴ These visits and conversations in the neighborhoods even gained some formalization by union activists, who organized “teams” to work in certain areas.⁹⁵

It was informal actions, however, that were most common. Accordingly, meetings and chats in small neighborhood bars could become important opportunities for disseminating information, sparking debate, and promote cohesion. At the same time, it could lead to more confrontational exchanges and sometimes even physical conflict. According to Dorgival Ferreira da Silva, a resident of the Vila Ferrazópolis neighborhood: “We really chased down our own friends. [...] We knew that one of them was a strike-breaker, and then we went to a bar, a pub [...], it was bad for him, and we really made him pay for what he did.”⁹⁶ A similar situation arose in the same neighborhood when José Manoel Leandro de Brito was shot, according to a report in the *Diário do Grande ABC* newspaper, by Francisco Antão de Souza, who claimed that he felt “offended” by the fact that José, a metalworker and his colleague, called him a “strike-breaker”.⁹⁷ Under these circumstances, bars could become out of bounds to those who did not adhere to the strike.

Bars had been identified by union leaders as important places of collective mobilization already in 1979. In fact, after federal intervention against the SMSBCD in March 1979, the Board itself and the Salaries Commission had based themselves not only in the parish hall of the Church of São Bernardo do Campo but also in the Aquarius Bar, located near the church, making both places gathering points for workers.⁹⁸

92. Report from F. Ervício to Edsel Magnotti, Division of Social Order, DOPS, São Paulo, 15 May 1980; Handbook 149.689 (v. 2), AESP, DEOPS sector.

93. Interviews with José by H.H.T.S. Martins, H. Pereira and C.A. Ricardo on 26 and 28 June 1980; “A Igreja na greve”, p. 38.

94. Author interview with Dorgival Ferreira da Silva, 29 May 2009.

95. Interviews with Isaías by Heloísa H.T.S. Martins, Henrique Pereira, and Carlos A. Ricardo on 26 and 28 June 1980; “A Igreja na greve”, p. 41, and *Folha de São Paulo*, 4 April 1980.

96. Author interview with Dorgival Ferreira da Silva, 29 May 2009.

97. *Diário do Grande ABC*, 4 April 1980.

98. Rainho and Bargas, *As lutas operárias*, p. 149; *Folha de São Bernardo*, 19 May 1979.

The leadership of the metalworkers had thus recognized that the activities of trade unionism and collective mobilization had moved beyond the boundaries of the union and the factories, reaching loci that were fundamental to the extramural sociability of workers outside their workplace.⁹⁹ In the strike of 1980, the situation was no different. Sites that were regularly visited by workers, bars in particular, were understood by Lula as a sort of “thermometer” to gauge the willingness of workers with respect to the strikes. Manoel Anísio, one of the twenty-four “directors” of the SMSBCD between 1978 and 1980, recalls that at the general public meetings in Vila Euclides, “Lula had this habit of going around among the workers. He went there, to the bars on the outskirts of Vila Euclides [...]. To get a sense of what was going on!”¹⁰⁰

In addition to bars, workers’ dense social lives revolved around several guesthouses (*pensões*), especially those located near the center of São Bernardo.¹⁰¹ It is therefore not surprising that during the strike in 1980, these guesthouses should have emerged in some cases as important locations of labor activism, especially in times of open clashes between strikers and police in the central areas of the city.¹⁰² As Almir Pazzianotto, a lawyer representing the SMSBCD, put it: “the workers mainly live in guesthouses. This daily contact generates a spirit of brotherhood, which is what sustains the struggle.”¹⁰³ Even before the strike, some union activists already had a sense of the potential for the mobilization of workers who lived in guesthouses, as evidenced by the production of a play entitled *Pensão Liberdade* [Freedom Guesthouse]. Grupo de Teatro Forja [Forja Theatre Group] of the SMSBCD prepared and presented the play during the 1980 Salaries Campaign.¹⁰⁴

In their homes, in the neighborhoods in which they resided, in pubs, and of course, in the assemblies and at the factory gates where they met their friends and colleagues, metalworkers in São Bernardo put a dense web of pre-existing relationships at the service of the collective mobilization in support of the “forty-one days strike” of 1980. Consequently “reasons” expressed by workers for supporting the strike, which were disseminated by the vigorous and widespread activism of union leaders, gained new momentum as they began to circulate in the specific context of the workers’ existing relationships. The mobilization through social

99. *Folha de São Bernardo*, 19 May 1979.

100. Author interview with Manoel Anísio Gomes, 21 October 2008.

101. Among the newly arrived migrants to São Bernardo, especially the younger and non-married, guesthouses (*pensões*) were a fairly common type of housing. In addition to rented rooms, often shared, *pensões* could also offer other services such as food and laundry.

102. On the role of guesthouses see e.g. *Folha de São Bernardo*, 31 May 1980.

103. *Folha de São Paulo*, 11 May 1980.

104. Grupo de Teatro Forja do SMSBCD, *Pensão Liberdade* (São Paulo, 1981), pp. 47–48.

networks was vital for the process that sustained the strike and could unfold in two different ways. First, among the workers who shared strong social bonds; in this case, the use of physical violence was only a last resort. Second, social networks were also essential in organizing the picket lines; the pickets acted mainly as instruments to convince those workers with whom the picket-liners had no strong interpersonal connections.¹⁰⁵ Here, some degree of physical violence was always a possibility.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE FORMATION OF PICKET LINES IN THE STRIKE OF 1980

In the “forty-one-days strike” of 1980, picket organizers deployed a broad spectrum of social ties, acting in a variety of different spaces and using multiple approaches to persuade and force their fellow workers to comply with the strike. Argumentative persuasion, moral pressure, and physical force were all used to fill the ranks of the pickets and to join and remain on strike. These methods coexisted at different points in the strike, varying in their relative importance depending on the intensity and forms of repression adopted by the state to confront the working-class action.

The “factory-gate pickets” were largely recruited from the SMSBCD; they were numerous and mainly included union activists, several of who were also militants from leftist political organizations who were already acting clandestinely in the factories. In the early days of the strike of 1980, this type of picket was rarely used. As the strike drew on, however, these activists took a more important role when some workers tried to return to work.¹⁰⁶

With the TRT ruling that the strike was unlawful and the order of federal intervention in the SMSBCD, this type of picket suffered serious constraints due to the growing size of the police contingent who started to “set up camp” in São Bernardo do Campo,¹⁰⁷ particularly in the central areas and at the factory entrances. At that time, the “neighborhood pickets”, who had already been congregating mainly at bus stops, grew sharply in importance.¹⁰⁸ These neighborhood pickets generally formed a smaller group than those who gathered at factory gates and included many union activists, who also mobilized their social networks in the

105. To avoid being labelled as “strikers” by supervisors, it was common for “factory-gate pickets” to picket places of work other than their own; author interviews with Odilon Dias de Souza, 3 July 2008 and 15 September 2008.

106. The role of leftist activists is, for instance, highlighted in: *A Vanguarda*, 5 April 1980.

107. See DGABC, 19 April 1980. The state security forces directly involved in repressing the strike were the following: Military Police, DEOPS, Federal Police, Civil Police, Fire Fighters, and the Army (only helicopters); see *Folha de São Paulo*, 27 April 1980 and 2 May 1980.

108. See DGABC, 19 April 1980.

neighborhoods in which they lived, incorporating colleagues, neighbors, friends, and relatives into the action. In June 1980, José, a metalworker from the Vila São José neighborhood who was also a member of the Salaries Commission, explained how people and information were moved along these networks. In just a few hours, José recalls, by means of “communication devices in the neighborhood”, or in other words “walking out and knocking on peoples’ doors”, it was possible to form pickets with dozens of participants.¹⁰⁹

From 19 April 1980, when the arrest of union leaders and activists, the ban on general assemblies in public spaces, and the siege of São Bernardo do Campo by the forces of state repression began,¹¹⁰ neighborhoods increasingly became *the* critical spaces for collective mobilization.¹¹¹ Under these circumstances, various forms of informal “enforcement groups” (*agrupamentos de coação*) became increasingly important for inducing workers to join the strike, and they were able to rely on a highly variable number of participants, including union activists and others. Because they pressured strike-breakers in their own homes, these groups were called “doorstep pickets” (*piquetes em porta de casa*).

Some “doorstep pickets” acted in groups of just one or two people. On 30 April, for example, Roberto de Souza Dantas, a Volkswagen worker, went to the police station in São Bernardo do Campo to register a police report. He claimed that he had just returned from work when José and Francisco, also Volkswagen employees, approached him at the gate of his home, uttering “threats of aggression” for “not having gone on strike”.¹¹² José, a plumber and Roberto’s neighbor, lived on a street in Jardim Petroni, a neighborhood at the periphery of São Bernardo do Campo. For this “doorstep picket”, José had turned to his fellow Volkswagen colleague, Francisco, also from the state of Ceará and possibly his cousin, who lived in the Vila Paula neighborhood of São Caetano do Sul. As this and many other examples indicate, ties of kinship and “common origin” had great importance for the formation of pickets, even, as in this case, surpassing the considerable distances between the places of residence of those involved in the picketing. Also on other occasions kinship ties proved important.

109. Interviews with José, by Heloísa H.T.S. Martins, Henrique Pereira, and Carlos A. Ricardo on 26 and 28 June 1980; “A Igreja na greve”, p. 38. For similar accounts see author interviews with José Euzébio (16 October 2008) and José Ferreira de Souza (23 June 2009), among others.

110. *Folha de São Paulo*, 23 April 1980.

111. *41 Dias de Resistência e Luta*, p. 27. This work, which attempts to summarize assessments of the collective mobilization that ended on 11 May 1980, was published after a series of debates, in July 1980, and included the comments and testimonies of fifty activists “who had a prominent role during the strike”.

112. BO no. 2607/80, São Bernardo do Campo Police Station, 30 April 1980, OS – 0099. All the police documentation that follows can be found at the DEOPS sector of the Archive of the State of São Paulo (AESP). References to follow will indicate only the boxes and file records.

On the thirtieth day of the strike, for example, four workers who shared the common last name Moraes, all Volkswagen workers, formed a picket line with two neighbors near the plant of Brastemp, a major producer of domestic appliances.¹¹³ Besides being relatives, three of the four Moraes family members lived in the same house, or on the same piece of land, located in the Ferrazópolis neighborhood. Of these six pickets, five were from Ceará, which, once more, implies the importance of "common origin".

In the metalworking industries of São Bernardo do Campo migrants often originated from the same cities. Some knew each other in their home towns or had migrated together. Others met after the migration process. In any case, evidence shows that personal ties that predated the strike helped in the formation of pickets. On 30 April 1980, for example, eight metalworkers were arrested in a bar, accused of picketing a nearby bus stop. Among those arrested, five were born in the town of Cristais in the state of Minas Gerais and worked at the Ford Motor Company.¹¹⁴ Besides, all eight detainees lived in the areas around the same neighborhood, Vila Gerty in São Caetano, leading back to one of the decisive social bonds sustaining all mobilizations around the strikes: the local community.

Considering the arrests made by the police and reported to DEOPS, there were many cases of workers who lived on the same street or on adjacent ones and who were arrested together and accused of picketing. Likewise, the police documentation reveals that engaging in picketing was based on pre-existing loyalties. In fact, there are cases in which pickets who were also neighbors were arrested together kilometers away from their homes, suggesting the strength of loyalty between them.¹¹⁵ The relationship between people who lived in the same community could be converted into a new type of proximity between two or more individuals within a larger picket containing other workers. Thus, interpersonal ties, which at first glance might seem invisible, conferred a remarkable cohesion, especially for workers undertaking high-risk actions.

For example, on 29 April 1980 an incident occurred involving some workers who lived near each other in the suburbs of Santo André.¹¹⁶

113. BO no. 2607/80, Police Station, São Bernardo do Campo, 30 April 1980, OS – 0099.

114. BO no. 1721/80, Police Station, São Caetano do Sul, 30 April 1980, OS – 0099. At the same picket another four strikers were detained, all of them from Bom Jesus da Lapa in the state of Bahia; see Message 2110/80, telex from Police Station in São Bernardo do Campo to DEOPS, São Paulo, 16 April 1980; Dossier 50-Z-341 (File 22).

115. Message 1221/80, telex from Police Station in Mauá to DEOPS in São Paulo, Ref. 6 May 1980, OS – 0099; Message 2497/80, telex from Police Station in São Bernardo do Campo to DEOPS in São Paulo, Ref. BO 2730/80, 6 May 1980, OS – 0096; Message 2223/80, telex from Police Station in São Bernardo do Campo to DEOPS in São Paulo, Ref. BO 2440/80, 22 April 1980, OS – 0096.

116. Arrest warrant regarding F. Ervício, V.S. Clovis, J.R. Alfredo, and F. Sérgio, Police Station, Santo André (Civil Police, São Paulo), 29 April 1980; Doc. 104, OS – 0097, File 19.

Four metalworkers were arrested and accused of “bodily injury” and “coercion to strike” against a fifth metalworker who had refused to join the strike. The group of attackers did not work in the same company; however, they did live in the same neighborhood and they were “close friends”, as is made explicit in their testimony.¹¹⁷

A highly evocative episode that demonstrates the importance of the underlying social relationships to actions taken during the strike was the clash between workers and police in the vicinity of the SMSBCD headquarters on 18 April 1980, the day on which the federal official, Osvaldo Pereira de Aguiar, was scheduled to assume the command of the union.¹¹⁸ According to documentation from DEOPS, 27 workers were arrested, 85 per cent of whom lived in São Bernardo do Campo. Of the São Bernardo residents, approximately 80 per cent lived in only two neighborhoods of the city, Centro and Ferrazópolis, both close to the SMSBCD headquarters, which would have facilitated rapid access for workers to the scene of the confrontation. Looking more closely at the large numbers of these workers who were arrested and who lived in São Bernardo, eight of them lived in the same street within 20 meters of each other, four lived in the same house, and three in another. All eight probably lived in guesthouses and some of them were relatives and fellow countrymen. Thus, it is worth adding that the guesthouses, as well as bars,¹¹⁹ became nuclei for the preparation of pickets, which resulted in police surveillance of such places.¹²⁰

Among the twenty-seven workers arrested in São Bernardo, it is possible to identify two other sub-groups, both from Ferrazópolis: one of four workers residing in adjacent streets, and the other of four workers living in the same street (three of them in the same house or piece of land). The relevance of common residence is further highlighted by the fact that one of those arrested, Joaquim A.S., was not even a metalworker. This young man, from the state of Goiás, worked in a bakery. It might be possible to consider his arrest as a simple misunderstanding. However, when we observe that two other residents with the same address, Rua Marechal Deodoro 2549, were arrested along with him, it seems likely that they were accompanying Antônio L.O., the only metalworker in the

117. For another example of neighbors arrested together, see the arrest warrants for C. Rubens, M. Xisto, F.S. Newton, and L.C. Del José, Police Station, São Bernardo do Campo, 8 May 1980; OS – 0096 and BO no. 2333/80, Police Station, São Bernardo do Campo, 18 April 1980, OS – 1149.

118. For documentation of the incident see: Identification form, Secretary of State for Public Security Affairs, Civil Police, São Paulo, 18 April 1980; Handbook 149.689 (v. 1) and BO no. 2330/80, Police Station, São Bernardo do Campo, 18 April 1980, OS – 1149.

119. On the importance of guesthouses and bars as organizational “hot spots”, see also author interview with Raimundo Alexandre Sobrinho, 24 August 2009.

120. See DGABC, 23 April 1980.

group, who shared their place of residence. A similar situation occurred with the brothers José Arnaldo and José Nivaldo F., both of whom were not steelworkers but employees of a transport firm. However, they lived in the same house, or piece of land, as the metalworker Jorge C.L., who worked at Brastemp. These two brothers, born in the municipality of Santa Cruz do Capibaribe in the state of Pernambuco, nonetheless seem to have been engaged in the intense confrontation with the Military Police. José Arnaldo was accused by the police of "driving a truck that distributed stones for the metalworkers to throw at vehicles". The police report for José Nivaldo reads: "threw stones at military police". They were accused of helping Jorge C.L. stone a police car. The brothers F. and Jorge C.L. most likely mentioned in the vicinity of the SMSBCD that they were going to undertake this action to their neighbor, the Volkswagen worker Roberto P.C., who was also detained by the police.

The ties of kinship, friendship, neighborhood, and "common origin" appear to have been most prominent in the derivative forms of picketing, such as "doorstep pickets" and "neighborhood pickets". Gilberto de Souza Cunha remembers that these were made up of "everyday people who came to picket".¹²¹ This does not mean, however, that such linkages were absent from the "factory gate pickets". In other cases, the "closeness" between the pickets arose from the friendships forged on the factory floor, which could be the vital link within a group of workers who constituted a picket line.¹²²

At the same time, it should be stressed that many workers not only engaged in picketing because of their ties of kinship, friendship, neighborhood, or employment with other strikers but also because of union activism, membership of political parties, or other types or organizations, or simply because they believed that the strikers' claims were fair and wanted to support them. Accordingly, the Board of the SMSBCD, the Salaries Commission, meetings in churches, neighborhood associations, and public meetings were undoubtedly all instances where workers could be contacted and recruited to picket. Even a "doorstep picket" could be organized through these means. The role of the Board of the SMSBCD and the Salaries Commission was particularly decisive regarding the establishment of "factory-gate pickets" and "neighborhood pickets". To be more precise, even the pickets that were formed from participants' pre-existing informal ties and loyalties interacted with the demands and guidelines of the SMSBCD, the Salaries Commission, and the general public assemblies.

121. Author interview with Gilberto de Souza Cunha, 9 October 2008.

122. See for instance: Statement by A.R. Lourival to Doutor Edson Pereira Serpa, Police Station, São Bernardo do Campo, Police Station, São Bernardo do Campo, 30 April 1980, OS - 0097.

POLITICAL CONJUNCTURE, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND
COLLECTIVE MOBILIZATION IN THE STRIKE OF 1980

The evidence presented in this article shows how workers' social networks proved crucial in the intense collective mobilization that shaped the "forty-one-days strike". Yet the wider socio-political context of the *abertura* that had just become more clearly defined in the second half of the 1970s was also essential.

The progressive crisis of legitimacy of the military regime¹²³ contributed greatly to the fact that in their confrontation with the government, workers showed a willingness to mobilize their social networks to support the strike movement. Specific episodes that involved the metalworkers in São Bernardo resulted in ever increasing antagonism towards the federal government. For example, in the Wage Replacement Campaign of 1977 trade-union leaders and activists denounced the Federal Executive's manipulation of inflation rates in 1973–1974, which resulted in substantial wage losses for workers. In 1978, and especially in 1979 when the SMSBCD suffered federal intervention and the police took control of the streets of São Bernardo, workers experienced intense state repression. Consequently, they increasingly began to perceive the federal government, in particular, as the "other", which when not openly opposing workers, was at least unreceptive to their demands.

In contrast, the public support of the Catholic Church encouraged workers by affirming the justice of their claims. Members of the Church hierarchy and Catholic activists climbed on to platforms and put their symbolic power and organizational resources at the services of the strike. At the assembly that decided the beginning of the strike, D. Cláudio Hummes, the bishop responsible for the ABC region, declared that "your decision deserves only praise and it [the strike] should be carried on until the end", adding that "on the part of the Diocese, we are at your service", and "let us go forward with our Father, revered with much faith by all workers".¹²⁴ In a city like São Bernardo where 87.52 per cent of the population declared itself Catholic,¹²⁵ one can only imagine the impact that the bishop's declaration would have had on workers' willingness not only to engage in struggle but to mobilize their entire social networks for their cause.

The SMSBCD, in turn, asserted itself as an important reference for the workers. Its organizational efforts, including the use of class-based language founded on a vocabulary of networks, increasingly resonated

123. This may be illustrated by the results of the elections of 15 November 1978 for state and federal legislatures, in which the candidates of the ruling party were defeated in São Bernardo by "a wide margin of votes"; *A Vanguarda*, 25 November 1978.

124. *A Vanguarda*, 5 April 1980.

125. *Pesquisa Sócio-Econômica*, Secretaria de Planejamento e Economia, PMSBC, 1979, p. 20.

among workers. Even for militants of the various leftist political organizations, which worked clandestinely in the factories even before the beginning of the strike waves discussed here, the SMSBCD was important in the late 1970s because it was a catalyzer that opened up the possibility of confronting the authoritarian state. Following the union leadership in varying degrees, these combined forces during the 1980 strike made manifest that, as one militant put it, “everyone was united”.¹²⁶ Actively participating in the Salaries Commission, leftist militants continually sought to expand their influence within the strike.¹²⁷

Other sectors of civil society apart from the Church also opposed the military regime and supported the strikers. Hence the public support of the student movement, the Order of Brazilian Lawyers, the Brazilian Press Association, trade unions, and so on. The opposition political parties then in formation (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro – PMDB, Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro – PTB, and Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) constituted a “public eye” that was overwhelmingly in favor of the strikers. This became clear when, for example, the Salaries Commission recommended, in the early days of the strike, that the Board of the SMSBCD “request that the Solidarity Committees, parliamentarians, trade unions and popular democratic movements push for the reopening of negotiations and an impartial stance from the Minister of Labor”.¹²⁸ Reiterating this position, the union leaders did not hesitate: “we need all the entities that struggle for amnesty, freedom, better living conditions, work, education etc. Our cause is the same.”¹²⁹

In São Bernardo do Campo, workers also had the support of the mayor, Tito Costa, who simultaneously foresaw the weakening of the military regime and the possibility of garnering electoral benefits for himself. He did not hesitate, therefore, to allow strikers to use important public places like the Vila Euclides Stadium and the Municipal Square (Paço Municipal) to hold their meetings. Costa’s attitude was diametrically opposed to that adopted by the federal and state governments – the latter headed by Paulo Maluf, who maintained close relations with sectors of the “*linha dura*”¹³⁰ military – that closed off public spaces and repressed workers and their organizations. Such postures, of course, only served to foster collective mobilization.

126. Author interview with Enílson Simões de Moura, 2 September 2009.

127. The three chosen to speak at general meetings on behalf of the Salaries Commission were militants of leftist political organizations: Alemão (October Eighth Revolutionary Movement), Osmarzinho (Communist Unity) and João Batista (Communist Party of Brazil).

128. “Minutes of meeting of Mobilization Commission”, undated, SMSBCD archive.

129. Undated letter entitled “To the Brazilian People”, printed on paper with the letterhead of the SMSBCD; 1980 Salaries Campaign folder, SMSBCD archive.

130. *Linha-dura* (hard-line) is the term generally used at the end of the 1970s to describe elements of the military opposed to the process of liberalization known as *abertura*.

Increasingly dependent upon the neighborhoods, the strike was based on the commitment of union activists and the mobilization of the social networks of the workers. This, in turn, further polarized the relationship between workers, employers, and above all the government. Neighborhoods served as crucibles bringing together the multiple experiences of workers – in other words, the dense connecting tissue of their relationships within communities – that proved to be so fundamental to the 1980 strike. Immediately after the end of the strike, however, many union activists concluded that although neighborhood-based organizing and the social networks that workers established in their communities were largely the mainstay of the strike effort (especially after federal intervention in the SMSBCD), both factors could not, alone, have sustained the strike for long. The general public assemblies in the Vila Euclides Stadium and the institutional and human resources of the SMSBCD were truly indispensable for more extensive resistance.¹³¹ It was through the interaction of all these components that collective mobilization drew its maximum strength.

Evidently, the depletion of workers' economic resources and the broader socio-political environment also contributed to the eventual debilitation of the strike effort. The intransigence of the employers in refusing to reopen negotiations, an attitude supported and encouraged by the military, increasingly eroded hopes that workers' demands would be addressed.¹³² When the demands of the strike, despite the full-scale mobilization of the workers' social networks in its support, seemed practically unattainable, the strike effort began to lose its meaning. Support for the movement began to decline, and many returned to work, including those who had actively supported strike action. Vacillating strikers, who had often joined the strike owing to pressure from pickets and their relationships with other workers, probably started to return earlier.

Despite the unmet demands of the strike, shortly after its end SMSBCD leaders sought to highlight both what they perceived as victories and lessons that had been learned from the movement. For example, Manoel Anísio, leader of the SMSBCD, pointed out "the very high standard of organization of the neighborhoods that this strike achieved", that enabled "the interaction of colleagues from several factories".¹³³ Another newspaper quoted the outlawed board of the SMSBCD to highlight the importance of "small-scale actions in the neighborhoods, and even the assembly and the demonstrations", and reiterated that "during this time out of the factory, we discovered new ways of organizing, we strengthened our unity and we could sense that no worker was alone".¹³⁴

131. See the statements documented in *41 Dias de Resistência e Luta*, pp. 29–30.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

133. *Folha de São Bernardo*, 17 May 1980.

134. *ABCD Jornal*, 17 August 1980.

In fact, as in 1979, the leaders of SMSBCD found that in 1980 “no worker was alone”, but that they were “interconnected”. Thus, recognizing the mobilizing potential in the constituent links of the social networks of these workers, union leaders began preparing the 1981 salary campaign with meetings in working-class neighborhoods on the outskirts of Diadema and São Bernardo, in which “all participated, the women, children, and friends”. Furthermore, the union leadership affirmed, “the residents of the neighborhoods are helping to carry forward our wage campaign”.¹³⁵ In this process, leaders sought to maintain or initiate interactions with several different types of organizations – which were also articulated through social networks – that functioned at community level and had proved to be relevant during the strike effort, from ecclesiastical base communities,¹³⁶ to neighborhood associations,¹³⁷ and even football clubs.¹³⁸

Such practices suggest, then, that the process of class formation came to be articulated through multiple experiences and in various social spaces. If experiences in the workplace and the perception of industrial exploitation by employers fomented the main demands of the workers, encouraging them to strike, links that were developed where they lived and socialized offered obvious substrata for the development of the collective mobilizations of 1979 and 1980. To gain a deeper understanding of the multiple and complex facets of the process of class formation, we must thus be especially attentive to the varied ways in which, throughout the twentieth century, Brazilian workers experienced processes of industrialization, migration, and urbanization – often by way of their social networks.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Francisco Barbosa de Macedo. *Réseaux sociaux et espace urbain: mobilisation des travailleurs dans les premières années du “nouveau” syndicalisme au Brésil.*

En 1980, des milliers d’ouvriers métallurgistes de la région métropolitaine de São Paulo, désignée par “Région du Grand ABC”, conduisirent l’une des grèves les plus

135. *Tribuna Metalúrgica*, December 1980, p. 2.

136. Author interview with Diácono Franco Chippari, 3 July 2009. Ecclesiastical base communities were Catholic groups organized on the basis of sharing both neighborhood vicinity and certain demands. Their goal was to offer Bible reading in conjunction with discussions on the political and social reality in which people lived. This often resulted in the search for collective solutions to a series of pressing problems faced by large sectors of the population (sanitation, housing, public transport etc.). The ecclesiastical base communities were encouraged by sectors of the Catholic Church from the 1960s and spread mainly in the 1970s and 1980s both in Brazil and Latin America in general.

137. Author interview with José Ferreira de Souza, 23 June 2009.

138. *Folha de São Bernardo*, 22 November 1980.

longues et intenses dans l'histoire de la classe ouvrière brésilienne. Pendant quarante-et-un jours, les ouvriers grévistes résistèrent à la répression que les patrons et le régime militaire national fomentèrent contre eux. Cela contribua à la mobilisation collective des travailleurs ensuite propagée à tous les espaces de la ville – et particulièrement aux rues du quartier de São Bernardo do Campo. Expulsés des usines et des principaux espaces publics, les travailleurs parvinrent à continuer la grève dans leur quartier de vie. Ils politisèrent ainsi les espaces et les relations de leur vie quotidienne et redéfinirent la géographie de la mobilisation collective. Cet article analyse certains aspects de ce processus, en soulignant l'importance des réseaux sociaux des travailleurs pour la (ré)appropriation remarquable de l'espace urbain, caractéristique de ce mouvement de grève.

Traduction: *Christine Plard*

Francisco Barbosa de Macedo. *Soziale Netzwerke und urbaner Raum: Arbeitermobilisierung in den ersten Jahren der "neuen" brasilianischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung.*

Im Jahr 1980 streikten tausende von Metallarbeiter aus der als "ABC" bekannten Region des Großraums São Paulo; es war einer der heftigsten und längsten Streiks in der Geschichte der brasilianischen Arbeiterklasse. Einundvierzig Tage lang trotzten die streikenden Arbeiter der Repression, mit der die Unternehmer und das Militärregime des Landes gegen sie vorgingen. Das trug zu einer kollektiven Arbeitermobilisierung bei, die sich im städtischen Raum ausbreitete – insbesondere in den Straßen des Viertels São Bernardo do Campo. Die aus den Fabriken und von den zentralen Orten des öffentlichen Raums ausgeschlossenen Arbeiter erhielten den Streik vor allem in ihren Wohnvierteln aufrecht, wodurch sie die Räume und Beziehungen ihres Alltagslebens politisierten und die Geografie kollektiver Mobilisierung neu definierten. Der Beitrag untersucht einige Aspekte dieses Prozesses und streicht insbesondere die Bedeutung heraus, die die sozialen Netzwerke der Arbeiter bei der bemerkenswerten, für den Streik kennzeichnenden (Wieder)Aneignung des städtischen Raums spielten.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Francisco Barbosa de Macedo. *Redes sociales y espacio urbano. La movilización laboral durante los primeros años del "nuevo" unionismo en Brasil.*

En 1980, miles de trabajadores de la metalurgia de la región del gran São Paulo conocida como región "ABC" llevaron a cabo una de las huelgas más intensas y duraderas en la historia del movimiento obrero en Brasil. Durante cuarenta y un días, los trabajadores en huelga resistieron la represión que los empresarios y el régimen militar nacional dirigieron contra ellos, lo que contribuyó a que la movilización obrera colectiva se fuera difundiendo por todos los espacios de la ciudad – especialmente en las calles del vecindario de São Bernardo do Campo. Expulsados de las fábricas y de los principales espacios públicos, los trabajadores pudieron mantener la huelga principalmente en los barrios donde vivían, politi-

zando los espacios y las relaciones de su vida cotidiana y redefiniendo la geografía de la movilización colectiva. En este artículo se analiza algunos de los aspectos de este proceso, prestando una atención destacada a la importancia jugada por las redes sociales de los trabajadores en la notable (re)apropiación del espacio urbano que caracterizó el movimiento huelguístico.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*