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# RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

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## STRIKES IN ARGENTINA: Data Sources and Recent Trends\*

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Strikes have important effects on the workers and employers directly involved as well as significant indirect effects on consumers, economic growth, electoral outcomes, policy making, and political stability. Moreover, strikes form patterns that illuminate long-term social processes, the dynamics of economic and political conflict, and the functioning of industrial relations systems. Because strikes are important as both causes and symptoms of social change, an extensive literature has arisen on patterns of strike activity.<sup>1</sup> To date, however, this literature has focused mainly on advanced industrial countries.<sup>2</sup> To prepare the way for analyses of strike patterns in Latin America, more research is needed on the ways in which Latin American strike statistics have been collected

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1. Reviews of the literature on strike patterns in industrialized countries include Jackson (1987) and Franzosi (1989).

2. One of the few published comparative analyses of strike patterns in Latin America is Zapata (1986). Analyses of strike patterns in individual Latin American countries include Payne (1965), Pizarro (1986), and Sandoval (1993). A good guide to government data on Latin American strikes is ILO (1993).

and reported.<sup>3</sup> This research note will report the results of such research for Argentina. The first section will assess the quality of strike statistics covering a century of Argentine history. The second section will compare four sources of data on Argentine strikes since the return to democracy in 1983, focusing on particularly useful data published by the Consejo Técnico de Inversiones (CTI) in Buenos Aires. The third section will make the CTI statistics available for research and will employ them to assess some widely held assumptions about labor militancy in Argentina during the period from 1984 to 1993.

*Sources of Data on Argentine Strikes, 1887–1983*

In 1907 the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, an agency of the Ministerio del Interior, began collecting strike statistics in Argentina by publishing a quarterly bulletin with quantitative information on labor conflicts (Gaudio and Pilone 1983, p. 252, n. 36). In 1940 this information was summarized in *Estadística de las huelgas* (published by the Poder Ejecutivo Nacional in 1940). This monograph featured annual statistics on the number of strikes, the number of strikers, working days lost to strikes, and wages lost to strikes from 1907 to 1939, along with extensive information on strikes between 1934 and 1939, including a list of individual strikes. Yet despite its comprehensiveness, *Estadística de las huelgas* revealed deficiencies. First, it included data only for strikes in the federal capital (the city of Buenos Aires).<sup>4</sup> Second, rather than noting this limitation, the volume included a table comparing the annual numbers of strikes, strikers, and working days lost in “Argentina” from 1929 to 1938 with national figures for thirty-five other countries, thus implying that its statistics covered all of Argentina.<sup>5</sup> Third, the compilation did not elaborate on its techniques for collecting data except to note that “modern methods” were used as of 1934.<sup>6</sup> As if to corroborate the implication that less reliable methods were used from 1907 to 1933, the list of annual strike totals in each of the four editions of the Ministerio del Trabajo publication *Con-*

3. On the reporting of strike statistics in advanced industrial countries, see Fisher (1973) and Walsh (1983).

4. The 1934–1939 figures in t. 19 of *Estadística de las huelgas* are identical to those in t. 25 of *Conflictos del Trabajo* (1961), which states that its data pertain only to the federal capital. See Argentina, Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, Ministerio del Interior, Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, División de Estadística (1940); and Argentina, Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social (1961).

5. A similar error was made in Zapata (1986), which recognized that the government strike data for 1957–1972 do not pertain to the entire country but attributed them incorrectly to the province rather than to the city of Buenos Aires (Zapata 1986, 194–97). Moreover, this analysis used these subnational figures to construct the numerator of a curious strike-rate quotient whose denominator is the number of union members in the entire country. This quotient, described as the strike rate for “Argentina,” was then compared with those of other countries.

6. See Argentina, Departamento Nacional del Trabajo, *Estadística de las huelgas*, p. 2.

*Conflictos del Trabajo* begins in 1934 rather than 1907.<sup>7</sup> Each displays a continuous series, and none of the publications note any change between 1934 and 1971 in methods of collecting data.

The “modern methods” used to collect the statistics were finally explained in the 1961 edition of *Conflictos del Trabajo*, although the summary failed to clarify whether they came into usage in 1934 or 1957 (the first year for which *Conflictos del Trabajo* provides detailed information). According to this summary, the Ministerio del Trabajo identified strikes and stoppages in daily police reports, then sent to each party involved a questionnaire about the dispute.<sup>8</sup> The resulting figures include only *huelgas* (strikes), meaning work stoppages (including lockouts) lasting twenty-four hours or more in which employees leave the workplace. Omitted from the count, but intermittently recorded separately, were *paros* (stoppages lasting between fifteen minutes and twenty-four hours), *huelgas de brazos caídos* (sit-down strikes), *trabajo a desgano* (slowdowns), and *trabajo a reglamento* (work-to-rule, a special type of slowdown caused by workers adhering meticulously to written work regulations).<sup>9</sup> The publication excluded nationwide general strikes, and its figures on the number of strikers omitted workers idled due to the effects of another strike.<sup>10</sup>

The four editions of *Conflictos del Trabajo* published between 1961 and 1972 have deficiencies of their own. Like *Estadística de las huelgas*, they covered only strikes and stoppages in the federal capital, excluding even the nineteen surrounding municipalities that comprise Greater Buenos Aires.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, they surely omitted many strikes that occurred in the federal capital itself. Studies of strike statistics in Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands (countries with better-financed labor ministries that have been less affected by political tumult) indicate that government agencies in charge of collecting strike data typically fail to record up to half the strikes

7. The 1961, 1966, and 1972 editions of *Conflictos del Trabajo* were published by the Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, whereas the 1970 edition was published by the Departamento de Estadísticas Sociales, Dirección General de Estudios y Investigaciones, Secretaría de Estado de Trabajo.

8. See the 1961 edition of *Conflictos del Trabajo*, pp. 18–21.

9. These forms of labor conflict are described more extensively in Cabanellas (1966, 43–157). Statistics by economic sector for workers involved in these other types of protest are recorded for 1946–1957 in *Anuario Estadística de la República Argentina*, published by the Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, Secretaría de Estado de Hacienda, Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos in 1957, p. 145. These 1957 figures may be provisional; they differ from those given in the 1961 edition of *Conflictos del Trabajo*.

10. See the 1961 edition of *Conflictos del Trabajo*, pp. 17–24. Procedures for compiling strike statistics differ widely from country to country (see Jackson 1987, 10). Those described in the 1961 edition of *Conflictos del Trabajo* resemble the ones used today by the Belgian government, except that the Belgian statistics pertain to the entire country (ILO 1993, 9). See also Fisher (1973, 102–3) and Walsh (1983, 65).

11. This omission is far from trivial. In 1985 these 19 municipalities included 27,904 industrial establishments employing 387,966 wage earners, nearly twice as many as the 15,864 establishments employing 205,864 workers in the federal capital proper. See Argentina, INDEC (1989, 36–37, 62–63).

that actually occur, although the omitted strikes tend to be smaller and less economically significant than the recorded strikes (see Jackson 1987, 11; Walsh 1983, 48). Another deficiency of *Conflictos del Trabajo* is that (unlike *Estadística de las huelgas*) it provided no listing of each individual strike.

It was not until December 1973 that the labor ministry began to record strikes outside the federal capital. From then until September 1975, the labor ministry compiled monthly figures for the number of strikes in the metropolitan areas of Buenos Aires and Córdoba. This compilation is available in a working paper by Elizabeth Jelín (1977) but is less useful than it might be.<sup>12</sup> It includes no figures for the number of strikers or working days lost to strikes, no strike-by-strike information, and no description of data collection methods. Moreover, the 1974 government figures for the Buenos Aires metropolitan area presented in this paper differ significantly from putatively identical figures presented in the International Labour Office's 1980 *Year Book of Labour Statistics* (ILO 1980, 634).

Because Argentine government strike data are limited to the federal capital, scholars have turned to Buenos Aires newspapers to compile strike data for the entire country. Such compilations are likely to suffer from several sources of bias. Reporters for Buenos Aires newspapers are likely to overlook several categories of strikes: those occurring during eras of poor communications; strikes during eras of press restrictions; smaller strikes; and strikes in the interior provinces. Such biases are less damaging than they seem at first glance, however, in that they do not preclude cross-sectional or short-run analyses that do not depend on every small strike being counted.

Periodical-based strike counts have been compiled for 1887–1907, 1930–1943, 1955–1972, 1973–1976, and 1976–1980. Roberto Korzeniewicz used the Buenos Aires daily *La Prensa* to make counts of episodes of labor unrest for each year from 1887 to 1907 and from 1930 to 1943 (see Korzeniewicz 1989, 1993). He reported no data on the size or duration of such episodes but categorized each according to economic sector and (for 1930–1943) by province and mode of resolution. These figures based on *La Prensa* seem to omit a much higher number of strikes than do official figures apparently based on police reports. Korzeniewicz tabulated strikes, stoppages, general strikes, and mass rallies, turning up only 331 such events in the federal capital between 1930 and 1943, whereas the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo recorded only strikes and stoppages but counted 1,025 such events in the federal capital between 1931 and 1943 (see Korzeniewicz 1993, 11).<sup>13</sup>

12. Some provincial governments may have collected strike statistics, but the only published data are for the province of Mendoza in 1958, when 23 strikes and 2 lockouts resulted in a total of 616,848 working days lost (see Guibordenche de Cabezas 1958).

13. Departamento Nacional del Trabajo figures for 1930–1939 were taken from *Estadística de las huelgas*, p. 20; and figures for 1940–1943 came from Horowitz (1990, 72).

Guillermo O'Donnell and his collaborators chose the daily *La Razón* to compile monthly data on strikes, workplace occupations, demonstrations, student protests, and acts of violence from 1955 to 1972.<sup>14</sup> The strike data were disaggregated by month, economic sector, region, ownership (public versus private), type of workplace (blue- versus white-collar), presence or absence of national union involvement, and related damages or deaths. The monthly strike counts were broken down by rough size categories (according to whether they involved 500, 5,000, 50,000, or 500,000 strikers) and included a figure for the total duration of all strikes whose length could be ascertained (about 80 percent of them). Based on reports in *La Razón*, the O'Donnell team identified 986 strikes and stoppages in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area from 1955 through 1971. Using police reports, the Ministerio del Trabajo recorded 490 strikes and stoppages in the federal capital during the same period. The correlation between the monthly figures on strike frequency in each series is quite low (.23).<sup>15</sup>

Elizabeth Jelín consulted newspapers, magazines, and *Informes Laborales*, the monthly bulletin of the Servicio de Documentación e Información Laboral, to tabulate strikes occurring between June 1973 and March 1976. She tabulated from these sources only about a third as many strikes as the labor ministry count she reported for this period, even though her count covered the entire country whereas the labor ministry's covered only Greater Buenos Aires and Córdoba. Jelín recorded the number (but not the size or duration) of strikes, noted how many occurred in each of eight phases of the Peronist governments of the era, and disaggregated the figures within these phases according to stated cause and economic sector.<sup>16</sup>

Strikes continued in Argentina even during the harsh military dictatorship that ruled from 1976 to 1983. According to a table in a study by Arturo Fernández, five Buenos Aires newspapers recorded 361 strikes and a similar number of other acts of worker protest between April 1976 and December 1980 (Fernández 1985, 90–94). The table provides yearly counts of episodes of labor protest and of participants in such protests and disaggregates the episodes according to economic sector, cause, outcome, type of protest, and scope of protest (firm, regional, or national). But the table neither states its source nor describes how the data were collected. For a

14. See Guillermo O'Donnell, "Argentine Domestic Violence and Economic Data, 1955–1972," ICPSR data set 5213 (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, n.d.). The word *strikes* refers here to both *huelgas* (one day or longer) and *paros* (less than one day). O'Donnell reported elsewhere that "a comparison of several daily newspapers revealed that *La Razón* had the best coverage of such events over the period as a whole" (O'Donnell 1988, 327). According to a personal conversation with Guillermo O'Donnell in 1985, the strike-by-strike data were lost when the research team dispersed after the 1976 coup.

15. Correlation calculated from O'Donnell, "Argentine Domestic Violence and Economic Data," and the 1972 edition of *Conflictos del Trabajo*.

16. See Jelín (1977, 46–47). For an analysis of these data, see also Jelín (1979, 233–57).

separate analysis spanning roughly the same period, Roberto Falcón consulted fourteen different periodicals to record ninety factory-level strikes and stoppages and two hundred other factory-level acts of labor protest between March 1976 and November 1980. Tables in Falcón's chapter disaggregate these episodes by region, stated cause, type of action, degree of union involvement, and extent to which the workers' demands were met. Falcón does not, however, disaggregate the figures by month, quarter, or year, although he includes an appendix with the strike-by-strike data (Falcón 1982).

The strike statistics collected in these studies are useful for many purposes, but they suffer from major deficiencies. Most newspaper-based studies include little information on the size or duration of strikes, and government data pertain almost exclusively to the federal capital. Few studies include strike-by-strike data, some fail to describe their data collection methods, and significant unexplained discrepancies exist between government and newspaper-based statistics for identical time periods and regions. If strike data are to contribute more effectively to the study of Argentine social phenomena, they must be scrutinized more carefully. The next section undertakes this task for the period from 1984 to 1993.

#### *Sources of Data on Argentine Strikes, 1984–1993*

The Ministerio del Trabajo collected no strike statistics between 1976 and 1986, but for nineteen months, beginning in January 1987, the ministry recorded data on strikes, strikers, and working days lost to strikes throughout Argentina. This nineteen-month tabulation represented the first time that the Ministerio de Trabajo had collected strike data for the entire country. In August 1988, however, it began to restrict its tally to nationwide strikes and those in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area; and in July 1989, the ministry stopped collecting data altogether. Moreover, its data collection procedures were less sophisticated than in previous years. Perusal of the handwritten coding sheets on which individual strikes were recorded revealed that the data had been drawn almost exclusively from Buenos Aires newspapers.<sup>17</sup>

Because the data covered only nineteen months at the national level, the labor ministry's strike statistics are of limited use. A few years earlier, however, three private Buenos Aires research institutions began to compile nationwide monthly counts of strikes from Buenos Aires newspapers. Table 1 summarizes the counts made between January 1984 and May 1989 by three institutions: the business-oriented Consejo Técnico de Inversiones (CTI), which published its data annually in *La Economía Argentina*; the academically oriented Centro de Investigaciones sobre el Estado y la Administración (CISEA), which published its data bimonthly in

17. Labor Ministry personnel graciously allowed me to look over these coding sheets in July 1989 and July 1991.

*Bimestre Político y Económico*; and the politically oriented Unión para la Nueva Mayoría, which published its data in independently edited books and in the mass media.

The CTI statistics have several advantages over the data compiled by CISEA and the Unión para la Nueva Mayoría. First, the CTI statistics are assembled in a strike-by-strike format, whereas the other two sets of data appear only in monthly aggregates. The strike-by-strike format allows researchers to aggregate the data in a multitude of ways and to incorporate additional information about individual strikes as it becomes available in other sources. Second, the CTI statistics record the duration of each strike and, if available, the number of participants, whereas the CISEA and Unión para la Nueva Mayoría data record only the number of strikes per month. Information on the frequency, size, and duration of strikes gives researchers a much fuller picture of strike activity than does information on frequency alone. Third, the CTI statistics cover a longer period than all but the count by the Unión para la Nueva Mayoría, which correlates poorly with the other sources (see table 1).

Given the advantages of the CTI data, it is worth looking more closely at how they were collected. The CTI assigned researchers to record the month, site, size, and duration of all strikes reported in six Buenos Aires daily newspapers: *Clarín*, *Crónica*, *Cronista Comercial*, *La Nación*, *Página 12*, and *Sur*. The records included strikes and factory occupations lasting one day or longer and stoppages lasting from fifteen minutes to twenty-four hours. Actions like work-to-rule and slowdowns were omitted, as were general strikes encompassing the entire nation.<sup>18</sup> Once compiled, the CTI published its list of strikes in a weekly newsletter (*Tendencias Económicas*) and in a yearbook (*La Economía Argentina*).

Yet the CTI data also reveal deficiencies, two of which complicate determination of the number of strikes. First, all strike counts based on periodicals are incomplete, and the CTI count may be less complete than others. From January 1984 to May 1989, the CTI recorded an average of 38.4 strikes per month, about the same as CISEA (38.7) but fewer than the Unión para la Nueva Mayoría (49.5) or the Ministerio del Trabajo (53.2). These discrepancies probably stemmed from varying definitions of strikes, coding procedures, the number of periodicals analyzed, and time periods covered. Second, the CTI had to make coding decisions that affected monthly strike counts. For example, it counted strikes that started in one month and ended in the next under both months (converting one strike into two) and treated interrelated strikes as a set of discrete events rather than as a single event.<sup>19</sup>

18. Interview with a research associate at the Consejo Técnico de Inversiones. *La Razón* (the morning edition) was included until the paper folded in 1986, and *Página 12* was included after it began publishing in 1987.

19. For a discussion of the issue of counting interrelated strikes, see Fisher (1973, 60).

TABLE 1 Comparison of Strike Counts for Argentina, January 1984–June 1989

| Monthly Series                 | Months Covered                             | Mean Number <sup>a</sup> |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Consejo Técnico de Inversiones | Jan. 1984–May 1989                         | 38.4                     |
| CISEA                          | Jan. 1985–June 1989                        | 38.7                     |
| Ministerio de Trabajo          | Jan. 1987–July 1988                        | 53.2                     |
| Unión para la Nueva Mayoría    | Jan. 1984–June 1988<br>Jan. 1989–June 1989 | 49.5                     |

Sources: Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, *La Economía Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, 1984–1993); Centro de Investigaciones sobre el Estado y la Administración, *Bimestre Político y Económico*, nos. 28 (July–Aug. 1986) through 45 (Aug. 1989); Ministerio de Trabajo, unpublished data furnished by employees of the ministry's Dirección

The CTI also faced problems relating to strike duration. O'Donnell found that "in many instances a newspaper will record the beginning of a strike but not the date on which it ended or the number of participants" (O'Donnell 1988, 328n). Using a single newspaper (*La Razón*), the O'Donnell team was able to determine the duration of only 80 percent of the strikes it recorded between 1955 and 1972.<sup>20</sup> The CTI, in contrast, recorded the duration of each of the 3,401 strikes it discovered between January 1984 and December 1993. Asked how the CTI had achieved such universality, one of its researchers, who had earlier served on the O'Donnell team, attributed its success to the use of multiple sources.<sup>21</sup>

Determining the number of strikers was particularly difficult. According to the researcher interviewed, the CTI derived figures on the number of strikers from newspaper accounts, union membership data, and an archive of information on employment in factories, government agencies, and other units where strikes occur. Using these sources, the CTI recorded the number of strikers in 2,394 of 3,401 strikes between January 1984 and December 1993. The figures seem fairly accurate for smaller strikes,<sup>22</sup> but they may be exaggerated for certain larger ones. A May 1984 national strike by employees of the state waterworks corpora-

20. Calculated from O'Donnell, "Argentine Domestic Violence and Economic Data," variable 91.

21. Interview with Carlos Giori, Buenos Aires, July 1991.

22. A March 1985 strike in the Estexa textile plant in Rosario was said to have involved 400 workers; as of early 1993, the plant had 420 employees. An April 1985 strike in the Fabril Financiera textile plant in Resistencia was said to have involved 360 workers; by late 1993, the plant employed 180. A September 1993 strike in Morón's Castelar textile plant was said to have involved 130 workers; in late 1993, the plant employed 230. Employment figures from the textile workers' union were reported in "Trabajadores textiles: Reducciones y despidos," *Clarín*, Suplemento Económico, 17 Oct. 1993, p. 13.

| Range<br>Number <sup>a</sup> | Standard<br>Deviation<br>Number <sup>a</sup> | Correlation <sup>b</sup><br>with CTI<br>Series | Correlation <sup>b</sup><br>with CISEA<br>Series | Correlation <sup>b</sup><br>with<br>Ministerio<br>Series |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 12 to 73                     | 15   | 1.00   |  |  |
| 11 to 71                     | 17   | .81  | 1.00   |  |
| 31 to 78                     | 13   | .81  | .59  | 1.00   |
| 6 to 121                     | 28   | .68  | .74  | .57  |

de Recursos Humanos y Empleo, Departamento de Estudios Laborales; and Unión para la Nueva Mayoría, unpublished data furnished by Rosendo Fraga.

<sup>a</sup> Strikes per month  
<sup>b</sup> Pearson-r

tion (Obras Sanitarias) was said to have involved 24,000 workers, yet the following year Obras Sanitarias employed only 9,789 workers.<sup>23</sup> Civil servants' strikes in the province of Salta were said to have averaged 63,000 participants, but Salta employed only 37,302 in 1991 (by this date, however, layoffs may have reduced the figure from the 1980s levels).<sup>24</sup> A May 1988 national strike by the railway workers' Unión Ferroviaria is said to have involved 143,000 workers, but this figure (which probably derived from the labor ministry's certification that 142,345 workers were eligible to vote in the union's December 1984 election) included 62,682 retirees.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the 1985 Censo del Personal Civil de la Administración Pública Nacional found that the railways employed only 108,866 workers (García de Fanelli 1988, 58), about a quarter of whom belonged not to the Unión Ferroviaria but to separate unions for locomotive engineers, signal-switchers, and supervisors. Apart from these cases and a few others, however, most of the CTI estimates of numbers of strikers seem fairly accurate. Civil servants' strikes in interior provinces other than Salta were almost always recorded as involving fewer participants than the number of provincial employees, and figures for numbers of participants in

23. Employment data from the 1985 Censo del Personal Civil de la Administración Pública Nacional, as reported in García de Fanelli (1988, 59). It is possible that the CTI was simply using outdated employment figures. According to the 1977 Censo del Personal Civil de la Administración Pública Nacional, Obras Sanitarias employed 25,420 workers in 1977 (see García de Fanelli 1988, 59).

24. "Cuánto se lleva cada uno," *Clarín*, 19 July 1991, p. 14. Shortly after this report was published, the Consejo Técnico de Inversiones began to record much smaller numbers of participants in strikes by provincial administrations and did so in exact rather than round numbers.

25. "Unión Ferroviaria," *Informes Laborales* 18, segunda época, no. 221 (Jan. 1985), p. 2.374.

nationwide strikes by metalworkers and textile workers usually approximated the number of members claimed by the unions in those sectors.

The deficiencies in the CTI statistics can be summarized as follows. The number of strikes is probably undercounted, whereas the number of participants in strikes is occasionally exaggerated. The duration of strikes is probably recorded fairly accurately, although strikes that began in one month and ended in the next (fewer than 50 of the 3,401 strikes) entered the database not as one long strike but as two shorter ones. No evidence suggests, however, that such undercounts, exaggerations, or conflations were any worse in some months than in others, and thus these sources of error should not bias the results of time-series analyses confined to the period of 1984 to 1993.

Imperfections characterized not merely the original strike records but also the process by which they were aggregated. Using the CTI's information on the month, site, and duration of 3,401 strikes between January 1984 and December 1993, I entered these records into a computerized database and coded each strike by economic sector (such as teaching or public administration), scope (such as national, municipal, or plant), and province (with separate codes for the federal capital, Greater Buenos Aires, the province of Buenos Aires, and each of the twenty-two remaining provinces).<sup>26</sup> The trickiest part of the aggregation process was to estimate the number of participants in 1,007 strikes for which the CTI did not report a figure. The estimation method involved searching the database for "most similar strikes." First, a search was made for a strike at the same site (but at a different time) in which the number of participants had been recorded. If such a strike was discovered, the number of participants (or the average of such numbers if more than one was found) became the estimated number of participants for the strike in question. If not, the number of strikers was estimated by averaging the numbers in a set of "most-similar strikes" for which such information was available. For example, the CTI did not indicate the number of workers participating in strikes in November 1986, March 1987, and August 1988 by court clerks in the province of Santa Fe, but it did report that 1,500 workers participated in an April 1986 strike by court clerks in the province of Mendoza. Because Santa Fe had almost twice the population of Mendoza (according to the 1980 census), each of the court clerks' strikes in that province was assigned a proportional number of participants (2,900). These estimates were recorded separately from those of the CTI, but both were combined to compute the aggregate figures for the number of strikers and the number of working days lost to strikes.

26. I thank Rebeca Rumayor-Alfonso for assistance in transcribing data on month, site, duration, and number of participants for about a thousand strikes.

*Patterns of Strike Activity in Argentina, 1984–1993*

The CTI strike data, like the methods used to compile them into aggregate statistics, are imperfect. Their flaws are not so grave, however, as to diminish their utility for evaluating assumptions about Argentine strike activity between 1984 and 1993. The statistics confirm two such assumptions: that a fiscal crisis accounted for much of the labor militancy of the era, and that strike activity was lower during the first part of Peronist President Carlos Menem's first term (1989–1993) than under Radical President Raúl Alfonsín (1983–1989). Surprisingly, however, the statistics suggest that the main cause of the drop in strike activity under Menem was neither Peronist incumbency nor hyperinflationary trauma nor satisfaction with government policy but rather the strike-inhibiting effect of the government's defeat in September 1990 of a major anti-privatization strike by telephone workers in the federal capital. This unexpected contradiction of the conventional wisdom underscores the importance of incorporating strike statistics into analysis of the Argentine political economy.

*Fiscal crisis and strike activity* / Between 1983 and 1989, Argentina's budget deficit averaged about 10 percent of the gross domestic product. On the revenue side, the main causes of the deficit were woefully poor tax collection and a tax structure that relied on export and energy "tax handles" at the expense of income and value-added "efficient taxes." On the expenditure side, the deficit stemmed mainly from private-sector subsidies (8 percent of GDP); bailouts of money-losing state firms (2 to 7 percent of GDP); and transfers to the provinces, whose administrations raised only 4 percent of GDP but spent about 13 percent, mostly on salaries (World Bank 1993, 2, 31, 115). The Alfonsín government met the fiscal pressure by printing more money, which led eventually to hyperinflation, and by letting real public-sector wages decline by 65 percent between 1983 and 1989 (World Bank 1993, 10). This wage drop, coupled with frequent delays in public-sector wage payments, caused much of the strike activity under Alfonsín. Between January 1984 and May 1989, the newsletter *Informes Laborales* described the stated causes of 1,468 of the 2,503 strikes recorded by the CTI. Fully 65 percent of these 1,468 strikes were in the public sector or "mixed sector" (occupations where most workers are employed in the public sector but some work in the private sector).<sup>27</sup> Within this subset of 944 strikes, wage demands caused 56 percent and overdue wage complaints caused 12 percent.

After assuming office in July 1989, President Menem took several measures to improve the fiscal balance. On the revenue side, he scrapped export taxes, imposed an income tax, raised the value-added tax, and

27. For a full list of such occupations, see the notes to table 3. The 1980 census showed that 83 percent of teachers (by far the largest occupational group in the "mixed sector") worked for public institutions. See Palomino (1987, 124).

boosted the capacity of the Dirección General Impositiva (DGI) to collect taxes, in part by doubling its payroll (World Bank 1993, 6, 13, 40–46, 303). By 1992 the central government was collecting 24.4 billion (U.S.) dollars in taxes, up from 13.7 billion only two years earlier.<sup>28</sup> On the spending side, however, Menem restored the fiscal balance in ways that led to massive layoffs, thus increasing short-term incentives for protest. By the end of 1992, Menem had privatized 16.5 billion dollars worth of state corporations<sup>29</sup> (including all or part of the state oil, telephone, gas, and electricity companies), resulting in job losses for 85,000 of the 246,000 workers hitherto employed in public enterprises. He also dismissed 217,000 civil servants—110,000 from the central government and 107,000 from provincial or municipal governments—reducing public employment from 2.03 million in 1989 to 1.81 million in 1992 (World Bank 1993, 299, 308).

Declining public-sector wages under Alfonsín, public-sector layoffs under Menem, and pay arrears under both presidents help explain why strikes were concentrated in the public sector from 1984 to 1993. Public-sector and mixed-sector workers, who numbered about 2 million in 1984, accounted for 66 percent of strikes, 69 percent of strikers, and 81 percent of working days lost between 1984 and 1993.<sup>30</sup> Manufacturing workers, who numbered 1.13 million in 1984, accounted for only 21 percent of strikes, 22 percent of strikers, and 14 percent of working days lost during this period.<sup>31</sup> As table 2 indicates, the occupations with the highest level of strike activity were teachers and civil servants (national, provincial, and municipal), who together accounted for 32 percent of strikes, 47 percent of strikers, and 65 percent of working days lost during the period from 1984 to 1993.

Within the public sector, disproportionate strike activity occurred in the impoverished provinces of the interior, where wages were low, pay arrears rampant, private-sector jobs scarce, and layoffs frequent (after Menem took office). Strike intensity within a given unit of analysis (time period, industry, region, province) can be measured by dividing the unit's number of working days lost to strikes by its economically active population.<sup>32</sup> This quotient can be called the "strike volume rate" (SVR). When

28. "El fugitivo: Cómo opera la Dirección General Impositiva," *Clarín*, Suplemento Económico, 21 Nov. 1993, p. E12.

29. "Nueva estrategia para las multinacionales," *Clarín*, Edición Internacional, 12–19 Oct. 1993, p. 12.

30. The figure of 2 million includes 1.84 million public employees (World Bank 1993, 308) plus 150,000 or so working in private schools, banks, and elsewhere.

31. The number of manufacturing workers was taken from Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, *Censo Nacional Económico 1985*, 15. The 5 percent of public-sector workers employed in manufacturing were counted in both categories (the 5 percent figure was taken from Palomino 1987, 122).

32. This quotient has been used to compare strike rates in advanced industrial countries. See Walsh (1983, 156).

TABLE 2 *Strike Activity in Argentina, 1984–1993, By Economic Sector*

| <i>Economic Sector</i>                                | <i>Work Days Lost to Strikes</i> | <i>Number of Strikers</i> | <i>Number of Strikes</i> |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Teachers  | 65,769,791                       | 15,573,966                | 421                      |
| Public administrators                                 | 42,169,129                       | 12,953,641                | 496                      |
| Metalworkers  | 15,443,684                       | 9,482,034                 | 199                      |
| Municipal workers                                     | 6,262,618                        | 1,871,270                 | 186                      |
| Private hospital workers                              | 5,788,993                        | 2,874,110                 | 181                      |
| Court clerks  | 5,513,278                        | 2,158,800                 | 128                      |
| Bank employees  | 3,931,880                        | 3,994,320                 | 133                      |
| University staff members                              | 3,497,985                        | 877,010                   | 43                       |
| Railway workers                                       | 3,387,344                        | 1,987,550                 | 76                       |
| Construction workers                                  | 2,263,417                        | 1,865,948                 | 92                       |
| Food industry workers                                 | 2,117,410                        | 883,205                   | 28                       |
| Telephone workers                                     | 1,891,963                        | 1,181,900                 | 39                       |
| Bus drivers   | 1,698,020                        | 930,240                   | 113                      |
| Maritime workers                                      | 1,351,637                        | 354,896                   | 57                       |
| Public industries <sup>a</sup>                        | 1,072,348                        | 318,040                   | 77                       |
| Post office workers                                   | 1,034,652                        | 592,800                   | 26                       |
| Doctors   | 904,145                          | 327,116                   | 83                       |
| Public services <sup>b</sup>                          | 851,788                          | 434,270                   | 47                       |
| Sugar workers   | 778,590                          | 187,730                   | 50                       |
| Paper workers   | 764,442                          | 436,796                   | 55                       |
| Locomotive drivers                                    | 671,325                          | 262,650                   | 25                       |
| Meat workers  | 658,793                          | 217,589                   | 56                       |
| Textile workers                                       | 601,570                          | 761,812                   | 37                       |
| Light and power workers                               | 576,150                          | 389,820                   | 21                       |
| State petroleum workers                               | 515,915                          | 277,540                   | 32                       |
| Total of above 25 sectors                             | 169,516,861                      | 61,195,053                | 2,701                    |
| Total for all 88 sectors<br>with 1 strike or more     | 175,601,288                      | 64,828,080                | 3,401                    |
| Above 25 sectors<br>as a proportion<br>of all sectors | 0.97                             | 0.94                      | 0.79                     |

Source: Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, *La Economía Argentina* (yearbooks for 1984–1993)

NOTE: This table includes only economic sectors in which at least 500,000 working days were lost to strikes.

<sup>a</sup> Includes state coal company, state shipyards, state weapons factories, and state nuclear power plants.

<sup>b</sup> Includes public hospitals, public markets, prison guards, public museums, public theaters, city parks, and national parks.

used to compare the level of strike activity across provinces, the SVR produces some remarkable findings. Between 1984 and 1993, the SVR was eighty times as high in Carlos Menem's dusty home province of La Rioja as in the nineteen municipalities of Greater Buenos Aires, hitherto viewed as the heart of Argentine labor militancy. Similarly, strikes cost more than 10 million working days in Salta, an impoverished province with 230,000 economically active inhabitants, but fewer than 6 million working days in the federal capital, with an economically active population of 1,200,000. La Rioja and Salta were far from exceptional: poor provinces held all top ten places in the SVR ranking (see table 3). The actual rate of strike activity in interior provinces may be even higher, given that the CTI data were derived from the Buenos Aires newspapers, which probably under-report strikes in interior provinces.

Argentine strike activity since 1983 has thus been concentrated not among industrial workers in or near the major cities of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Rosario but among teachers and civil servants in the interior. In the ten provinces with the highest SVRs, teachers and civil servants accounted for 51 percent of strikes, 90 percent of strikers, and 93 percent of working days lost. In the instances in which *Informes Laborales* reported stated causes for such strikes (109 cases from January 1984 to May 1989), almost all involved a demand for a wage hike (61) or for payment of overdue wages (40). The wage declines and pay arrears that produced these demands came from revenue shortages and inflated public employment, which was serving as both a safety net and a source of clientelistic support for politicians.

The dynamics that led to intense strike activity by provincial employees are epitomized by La Rioja, which had the highest SVR in the country. Each of the 43 strikes in La Rioja between 1984 and 1993 was launched by a group of public employees: teachers accounted for 25, civil servants for 15, police for 2, and court clerks for 1. Of the 20 strikes in La Rioja for which information on stated cause was available, 10 were called to demand higher wages and 10 to demand the payment of overdue wages. The main cause of these wage problems was featherbedding. Between 1983 and 1989, when current President Carlos Menem served as governor of La Rioja, the number of public employees in the province rose from 12,000 to more than 40,000, out of an economically active population numbering only 67,370 (table 3). According to a report in *The Economist*, "many of these employees have nothing to do. There are schools with more teachers than students, and the halls of government buildings are packed with salaried loungers."<sup>33</sup> Provincial employment fell after Menem left the governorship to become president of Argentina, but in 1990, La

33. "Letter from Menemland," *The Economist*, 6 Oct. 1990, p. 50. Public employment figures also come from this report.

Rioja's budget deficit remained at 108 million (U.S.) dollars. This figure represented 31 percent of the gross provincial product and amounted to almost a third of the budget deficit of the province of Buenos Aires, which had fifty-seven times as many inhabitants as La Rioja (World Bank 1993, 125–26). Featherbedding in provinces with entrenched clientelistic practices, like Menem's La Rioja and Ramón Saadi's Catamarca (where salaries absorbed 80 percent of the provincial budget),<sup>34</sup> contributed significantly to the inflation that the Menem administration later helped reduce—in part by requiring provincial governments to fire thousands of civil servants and teachers.

*Peronist incumbency and strike activity* / The CTI data confirm that strike activity fell under Peronist President Menem. Under Alfonsín, each of the twenty-two quarters averaged 115 strikes, 1,984,708 strikers, and 4,874,247 days lost. Under Menem, the averages fell to 48 strikes, 1,345,719 strikers, and 3,789,812 days lost (see table 5). One hypothesis attributes this decline to Peronist incumbency. Cross-national and time-series analyses of strikes in rich countries suggest that strike activity drops when union-linked parties take office (Hibbs 1978, 153–75; Korpi and Shalev 1979; Cameron 1984, esp. 160–61). Accordingly, some scholars have argued that the recent drop in Argentina can be traced to the incumbency of Menem's union-linked Partido Justicialista, the party representing the Peronist movement.<sup>35</sup> A second hypothesis links the decline to the hyperinflation of 1989 and 1990, which may have increased worries about exacerbating an already unstable economic situation.<sup>36</sup> A third hypothesis attributes the decline to satisfaction with the March 1991 convertibility plan, which brought price stability, a rise in purchasing power, and increased confidence in economic management.<sup>37</sup>

The hypothesis crediting Peronist incumbency derives support from the evolution of general strikes called by the Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT), Argentina's umbrella union confederation. Ostensibly, the CGT called general strikes to protest policies that hurt workers and unions, but other factors may have been equally important. If general strikes were called primarily to protest anti-labor policies, it would be hard to explain why the CGT called thirteen against Alfonsín's piecemeal reforms but only one against Menem's titanic restructuring, which led to massive layoffs, reduced job control, decentralized collective bargaining,

34. *La Prensa*, 25 Apr. 1991, sec. 2, p. 4. On clientelism in Catamarca, see also Zicolillo and Montenegro (1991, esp. 22, 88).

35. Works advancing this or a similar hypothesis include Dani Rodrik, untitled comments in Williamson (1994, 213); and Munck (1994, 10).

36. Works advancing this or a similar hypothesis include Haggard and Kaufman (1992, 31); Nelson (1994a, 13) in Nelson, ed., 1994; and Murillo (1994, 14).

37. Works advancing this or a similar hypothesis include Geddes (1994, 112); Nelson (1994b, 169); and Murillo (1994, 12–13).

TABLE 3 Strike Activity in Argentina, 1984–1993, by Province

| Province             | Working Days Lost to Strikes | Economically Active Population (EAP) <sup>a</sup> |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---|
| La Rioja             | 3,746,580                    | 67,370  |
| Salta                | 10,623,796                   | 229,845   |
| Jujuy                | 6,230,591                    | 135,505   |
| Santa Cruz           | 1,624,816                    | 56,677  |
| Tucumán              | 9,597,111                    | 350,917   |
| Chubut               | 1,697,847                    | 117,812   |
| La Pampa             | 1,289,493                    | 94,496  |
| Chaco                | 3,059,860                    | 226,568   |
| Catamarca            | 935,385                      | 75,955  |
| Santiago del Estero  | 2,255,185                    | 198,400   |
| Santa Fe             | 9,751,325                    | 876,109   |
| Tierra del Fuego     | 188,910                      | 22,063  |
| Córdoba              | 6,916,995                    | 932,435   |
| Río Negro            | 1,177,835                    | 178,184   |
| San Juan             | 775,890                      | 148,716   |
| Mendoza              | 2,128,813                    | 417,102   |
| Capital Federal      | 5,942,670                    | 1,217,254   |
| Neuquén              | 602,928                      | 128,949   |
| Corrientes           | 762,601                      | 214,397   |
| San Luis             | 262,044                      | 96,110  |
| Formosa              | 270,850                      | 102,127   |
| Buenos Aires         | 8,721,719                    | 5,170,051   |
| Entre Ríos           | 443,585                      | 282,917   |
| Misiones             | 315,996                      | 228,951   |
| Greater Buenos Aires | 2,153,120                    | 3,259,454   |
| Subtotal             | 81,475,945                   |   |
| Confederations       | 2,392,400                    |   |
| Multiple provinces   | 1,338,332                    |   |
| National scope       | 86,774,765                   |   |
| Unidentified         | 3,619,846                    |   |
| Total                | 175,601,288                  | 12,402,689  |

Sources: All data taken from Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, *La Economía Argentina* (yearbooks for 1984–1993), with the following exceptions. Economically active population (EAP), Provincial Employment as percentage of EAP, from “Empleados públicos provinciales,” *Clarín*, 20 July 1991, p. 8. EAP figures for Greater Buenos Aires and the federal capital were calculated assuming that each EAP constitutes 40.9 percent of their respective total populations; that figure from Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, *La Economía Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, 1994), 89. National EAP includes the federal capital but not the EAP of Greater Buenos Aires.

STRIKES IN ARGENTINA

| <i>Working Days Lost to Strikes ÷ EAP<sup>b</sup></i> | <i>Provincial Employment as % of EAP</i> | <i>Number of Strikes</i> | <i>Public- and Mixed-Sector Strikes as % of All Strikes in Province</i> |
|---|--|--------------------------|---|
| 55.6  | 34%                                      | 43                       | 100%  |
| 46.2  | 16%                                      | 111                      | 78%   |
| 46.0  | 22%                                      | 80                       | 73%   |
| 28.7  | 27%                                      | 27                       | 96%   |
| 27.3  | 13%                                      | 141                      | 72%   |
| 14.4  | 17%                                      | 59                       | 85%   |
| 13.6  | 18%                                      | 9                        | 100%  |
| 13.5  | 17%                                      | 84                       | 72%   |
| 12.3  | 37%                                      | 30                       | 100%  |
| 11.4  | 13%                                      | 38                       | 89%   |
| 11.1  | 8%                                       | 153                      | 71%   |
| 8.6   | 16%                                      | 11                       | 55%   |
| 7.4   | 8%                                       | 156                      | 66%   |
| 6.6   | 14%                                      | 35                       | 80%   |
| 5.2   | 15%                                      | 49                       | 92%   |
| 5.1   | 9%                                       | 46                       | 70%   |
| 4.9   | —  | 434                      | 76%   |
| 4.7   | 20%                                      | 35                       | 66%   |
| 3.6   | 15%                                      | 43                       | 51%   |
| 2.7   | 18%                                      | 23                       | 83%   |
| 2.7   | 31%                                      | 8                        | 63%   |
| 1.7   | 5%                                       | 279                      | 67%   |
| 1.6   | 14%                                      | 31                       | 77%   |
| 1.4   | 13%                                      | 18                       | 67%   |
| 0.7   | —  | 213                      | 34%   |
| 2.5   | 9%                                       | 2,157                    | 70%   |
|   |  | 23                       |   |
|   |  | 65                       |   |
|   |  | 643                      |   |
|   |  | 513                      |   |
|   |  | 3,401                    |   |

<sup>a</sup> As of 1991

<sup>b</sup> Also referred to in this study as the SVR (strike volume rate)

<sup>c</sup> "Mixed-sector" refers to occupations in which most workers are employed in the public sector but some are employed in the private sector: teachers, clerical and administrative employees of educational establishments, bank workers, hospital workers (when not specifically identified as private-sector), airline workers, miners, shipbuilders, deckhands, and radio and television employees.

TABLE 4 Strike Activity in Argentina, 1984–1993, by Year

| Year          | Number of Strikes | Number of Strikers | Number of Days Lost to Strikes |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1984          | 495               | 8,459,192          | 16,521,182                     |
| 1985          | 333               | 4,248,248          | 8,296,518                      |
| 1986          | 582               | 11,236,940         | 23,170,963                     |
| 1987          | 470               | 5,980,507          | 13,372,628                     |
| 1988          | 443               | 7,443,344          | 33,593,112                     |
| 1989          | 418               | 7,720,985          | 24,359,522                     |
| 1990          | 326               | 9,970,886          | 32,844,016                     |
| 1991          | 119               | 3,468,930          | 10,201,821                     |
| 1992          | 99                | 4,656,536          | 7,208,282                      |
| 1993          | 116               | 1,642,512          | 6,033,246                      |
| Total         | 3,401             | 64,828,080         | 175,601,288                    |
| Mean per year | 340               | 6,482,808          | 17,560,129                     |

Source: Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, *La Economía Argentina* (yearbooks for 1984–1993).

and shrinking union membership and financial resources. Peronist incumbency probably has deterred CGT leaders from calling general strikes, but general strikes and ordinary strikes have different dynamics. Under Alfonsín, the timing of general strikes showed little correlation with the timing of ordinary strikes.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, qualitative studies suggest that general strikes are more likely than ordinary strikes to reflect political motives or turf battles among union leaders.<sup>39</sup> Hence even if Peronist incumbency deterred general strikes, it would be wrong to conclude on this basis alone that it also reduced ordinary strikes.

The explanation highlighting Peronist incumbency finds little support in the CTI data on ordinary strikes. This explanation would lead one to predict a fairly rapid decline in strike activity after Menem took office, when the new president was enjoying a “honeymoon” and even Peronist union leaders skeptical of his conversion to free-market economics were

38. General strikes were called during quarters that averaged 121 strikes (versus 115 for the entire Alfonsín presidency), 2,294,435 strikers (versus 1,984,708 for the entire Alfonsín presidency), and 5,594,565 days lost (versus 4,874,247 for the entire Alfonsín presidency). A similar finding emerges when the data are aggregated by month instead of by quarter. Data compiled from Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, *La Economía Argentina*, 1984–1993.

39. On general strikes across Latin America, see *Latin American Labor News*, nos. 2–3 (1990). On the role of turf battles among union leaders in causing general strikes during Alfonsín’s presidency, see McGuire (1992b, 52–53). For an econometric analysis suggesting that political and organizational factors motivate big ordinary strikes more than small ordinary strikes, see McGuire (1992a).

willing to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. A similar prediction would emerge from the hyperinflationary trauma explanation. The worst hyperinflation occurred between May and July 1989 (just before Menem took office) and the second-worst between December 1989 and March 1990 (also early in Menem's presidency). If the drop-off in strike activity had been caused by the trauma of hyperinflation, it would likely have occurred during the first few quarters of Menem's term, when the trauma was presumably the worst. But strike activity actually rose by certain measures during Menem's initial period in office. During the first five quarters of Menem's administration, the mean quarterly number of strikes (99) was lower than during the Alfonsín years (115), but the mean quarterly number of strikers was higher (2,737,632 versus 1,984,708) and the mean quarterly number of days lost was much higher (8,485,366 versus 4,874,247) (see table 5).

To explain why strike activity did not decline until more than a year after Menem took office, it seems reasonable to look beyond Peronism and hyperinflation to factors that came into play later in Menem's administration. One candidate is the March 1991 convertibility plan, which tamed inflation and restored economic growth. It seems unlikely, however, that the convertibility plan made the difference: the downturn in strikes came not in the second quarter of 1991, when the plan took effect, but six months earlier, in the fourth quarter of 1990 (see table 5). What happened around that time that might have inhibited strikes? Menem's October 1990 decree banning strikes in the public sector immediately springs to mind. But if this ban made the difference, then strike activity in the public-mixed sector should have dropped more precipitously than private-sector strike activity. That was not the case. Comparing the five quarters of Menem's term before the ban with the thirteen quarters afterward, the public-mixed sector's proportion of strikes fell only from 74 to 73 percent, of strikers only from 66 to 58 percent, and of working days lost only from 85 to 80 percent (see table 5). The fairly even decline in strike activity across the public-mixed and private sectors thus casts doubt on the hypothesis that the ban on public-sector strikes was responsible for the downturn in strike activity.

More important than the public-sector strike ban in reducing strike activity may well have been the defeat in September 1990 of a major strike by federal capital telephone workers protesting the privatization of the state-owned telephone company ENTel. Widely interpreted as a test of Menem's willingness to pursue free-market reforms despite worker resistance, the telephone workers' strike might well be called a "showdown strike." Its defeat came just prior to the drop-off in strike activity. Menem's supporters have compared it with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's defeat of the coal miners and U.S. President Ronald Reagan's defeat of the air traffic controllers, which launched a decade of low strike activ-

TABLE 5 Strike Activity in Argentina, by Quarter, 1989–1993

| Quarter                  | Number of Strikes | Number of Strikers | Number of Days Lost to Strikes | % of Days Lost in Public or Mixed Sectors |
|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 1989 Q3                  | 110               | 1,712,173          | 6,015,152                      | 97%                                       |
| 1989 Q4                  | 92                | 2,785,912          | 5,938,150                      | 75%                                       |
| 1990 Q1                  | 108               | 2,420,259          | 11,968,150                     | 99%                                       |
| 1990 Q2                  | 89                | 2,557,270          | 6,011,861                      | 82%                                       |
| 1990 Q3                  | 97                | 4,226,546          | 12,516,811                     | 72%                                       |
| 1990 Q4                  | 32                | 766,811            | 2,346,439                      | 90%                                       |
| 1991 Q1                  | 29                | 1,005,360          | 4,862,468                      | 94%                                       |
| 1991 Q2                  | 20                | 438,200            | 1,013,475                      | 97%                                       |
| 1991 Q3                  | 40                | 1,051,000          | 2,257,300                      | 89%                                       |
| 1991 Q4                  | 30                | 974,370            | 2,068,579                      | 89%                                       |
| 1992 Q1                  | 12                | 448,400            | 726,250                        | 51%                                       |
| 1992 Q2                  | 19                | 1,573,030          | 2,820,035                      | 32%                                       |
| 1992 Q3                  | 36                | 2,049,590          | 2,478,890                      | 81%                                       |
| 1992 Q4                  | 32                | 585,516            | 1,183,107                      | 45%                                       |
| 1993 Q1                  | 15                | 185,866            | 773,516                        | 98%                                       |
| 1993 Q2                  | 27                | 285,300            | 1,279,700                      | 84%                                       |
| 1993 Q3                  | 39                | 704,730            | 1,881,350                      | 78%                                       |
| 1993 Q4                  | 35                | 466,616            | 2,098,680                      | 99%                                       |
| Mean per quarter         |                   |                    |                                |   |
| Alfonsín presidency      |                   |                    |                                |   |
| 1984 Q1–1989 Q2          | 115               | 1,984,708          | 4,874,247                      | 80%                                       |
| Initial Menem presidency |                   |                    |                                |   |
| 1989 Q3–1990 Q3          | 99                | 2,737,632          | 8,485,366                      | 85%                                       |
| Later Menem presidency   |                   |                    |                                |   |
| 1990 Q4–1993 Q4          | 28                | 810,368            | 1,983,830                      | 80%                                       |
| Entire Menem presidency  |                   |                    |                                |   |
| 1989 Q3–1993 Q4          | 48                | 1,345,719          | 3,789,812                      | 83%                                       |
| Entire period            |                   |                    |                                |   |
| 1984 Q1–1993 Q4          | 85                | 1,697,163          | 4,386,251                      | 78%                                       |

ity in the United States (see Wynia 1992, 209–10, 223n.).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, scholars have argued that defeats of major “showdown strikes” in 1959 and 1967 brought periods of reduced strike activity in Argentina.<sup>41</sup>

Because correlation does not imply causation, the CTI statistics provide only tentative support for the showdown strike explanation. Moreover, the effect of defeating the showdown strike may have interacted with the effects of forces highlighted by the other hypotheses. Defeat of the telephone workers’ strike may have reduced strike activity only because it was inflicted by a Peronist president, or only because it came at a time when the memory of hyperinflation was still fresh. It is also possible that either satisfaction with the convertibility plan or rising unemployment after 1991 kept strike activity from increasing after its initial downward spike.<sup>42</sup> The CTI statistics nonetheless suggest that explanations of the recent decline in strike activity in Argentina should pay more attention to the defeat of a key “slowdown strike” and less to Peronist incumbency, the trauma of hyperinflation, the ban on public-sector strikes, or the economic resurgence after March 1991.

### *Conclusion*

Reflecting the importance of the endeavor, various efforts have been made to collect data on Argentine strikes. The government began the task in 1907, and scholars have tried to compile statistics as far back as 1887. These labor-intensive projects have advanced understanding of the Argentine political economy, but their contributions have been limited to varying degrees by restricted geographical scope, lack of information about strike size or volume, failure to explain methods of collecting data, neglect of comparisons among alternative data sources, and inadequate assessment of data quality. In presenting strike statistics for the 1984–1993 period, this research note has sought to avoid these limitations. It has argued that strike lists compiled by the Consejo Técnico de Inversiones represent the best available data for the post-1983 period and that their analysis can alter conventional wisdom about the recent evolution of labor militancy in Argentina.

40. On the strike-dampening effect of the PATCO air traffic controllers’ strike, see Lewin (1986, 248).

41. On the 1959 defeat and subsequent decline in strike activity, see James (1988, 118–19). On the 1967 defeat and subsequent decline, see O’Donnell (1988, 79–83, 290); and Smith (1989, 113–14, 133–35).

42. Little empirical evidence supports the conventional wisdom that high unemployment functions as a major deterrent to strikes (see Jackson 1987, 137–39).

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