



Inter-Agency Task Force on
Social and Solidarity Economy

The Creation of a Union Representation of the Popular Economy in Argentina

*A Recognition of the Informal and Self-employed Workers
and its Role for Decent Work (SDG 8)*

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What Role for Social and Solidarity Economy?**

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Abstract

The paper aims at presenting the case of the Popular Economy, a dynamic of actors that acquired a new role in Argentina in recent years, since the creation of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP) in 2011 in order to represent a set of cooperatives of urban recycling, textile and housing, together with worker-recovered enterprises. CTEP is becoming a new form of extended trade-union representation of the informal, self-employed and precarious workers lacking labour rights and social protection. These categories of workers are either organized collectively, mostly in worker cooperatives, or developing their activity individually. The main issue of the Popular Economy's recognition is extending and operationalizing worker's rights and social security coverage to the categories of workers they represent. The trajectory of the Popular Economy and the recently created CTEP is a unique experience linked to social movements' territorial organizations, many of which are Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) organizations, that have managed to scale up as a political representation. CTEP managed to center their demand on decent work for the large sector of informal and self-employed workers, especially thanks to their role in the implementation of SSE policies.

Keywords

Popular economy, Informal economy, self-employment, Unionization, Decent work, Social and solidarity economy organizations

Bio

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Introduction

The paper aims at presenting the case of the Popular Economy, a dynamic of actors that acquired a new role in Argentina in recent years, since the creation of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP) in 2011 in order to represent a set of cooperatives of urban recycling, textile and housing, together with worker-recovered enterprises. CTEP is becoming a new form of extended trade-union representation of the informal, self-employed and precarious workers lacking labour rights and social protection, either organized collectively, mostly in worker cooperatives, or developing their activity individually¹. The main issue of the Popular Economy's recognition is extending and operationalizing worker's rights and social security coverage to these categories of workers.

The emergence of CTEP in Argentina is a unique case in both the country and in Latin America (Coraggio 2018), offering a privileged look, as noted in the call for proposals, at how contexts or eco-systems, including public policies, institutional contexts, resource endowments and forms of social and political organization constitute key drivers for institutional change and implementation of People-centered Growth, especially the Goal 8 aiming at promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

According to CTEP, the Popular Economy workers are for example urban recycling workers, street vendors, worker-recovered enterprises, domestic workers, microenterprises, craftsmen etc. that can be organized as individual entrepreneurs or as cooperatives. They face serious problems related to low-quality jobs, low income, poor or even absent protection by labour laws and social security systems, nonexistent or poor trade union representation, double informality in terms of unregistered work and of unregistered production units. These impede on their and their families' access to rights and to social protection benefits. Informal and precarious employment has been growing recently in Argentina: by the end of 2017 it was over 34%, 6 out of every 10 jobs created were in the informal sector, and since the beginning of 2018 it has been the type of employment that has grown most rapidly, almost 8 out of every 10 new jobs correspond to undeclared or self-employed workers in unregistered or unstable and low-quality jobs. (INDEC 2018).

To answer these issues, CTEP is aiming at setting up a union representation and obtaining a legal recognition of these categories of workers for the first time, in order to extend their rights and reinforce their negotiation power for decent work. As a result, the Popular Economy was legally recognized in 2016 by the Law n°27345, called Ley de Emergencia Pública. It should be noted that the decree implementing the law refers to the ILO Recommendation n°204 concerning the transition from informal to formal economy. The main demands of CTEP are the implementation of a complementary revenue called "salario social complementario", the creation of a register for the Popular Economy workers and the recognition of an official status of trade union representation for CTEP.

¹ It should be noted that the associates in worker cooperatives in Argentina to be considered self-employed workers and are thus covered by the social security regime of self-employed workers that offers very poor guarantees.

The hypothesis is that the trajectory of the Popular Economy and of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy is a unique experience linked to social movements' territorial organizations, many of which are Social and Solidarity Economy organizations, that have managed to scale up as a political representation and center their demand on decent work for the large sector of informal and self-employed workers, especially thanks to their role in the implementation of SSE policies. The recognition of CTEP is a singular institutional change process, understood as a series of interplays between actors, mechanisms of response and adaptation to the crisis and implementation of change.

An original feature of CTEP is that it is built upon the experience of both political and economic actors, linked on the one hand to social movements and on the other hand to developing territorial work around various types of organizations, including SSE organizations. SSE organizations and especially worker's cooperatives, set by workers themselves or through public policies, have proven to be especially relevant to the issues of decent work and economic development following the crisis of 2001. The interplay of these territorial organizations with national level public institutions was instrumental in dealing with and voicing the issues of the sector as they played intermediary role in the implementation of public policies for Social and Solidarity Economy in the territories. This process allowed these territorial organizations to acquire political resources they used as a stepping stone for national level demands for labour rights and union representation of the precarious, informal and self-employed workers.

The paper is organized as follows: Section I describes the key drivers and actors in the process of emergence of the Popular Economy, especially the interplay of the territorial organizations with the public actors in the process of SSE policies implementation. Section II presents the main socioeconomic, political and legal features of the Popular Economy in Argentina and the scope of its recognition for the extension of rights for the informal, self-employed and precarious workers.

The conclusion emphasizes that the case of the unionization of the Popular Economy in Argentina provides more insight on the complex interplay between the socioeconomic forms of alternative or self-employment in the sectors excluded from the formal labour market, and on the political process of extension of workers' rights and social security coverage to individual enterprises or collective organizations of the Popular Economy, allowing to implement decent work.

I. From Social Economy to Popular Economy: the key drivers and actors

1. The crisis as a context of emergence of new forms of self-employment and public policies for SSE

The severe crisis that unfolded in the socioeconomic context of Argentina at the beginning of the 21st century had its greatest expression in the economy and led to a significant impoverishment in the society. When the legitimacy of the ruling class was questioned, the fragility of the State that was incapable of ensuring the maintenance of legality and order was evident (Romero 2013: 88-95). Some indicators expressed the magnitude of the crisis, especially in the labour market, as 21.5% of the active population was unemployed and the underemployment rate was 18.6% (INDEC, 2002).

The institutional reforms introduced from 2002 enabled the consolidation of a growth pattern that favoured a strong expansion of registered employment. Furthermore, income and inclusion policies were implemented, as well as a general reform of the pension system towards a unified distribution system in 2008. However, other long-standing historical and structural problems were reproduced, such as the situation of unregistered work or “informal economy”, aggravated in 2003, as it reached a rate close to 50%. Despite its subsequent reduction, in the third quarter of 2012, unregistered work remained at 35.5%, high levels that still endure today. This means that while the year-over-year percentage change in registered work was 1.1% between 2017-2018, informal employment grew about 5.8%. In the 2nd quarter of 2018 it represented a total of 4,750,000 unregistered salaried jobs (INDEC 2018).

These trends gave rise to two strategies from the popular sectors in response to the crisis: the proliferation of self-employment, and the strengthening of social movements, structured around territorial organizations, whose main demand has been oriented towards labour. The convergence of actions of several organizations originating from these social movements resulted in the creation of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy in 2011 in order to express through different means their legitimate demands on the condition of the workers of the so-called Popular Economy, and to claim the recognition of their rights².

The action of these movements has been linked since the 1990s to social protest through the blockades of roads known as “piquetes”, but also through the mobilization of new forms of economic and political association developed in the territories. Following the 2001 crisis, new forms of economic association, that were different from the predominant figure of the individual self-employed worker in the informal economy appeared. These grassroots initiatives stemming from social movements’ territorial organizations include for instance soup kitchens, fairs and markets. Other examples are the movement of urban recycling workers, known as “cartoneros”, as well as initiatives in the fields of family agriculture or textiles. Another well-known example of the popular economy and workers’ sectors response to the crisis through association is the phenomenon of worker-recovered enterprises turned into workers’ cooperatives.

Following the 2001 crisis, the governments also sought to provide solutions through social policies. This led to a reorientation of the social assistance policies of the 1990s, known as conditional cash transfer programs (CCTP), towards Social and Solidarity Economy policies, through the valorisation of the socio-economic grassroots initiatives of the popular sectors and the creation of cooperatives within public programs. The best-known programs are the Local Development and Social Economy Program « Manos a la Obra » (Resolución N° 1375 2004); the Program of Social Income through Work « Argentina Trabaja » (Resolución N° 3182 2009), under which cooperatives were massively created under the umbrella of public action; and the

² The social movements of different origins that constituted CTEP are: *Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC)*, promoted at its birth in 1994 as a political and trade-union grouping by the Revolutionary Communist Party and was formed after a federal march organized in opposition to the economic model of structural adjustment of Menem; *Movimiento Evita*, a Peronist political group, formed in 2004 that was part of the Front for Victory that governed between 2003 and 2015 ; and *Barrios de Pie Movement* created in December 2001 with the purpose of centering the claims of unemployed workers at the national level and as a social expression of the political party Libres del Sur. Since its creation, CTEP has been changing in terms of the organizations that compose it, although its growth and the diversity of origins of the political and social forces of its members stands out.

program for self-managed work « Trabajo Autogestionado » (Resolución N ° 203 2004), which was specifically created to support worker-recovered enterprises.

The importance of the socio-economic work carried out by the social movements' organizations in the territories, and the various strategies of political alliances, caused these territorial organizations to become the privileged intermediary of setting up policies for the Social and Solidarity Economy during the period 2003-2015 as part of the Kirchner governance. This intermediation should be highlighted as a key factor in strengthening the movements, thus scaling up their demand for the unionization of the Popular Economy workers.

2. On the intermediation of SSE public policies scaling up the political resources and demand of the movements

SSE programs were implemented by territorial organizations as part of a political alliance between some organizations and the Kirchner government. The intermediation of SSE policies was thus a factor of political reinforcement for the social movements. Indeed, since the Manos a la Obra program, territorial organizations have been project coordinators and managers of important public resources for the local implementation of SSE public programs, which allowed them to reinforce their politicization (Masseti 2011). This logic was amplified in the framework of the Ingreso Social con Trabajo program³, which massively created workers' cooperatives under contract with the State for the execution of small public works projects.

These policies generated some labour rights for the workers in the related SSE organizations, guaranteed by specific norms, although of limited scope and non-equivalent to the social protection of the formal wage-employment⁴. The economic development of cooperative SSE organizations created within public programs was however difficult because most often they were made up of people of high social vulnerability and their economic model was strongly linked to public procurement. Only a small number of these cooperatives continued to exist and managed to maintain their activity independently of the programs' support. However, these cooperatives were appropriated in an original manner by the social movements. For example, within the Argentina Trabaja program, the territorial organizations linked to social movements have transformed the cooperatives into spaces of socialization and job-insertion, which helped them strengthen their network of activists (Trenta 2017).

³ Created in 2009, the program was one of the most important in terms of resources and scope. It targeted people in situation of extreme socio-economic vulnerability, without income in the family group, without employment, or pensions, or other social plans, except for the Food Security plan benefits. Its purpose was the creation of jobs, training and promotion of cooperative organization, through the execution of public works of low and medium complexity improving local infrastructure. Besides generating income for vulnerable families, it intended to improve the social conditions and quality of life in the most neglected neighborhoods.

⁴ The Social Economy policies were accompanied by transfers of monetary resources and partial social protection measures. The Laws 25865 and 26223 of 2004 created a register of the providers of social economy goods and services for the local development "Registro Nacional de Efectores de Desarrollo Local and Social Economy" and a special access to social protection named "Monotributo Social". The latter provides for a contribution of 50% for access to social coverage, the rest being paid by the State. It applies to individual contributors and members of worker cooperatives with low incomes, who may be providers of the State in the framework of public programs. However, this scheme is not equivalent to the social protection of formal workers, as it does not guarantee a minimum wage and does not sufficiently cover the replacement income (paid leave, pensions, illness, etc.) which are claimed by the CTEP.

The increase in the management power and the funding granted to the territorial organizations for the implementation of public policies for SSE during the Kirchner government, allowed them to mobilize these resources for the construction of the political capital of the social movement : to recruit more committed activists, to diversify and to increase economic services and opportunities, both in terms of employment and provision of public services for the movement's adherents, and thus to expand or retain the militant base of the movement.

Since the creation of CTEP, it is interesting to notice how the cooperatives inherited from Kirchner's governance SSE programs have been mobilized in the new union logic of the movement. The cooperatives seem to continue to be used as resources for this movement's new strategy, and are seen by some activists as "basic units of the labour union", similar to the structure of the General Confederation of Workers "CGT" (Grabois and Pésico 2014 p.9).

Mauricio Macri, the President of Argentina since December 10, 2015, has maintained or even increased the budgets of social programs⁵. The programs Manos a la Obra and Trabajo Autogestionado have also been renewed. However, the creation of cooperatives as part of public programs has ceased to be compulsory⁶. CTEP is against this measure of suppression of cooperatives in the social plans. As a matter of fact, this policy is likely to make the movement lose an important resource. However, CTEP continues to use SSE organizations as resources to strengthen the movement and as organizational innovations (Bruno, Coehlo and Palumbo, 2017) outside public programs. CTEP thus created a health mutual⁷, hoping to establish rights and more autonomy in the management of the health insurances traditionally managed by historical unions.

The intermediation of public policies for SSE and for the proliferation of self-generated and self-managed forms of work within SSE organizations have politically strengthened the movements and their demands for decent work. However, the limited scope of the granted labour rights and the shocks of the successive crises of 2001 then of 2008, reinforced the certainties the social movement had that the problems of unemployment that persisted in the popular sectors were a structural and not a transitory issue (Pésico et al., 2017). This has brought them back to their militant roots which had been strengthened within the SSE policies implementation, and to their identity, not as SSE organizations, but as "Workers" in search of the recognition of their rights.

Specifically, the territorial organizations rallied around the issue of the discarded⁸ and the excluded, on which basis a representation of the condition of the Popular Economy as a sector

⁵ The Argentina Trabaja program was modified by assigning 12.3 million pesos in the 2017 budget (MDS 2018) and 16.2 million in the 2018 budget, with a number of beneficiaries that increased by 63%. Cf. Tarricone, 2018.

⁶ The new government states that "the cooperatives in the program did not achieve a consolidation and insertion in the market and the corresponding labour inclusion of the beneficiaries that formed them". For this reason, changes were introduced that maintain the transfer of income for the legal persons, although they interrupt the modality of creation of cooperatives and the promotion of community organizations and extend the scope of the Executing Entities, such as government and non-government agencies, beyond the territorial organizations linked to social movements.

⁷ The health mutual Senderos is the social insurance fund of the CTEP, see mutualsenderos.org.ar

⁸ The leaders of CTEP adopt the notion of discarded to which the speech of Pope Francisco at the Welcome Ceremony, La Paz, Bolivia, on July 8th 2015 refers, when he addressed society on behalf of the Church. In it, the need to "defend those who today are discarded because of so many interests that place the money god at the center of economic life" is mentioned.

involved for the extension of labour rights was forged. That identity helped structuring the collective action for the institutional recognition from the government in different ways. This action aimed at “follow[ing] up the struggles of those excluded from the formal labour market” and to solidify the union representation of self-employed workers. Thus, the necessity of generating a legal framework for the social protection of work in this large Popular Economy sector became evident.

II. The recognition of the Popular Economy and its main political, legal and socio-economic features

1. The popular economy as a collective identity and a demand for decent work

From the conceptual point of view, some Latin American authors consider the Popular Economy as a reality that emerges from poverty (Razetto Migliaro 1999 p.7) and it is expressed in activities aimed at satisfying the needs of a specific group, guided by a logic of reproduction of its members (Coraggio 1989 pp. 27-28). Beyond the economic initiatives, it refers to spontaneous actions of solidarity between family members, friends and neighbors and also to collective actions organized at community level, aiming at a better quality of life (Sarria Icaza and Tiribia 2003). This characterization outlines a heterogeneous universe of economic units, activities and forms of job-insertion, that empirically correspond to diverse occupational positions.

In a labour market of 23,780,000 people in the first quarter of 2017, this universe comprised 19.2% of the economically active population and 21.2% of the total occupation in urban agglomerates, according to the Permanent Survey of Homes. This means that in the social structure of labour, the Popular Economy represented almost 2 out of 10 people employed and this type of insertion included 2,400,838 people in the main urban agglomerations of Argentina (Salvia, Donza and Poy 2018). It is a heterogeneous sector, whose members are represented by the group of small employers and technicians, self-employed workers and unqualified workers (in domestic service, as self-employed or in employment programs). The main activities fall within the framework of peripheral economic processes that include the production of goods and services, marketing and exchange with low intervention of money in transactions.

From the perspective of CTEP, the Popular Economy appears above all as a form of organization of labour in the popular sectors outside formal wage-employment, in an associated or individual manner, and not as an entrepreneurial organization of a marginal sector. That is what makes it larger and differentiates it from the cooperative economy, considering that “the cooperative is just one form of organization of work in the Popular Economy among others” (Pérsico et al. 2017), and that the social movement’s territorial organizations “use cooperatives to distribute work”. (Interview with Emilio Pérsico 2018). The social category of those who integrate the Popular Economy is defined by the absence of rights, as opposed to the condition of wage employment-related rights that are recognized as a fundamental human right. Because Popular Economy workers are not considered salaried workers, they are characterized as “unnecessary as workers, superfluous as consumers, discarded by the market and left to their own devices by the State” (Grabois 2014 p.12). These traits try to reveal a collective identity, capable of reinforcing a strong “Us”, which expresses itself as a sense of belonging rooted in the union organization. In the characterization carried out by the leaders, the reference to the

context of expulsion and the impact of “the reality of discarding” is most frequently accentuated⁹.

The claim that is defended for the workers of the Popular Economy emphasizes the importance of the processes that favor the creation of a “popular institutionality”. In this condition lies the main aspect of separation and differentiation regarding the nature of work in comparison with the social economy and the informal economy. While the former is criticized for imposing certain organizational forms almost exclusively and for considering solidarity as an attribute of the popular sector, the latter is opposed because it considers that it does not take into account the possibility of institutional insertion of all workers who act in the informality.

The novelty in the strategy that CTEP sustains refers to the need to protect work in all its forms and to ensure the workers the rights established in the National Constitution and the ratified ILO Conventions. This means viewing employment as a right in itself, rather than as an object of social policy. The recognition of work as a right, and the access to protections similar to formal wage-employment, also allows to raise demands around obtaining a decent salary as workers creating value through their work, and not as beneficiaries of assistential welfare policies, a reality that can no longer be ignored by the State. Thus the strategy of CTEP in the field of the Popular Economy has allowed its growth and its consolidation as union organization and as an expression of a national force of a federal nature, trying to preserve the struggle of the Popular Economy’s workers from the political vagaries.

2. The recognition, legal framework and scope of the Popular Economy

The demand of CTEP for the recognition of the Popular Economy was expressed in numerous collective actions: demonstrations, “banderazos”, campaigns, pickets, fighting days, takeovers, road cuts and federal marches. These traditional protest actions were supported by deliberative bodies such as neighborhood assemblies and other bodies, in which the access to rights was invoked as an instrument for the vindication of a collective cause. Thus, the campaign carried out in September 2016 with the purpose of promoting a law to declare Social Emergency at a national level (CTEP 2016) made it possible to link the action of the movement with the one developed by various trade unions and political organizations. The bill, presented by the Front for Victory and the Justicialist Party, was voted unanimously in the Senate of the Nation and only had one vote against in the Chamber of Deputies. The presentation of the bill was accompanied by the General Confederation of Labour (Argentina) the two union federations of Workers of Argentina, the Argentinian Agrarian Federation and the General Economic Confederation. The support of the Social Pastoral of the Argentinian Church favored the articulation of the dialogue between all parties.

As a result of these various actions, the enactment of Law 27345 was approved by the National Congress in December 2016. Its purpose is “to promote and defend the rights of workers of the popular economy, throughout the national territory and it is based on the guarantees granted to work in its various forms by article 14bis of the National Constitution” (article 2).

⁹ Associated to the message of Pope Francisco such as indicated in the *Evangelii Gaudium*, “human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded... The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, chap. 2).

Based on the capacity of the movements that make up CTEP to agree on strategies of action, to identify their interlocutors and to establish alliances of different nature, a demand was built around their recognition as an official union. In this line of demands, the Ministry of Labour Employment and Social Security (MTEySS)¹⁰ recognized to a certain extent the representativity, called “personeria social”, of the organizations that are registered in the Registry of Popular Economy Organizations and Self-Managed Enterprises. The norm (*Resolution 32 2016*) gave rise to a union regime compatible with the current union model in Argentina, which until 2016 only contemplated the situation of salaried workers. Subsequently, CTEP claimed the same rights that the law confers to a trade union organization, i.e. to be able to determine its purpose, scope of representation and territorial action. The representation of the Popular Economy’s workers was raised as part of “the history of the Argentinian labour movement” with a view to promote the reunification of the trade union federations within the CGT and postulating a model of union organization that “should be reformulated”, according to CTEP’s leaders (Grabois 2015).

With the enactment of Law 27345, several measures, namely the Council of the Popular Economy and the allocation of the Supplementary Social Salary (SSC), were instituted in the social protection field with the purpose of “contributing to the satisfaction of the basic needs of the beneficiaries and their families and promoting the upholding and sustainability of socio-productive projects¹¹” (Article 3). Since its inauguration in February 2017, the Council has worked through equal negotiation rounds between representatives of the workers of the Popular Economy¹² and the National State to channel claims and demands.

As of now, evaluating the scope of the Popular Economy is difficult. The law enabled the creation of a Register of Workers of the Popular Economy (Article 6) within the Ministry of Social Development for the purpose of the registration of workers of the Popular Economy and their access to different benefits within the framework of the law. However, there is no information on the number of enrollees and their sociodemographic characteristics. An indirect reference is derived from the budgetary execution of the national administration with respect to the data on Supplementary Social Salary (SSC) destined to supplement the income of the workers of the Popular Economy in situation of high social and economic vulnerability and to sustain their productive community projects. According to the budgetary goals of the Ministry of Social Development, 180,975 people receive the benefit of the Supplementary Social Salary within the framework of the Socio-productive Project Strengthening Program for the Popular Economy, while a coverage of 241,786 people is estimated for 2019 (National Budget Office 2018).

¹⁰ The regulation, signed by the government of Mauricio Macri, replaced seven articles of a Resolution of the MTEySS ratified by the government of C. Fernández de Kirchner on December 8th 2015, although it did not take effect because it was not published in the Official Gazette.

¹¹ The SSC is non-retributive and non-transferable, it cannot be subject to assignment, seizure or retention, except in the case of debts arising from judicially-recognized maintenance allowances, within the scope of Law 25963. It gives these workers 50% of the minimum wage, complementing the income that they can generate on their own and it is granted for the benefit of all the family members of the beneficiary at the rate of one per family unit.

¹² In the council, the three organizations that signed the Social Emergency bill (Barrios de Pie, the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy and the Corriente Clasista y Combativa) participate together with three members of the government. National social plans are discussed within the council in order to promote their progressive transformation into an SSC (Article 7).

3. Advances and challenges regarding wages and social protection for the workers of the Popular Economy

The Community Productive Projects (Proyectos Productivos Comunitarios) program represents one of the government policy tools with the greatest impact to access the Complementary Social Salary proposed by CTEP. In 2018, the productive units that comprised it incorporated nearly 100,000 workers who were in the informal sector¹³, facilitating the access to formal social protection of people previously excluded from the benefits of salaried work. The design of these policies, especially promoted by the MDS, had as its purpose “the rationality in the management of the programs” and the elimination of intermediation to avoid discretionality and clientelism. In this area, some progress was made towards a more direct relationship of the organizations with the State and some better results regarding the condition of labour integration. However, the weight of social organizations’ management does not always ensure or guarantee control and effectiveness in the development of genuine work projects. It should be noted that the Complementary Social Salaries are distributed through social organizations, which is different than other social plans such as the Universal Allowance per Child (Asignación Universal por Hijo) or Doing the Future (Hacemos Futuro). The worker receives the salary as a result of a negotiation between the social organizations that represent him and the members of the government that make up the Council of the Popular Economy (three officials of the executive power and three leaders of social organizations).

Negotiation has been a way of dealing with situations of tension, focusing on a zone between pure confrontation and pure problem solving. The confrontation has been manifested permanently through the support of CTEP in favor of the national strikes called by the workers' unions, the days of popular gatherings in the neighborhoods, of the marches under the motto “land, roof, work” and of the demand for the increase of the social salary and for the adoption of laws that benefit the popular sectors, as well as the demands for the urgent declaration of the Food Emergency, for the days of mobilization in front of the offices of ANSES and of the Ministry of Social Development to fight against the suspension of employment programs or against the non-compliance with payments to infrastructure works, etc. However, the resolution of issues, has led to responses to the urgency of social problems that in some cases resulted in the increase in social plans and in the items for community kitchens or other measures related to the needs of the most vulnerable sectors. This negotiation has taken place in a context marked by the acceleration of inflation, especially in the price of food, of the diminution of value of income, of higher unemployment and a strong recession that led to the increase of poverty, which reached 33.6% of the population by the end of 2018.

Regardless of the conviction expressed by the leaders of CTEP in their representation capacity, the negotiation has included various forms and modalities in the face of situations of tension, which have arisen in part as a result of the public expressions of the movements’ claim.

In terms of resources allocated to the SSC in November 2017, they were of 40,626,781 dollars¹⁴, which increased by 4% in November 2018. The trend was especially significant in terms of the number of people included, with a 68% increase between 2017 and 2018 (from 160 000 beneficiaries at the end of 2017, 271 000 were reached at the end of 2018). It should be noted that at the end of 2018 the employment rate was 42.2%, the unemployment rate was 9.1% and the unregistered employment rate (wage earners over 14 years of age) was 34.3%.

¹³ 246,000 people who were part of the previous programs "Argentina Trabaja" and "Ellas Hacen" were added to this group.

¹⁴ In November 2017 it was equivalent to 713 million ARS and passed in November 2018 to 1,621 ARS.

In relation to the increase in resources, the amount received by each incorporated person was modified and raised in December 2018 with an increase that brought the previous complementary social salary from 4,400 ARS (109 dollars) to 6,000 ARS (equivalent to 273 dollars). The amount corresponds to the updates of the minimum wage agreed between the government, unions and employers in a negotiation in which CTEP did not intervene by decision of the trade unions. As a synthesis of the negotiations and of the agreed increases, after a meeting held at the MDS, a leader of CTEP and of the Evita Movement indicated the “acceptance of the official proposal knowing that it does not exceed the poverty line since the Law of social emergency establishes a floor of 50% of the minimum wage. In other words, it does not realize any social policy because the government's economic model is a “factory of poor”¹⁵.

Finally, and with respect to the social protection of the worker of the Popular Economy, it should be noted that the coverage is only extensive to those who are beneficiaries of the Monotributo social. In this condition, the worker can join the health mutual Senderos¹⁶ managed by CTEP that has conceived and that executes a Family and Community Health Plan based on the care and prevention of diseases and the health promotion and education with the goal of providing care in all stages of life in a comprehensive and continuous manner. In this regard, by promoting this protection tool, the movement has underlined that “health is a construction with social, economic and political implications and, above all, a right”.

Final considerations

The described trajectory reveals a strategy of action by virtue of which the social movements reunited in CTEP have been able to construct a common representation of the workers of the Popular Economy, although heterogeneity is characteristic of the sector.

In the light of the notion of ideas, interests and institutions (Hall 1994, Hecló 1997), the experience that we describe allows us to highlight the importance of the union organization that provides evidence of the presence of a group with sufficient strength to mobilize its social base around specific demands. To a certain extent, this idea determines the perception of the issues raised and the way to build the solutions. The idea has crystallized in the institutionalization of new legal figures of union representation of the Popular Economy and constitutes a virtuous starting point for the recognition of a negative subject (the excluded) and their rights as a worker. It also positions the SSE organizations as legal actors, with the capacity to join the formal labour market and strengthen the organization of work that favors self-management and sustainable development.

However, there are several pitfalls that could hinder such change, including a significant heterogeneity of approaches and proposals within the various fractions of the social movement, some strategies of political opportunism, a potentially conflictual division of the space of the management of social protection with traditional unions, and especially economic and financial difficulties to implement an extension of the social protection to the informal economy workers.

¹⁵ Onorato Gildo. 2018.

¹⁶ Among the benefits of the membership in the health mutual Senderos is the free medication for chronic diseases and the exemption of payment of co-insurance or the material for surgical interventions, among other benefits.

The reordering of the political forces in the 2019 presidential election scenario and the advancement of some leaders in the line of alliances and party commitments can undoubtedly weaken the gains and lead to the loss of adherents, diminishing the effectiveness of the negotiating capacity and the relevance of CTEP as a social movement.

However, the process of recognizing the Popular Economy as a new category of the socio-economic and political space and not just as a marginal sector, is an important advance in the extension of labour rights for decent work of the popular sectors in Argentina.

The case of the unionization of the Popular Economy in Argentina needs to be further discussed in two respects. First, it shows a very interesting dynamic of appropriation of SSE organizations and of public policies for SSE by social movements. This demonstrates that not only the SSE needs to be scaled up to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but the issue could also be its ability to scale up related social processes, in this case social movements, aimed at implementing the SDGs objectives. On the other hand, this process shows how the demand for employment and decent work has been put forward as a right in itself and not as an object of social policy or mere promotion of economic organizations. It thus highlights the interdependence of the objectives of economic development with the need for extension of the corresponding social rights.

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