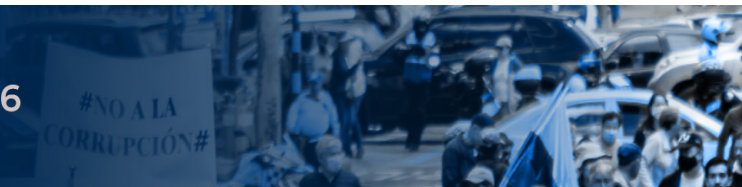


Chapter 16 / Capítulo 16



*Time, Power, and Resistances in Latin America:
Narratives, Democracy, and Global Reconfigurations
(English Version)*

ISBN: 978-9915-704-40-1

DOI: 10.62486/978-9915-704-40-1.Ch16

Pages: 149-155

©2026 The authors. This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 License.

Politics from below: the central de trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) as an agent of social transformation

La política desde abajo: la central de trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) como agente de transformación social

Gloria Claudia Lucero¹ ✉

¹Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales FLACSO, Maestría en Políticas Públicas y Desarrollo. Argentina.

Corresponding author: Gloria Claudia Lucero ✉

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) as a case study of “politics from below” and its role as an agent of social transformation. It argues that this way of doing politics emerges from the resistance and struggles of historically marginalized subjects, in opposition to hegemonic power structures. The research is framed within a critique of neocolonialism, examining how economic dependency, financial control, and political interventionism perpetuate global inequalities. The analysis of the CTA draws on theorists such as Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, and Maristella Svampa to unpack the “coloniality of power and knowledge.” The CTA represents a rupture with traditional trade unionism by promoting political autonomy, union democracy, and the inclusion of informal workers and those in the popular economy. By expanding its agenda to encompass struggles for human, gender, and environmental rights, the CTA acts as a social movement that challenges hegemonic discourses and validates “knowledges of resistance.” In conclusion, the paper argues that the CTA exemplifies how social transformation and global justice do not originate from elites, but from the organization and struggle of the peoples of the Global South, who build political and economic alternatives from the grassroots of society.

Keywords: Politics From Below; CTA; Neocolonialism; Social Transformation; Global South.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo analiza la Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) como un caso de estudio de la “política desde abajo” y su rol como agente de transformación social. Se argumenta que esta forma de hacer política emerge de la resistencia y las luchas de los sujetos históricamente marginados, en contraposición a las estructuras de poder hegemónico. La investigación se enmarca en la crítica al neocolonialismo, analizando cómo la dependencia económica, el control financiero y el intervencionismo político perpetúan las desigualdades globales. El análisis de la CTA se apoya en teóricos como Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo y Maristella Svampa para desentrañar la “colonialidad del poder y del saber”. La CTA representa un quiebre con el sindicalismo tradicional al promover la autonomía política, la democracia sindical y la inclusión de trabajadores informales y de la economía popular. Al ampliar su agenda para abarcar luchas por los derechos humanos, de género y ambientales, la CTA actúa como un movimiento social que desafía los discursos hegemónicos y valida los “saberes de la resistencia”. En conclusión, el trabajo sostiene que la CTA ejemplifica cómo la transformación social y la justicia global no

proviene de las élites, sino de la organización y lucha de los pueblos del Sur global, construyendo alternativas políticas y económicas desde la base de la sociedad.

Palabras clave: Política Desde Abajo; CTA; Neopolonialismo; Transformación Social; Sur Global.

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the First International Congress of Student Researchers - CIE IBERO 2025, this research paper delves into the notion of “politics from below” as a pillar of social transformation. Unlike vertical power structures, politics from below emerges from the diversity, resistance, and struggles of historically marginalized subjects. To illustrate this concept, the case study takes the “Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA)” (Argentine Workers’ Central Union), an emblematic actor in how social and trade union movements in the global South become agents of their own destiny and challenge traditional logics of power.

The argument is based on a critique of hegemonic power, which perpetuates structures of domination and inequality through mechanisms such as neocolonialism. This operates in a subtle yet persistent manner through economic dependence and financial control, rather than through the military occupations of the past. The CTA, with its innovative approach and inclusion of the most vulnerable sectors, is a clear example of how grassroots politics challenges this order.

Theoretical Framework: Grassroots politics versus hegemonic power

This theoretical framework seeks to provide conceptual tools for analyzing “politics from below” as an engine of social transformation. We will address the dynamic interaction between hegemonic power structures and practices of resistance emerging from the “global South.”

The “South” as an Epistemological and Political Locus

The concept of the “South” transcends its geographical connotation to become a fundamental “epistemological and political locus.” As Enrique Dussel (1977) points out, modernity is constructed based on the “coloniality of power,” which renders invisible and subordinates the knowledge of peripheral regions (Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* 1977). For his part, Walter Dignolo expands on this idea with the “epistemologies of the South” (2007), which offer different perspectives on reality and open paths toward “epistemic disobedience” (Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* 2000). The CTA, as an alternative to traditional trade unionism, is part of this logic of constructing a political subject based on the realities of the South.

Critique of Hegemonic Power and the Persistence of Neocolonialism

Criticism of hegemonic power is articulated as an analysis of how structures of domination are maintained in the current world system through neocolonialism. This manifests itself in:

- **Economic Dependency:** The South is positioned as a supplier of raw materials and cheap labor, perpetuating an unequal exchange. Foreign debt and conditional loans from organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank are key tools.

Oscar Osazlak’s view of state formation in Latin America helps us understand how internal structures are constrained by external dynamics (Osazlak, *La formación del Estado argentino*, 1997).

- **Financial and Corporate Control:** Large multinational corporations and global financial institutions exercise structural power that prioritizes corporate profits over the needs of the population, leading to privatization and job insecurity.

- **Political and Military Interventionism:** This manifests itself in interference in internal affairs and the installation of military bases that safeguard the hegemonic interests of the North. Oscar Oszlak's (1997) perspective on state capacity is key to analyzing how these interventions affect the autonomy of Southern governments.

Politics from Below: Agency and Diversity of Social Movements

As a counterpoint to hegemonic power, "politics from below" emerges as a philosophy of action where marginalized subjects become agents of their own destiny. Social movements in the South are the most visible manifestation of this politics. (Maristella Svampa) has analyzed in depth how these movements construct their own agendas and forms of organization, diversifying their struggles beyond a single issue (Svampa, *Debates latinoamericanos* 2008).

- **Diversity of struggles:** This is expressed in indigenous, feminist, environmentalist, and workers' movements. By including and representing formal, informal, and unemployed workers, the CTA integrates this diversity of social and labor struggles.
- **Knowledge of Resistance:** An essential component of grassroots politics is the knowledge of resistance, systems of knowledge that offer alternatives to the hegemonic model. (Maristella Svampa) addresses how these forms of knowledge propose a reciprocal relationship with nature, such as the concept of "Good Living" (Svampa, *Extractivism, Neo-extractivism, and the New Eco-social Challenges*, 2015). By including and empowering workers in the popular economy, the CTA validates and promotes these forms of organization that operate outside the capitalist logic.

Analysis of the CTA: Vanguard of Social Transformation from Below

The CTA is not only a labor union, but also a manifestation of grassroots politics in Argentina. Its approach is aligned with a philosophy of action that seeks radical social transformation, not merely tactical change.

The CTA's challenge to hegemonic power

Since its founding in 1992, the CTA has operated as a crucial counterpoint to neoliberalism. Its origins lie in dissatisfaction with the CGT, which was seen as co-opted by the state. By affiliating formal, informal, and unemployed workers, the CTA demonstrated that the struggle for labor and social rights was not limited to traditional spaces.

The force of social transformation in the CTA

The CTA has redefined the concept of a social movement by integrating diverse struggles beyond the labor sphere. It has incorporated human rights, gender equality, and environmental policies into its agenda. Its model of direct affiliation and secret ballot for the election of authorities promotes a deeper and more participatory union democracy, in contrast to the traditional top-down model.

Impact of the CTA on social transformation

The Argentine Workers' Central Union (CTA) has transcended the traditional role of a union to become a central political actor in the country's social transformation. Its impact is not limited to defending wages, but is also evident in its ability to articulate various struggles and redefine the very notion of the working class.

Concrete Struggles: A History of Mobilization

The CTA's participation in key mobilizations illustrates its role as a force for change.

- **The 2001 protests:** The 2001 crisis was a turning point. The CTA played a leading

role in the mass mobilizations that culminated in the resignation of Fernando de la Rúa's government. Unlike the CGT, which had a closer relationship with the state, the CTA joined forces with neighborhood assemblies, piquetero movements, and other social organizations, forming a broad front that demanded a radical change in the economic and political model. Its marches and roadblocks were not only for labor rights, but also against the neoliberalism that had devastated the Argentine economy.

- **Defense of retirees' rights:** A clear example of its expanded agenda is the fight for retirees' rights. The CTA actively promoted and supported the repeal of laws that cut their benefits and fought for the restoration of the 82 % mobile, linking the issue of the elderly with a question of social justice. This struggle demonstrated that the CTA defends all vulnerable sectors, not just active workers.
- **Fight against labor reform:** The CTA has taken a firm stand against labor reforms that seek to make work more precarious. In 2017, it led to massive protests against a bill by Mauricio Macri's government that sought to make hiring conditions more flexible and reduce severance pay. It called for general strikes and marches, which, although they did not completely halt the reform, did highlight popular rejection, moreover, slow down the most regressive aspects of the proposal.

The Inclusion of the Popular Economy: A Historic Breakthrough

One of the most significant and revolutionary contributions of the CTA has been its decision to incorporate informal workers and popular economy movements.

- **Broadening the concept of worker:** Traditionally, a "worker" was someone who had a formal job, with a salary and union rights. The CTA broke this paradigm by recognizing unemployed workers, urban waste collectors (cartoneros), street vendors, and artisans as part of the working class. This inclusion was not symbolic; it materialized in the creation of specific union branches and in the representation of their demands at the political negotiating table.
- **From protest to organization:** The CTA not only gave them a place but also provided an organizational structure. It worked together with social movements such as the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP) so that the "workers of the popular economy could organize, obtain legal recognition for their cooperatives, and access social rights. This collaboration transformed the notion of the "piquetero" from a simple protester to a political actor with concrete proposals for social transformation.
- **The union as a tool for development:** By including the popular economy, the CTA transformed the union's role. From being a mere wage negotiator, it became a tool for productive development, self-management, and the promotion of an alternative economic model. The union became a space for issues such as access to land and food production at local fairs, and the creation of solidarity networks, validating the "knowledge of resistance" that operates outside capitalist logic.

CONCLUSIONS

The CTA is the vanguard of social transformation from below

This work has explored the intricate relationship between politics, power, and social transformation from the perspective of the "global South," using the Argentine Workers' Central Union (CTA) as a paradigmatic case study of "politics from below."

We have reaffirmed the thesis that the CTA embodies this model of alternative politics. Our research has shown that criticism of hegemonic power, based on the dynamics of neocolonialism and the imposition of dominant discourses, is fundamental to understanding the structures of

inequality that persist in the current world system. Authors such as Dussel, Mignolo, and Oszlak have enabled us to unravel how this hegemony is exercised not only economically but also through the colonization of knowledge.

In this context, the CTA emerges as a forceful response. Since its inception, it has positioned itself as a distinct actor by promoting radical political autonomy, an essential characteristic of “politics from below.” Its model of direct affiliation and its emphasis on union democracy not only distinguish it from traditional unionism but also constitute a concrete practice of innovation.

The CTA has proven to be an active force in social transformation by expanding its agenda beyond labor issues and integrating a diversity of struggles, including environmental, gender, and human rights. Its focus on the inclusion of the popular economy validates the “knowledge of resistance” and fosters alternative economies.

In short, this analysis suggests that true global justice and social transformation will not come from elites or traditional power structures, but from the experiences, knowledge, and struggles of the peoples of the South. The Argentine Workers’ Central Union is a living example of how critical thinking becomes a tool for action, opening the way to the construction of political and economic alternatives that are sustainable, equitable, and radically democratic.

The future of the CTA and grassroots politics in Argentina

The path to the future for the CTA and grassroots politics is not without challenges. Trade union fragmentation and the emergence of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, will require constant redefinition of strategies. However, the CTA’s track record shows that its ability to adapt and its deep roots in social struggles give it a privileged position.

The CTA is called upon to remain a key player, not only in the defense of labor rights but also as a catalyst for an alternative development model. Its challenge will be to strengthen the unity and solidarity of the popular sectors, demonstrating that the hope for a more just future lies in workers’ own capacity to build social transformation from below.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Dussel, E. (1977). *Filosofía de la liberación*. Ediciones de la Universidad de Cuyo.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2000). *Historias locales/diseños globales: Colonialidad, saberes subalternos y pensamiento fronterizo*. Akal.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). *Desobediencia epistémica: Retórica de la modernidad, lógica de la colonialidad y gramática de la de-colonialidad*. Ediciones del Signo.
- Oszlak, O. (1997). *La formación del Estado argentino: Orden, progreso y organización nacional*. Planeta.
- Svampa, M. (2008). *Cambio de época: Movimientos sociales y ética anticapitalista*. Planeta.
- Svampa, M. (2015). *Extractivismo, neoextractivismo y los nuevos desafíos ecosociales*. Ediciones del Signo.

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Data curation: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Formal analysis: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Research: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Methodology: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Project management: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Resources: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Software: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Supervision: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Validation: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Visualization: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Writing - original draft: Gloria Claudia Lucero.

Writing - review and editing: Gloria Claudia Lucero.