

Nicolás Iñigo Carrera

»VIOLENCE« AS AN ECONOMIC FORCE:

the process of proletarianisation among the indigenous people of
the Argentinian Chaco, 1884-1930



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Cover: Indigenous worker employed at a sawmill in Chaco province, 1970.
(Photo: the author)

VIOLENCE AS AN ECONOMIC FORCE:
THE PROCESS OF PROLETARIANISATION AMONG
THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE ARGENTINIAN
CHACO 1884 - 1930

Nicolás Iñigo Carrera

Copenhagen, October 1982

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He has published material on the following themes: the formation of a rural semi-proletariat and the incorporation of indigenous people in the production of cotton; the role of the state in the process of creating necessary conditions for establishing a rural productive system; the alliance between workers and peasants in the conflicts of 1934 and 1936 (in collaboration); class formation among small scale producers in the cotton zone of the Chaco. He is a member of the Latin American Association for Rural Sociology.

The study presented here is part of a larger investigation on "The rural proletariat and class conflict in the country: worker-peasant alliance and millenarianism in the Argentinian Chaco from 1880 to 1976". The research was carried out with financial assistance from the Latin American Programme of the Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation with Developing Countries (SAREC-SIDA). Liliana Fuscaldo was also a member of the research team and Lilia Sierra participated in the collection of data. This paper was first presented to the 6th Symposium of Latin American Economic History held in Vancouver, Canada, August 10-17, 1979. It was later published in Spanish and is available from: CICSO, Defensa 665 5^oC, Buenos Aires, Argentina. This document has been translated from the original Spanish by Fiona Wilson.

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Preface

When talking about the indigenous peoples of northern Argentina, one must use the past tense. Hunter/gatherer societies in that region have been constantly undermined since the late 19th century as indigenous resources of land and labour were pulled into the capitalist economy. Vestiges of the identities and cultures of the Matacos, Tobas, Mocovies and Vilelas (though twisted and changed as a result of the contact process) are now disappearing. As Nicolás Iñigo notes in his concluding comments, indigenous peoples are being integrated irrevocably into national society. This process greatly speeded up in the 1960's. Once capital had no further use for the land or labour in this region, indigenous and settler populations have been forced to emigrate to the towns in search of work. This emigration and subsequent absorption into the poorest social stratum of Argentinian society has spelled the end of indigenous social and cultural distinctiveness. In publishing a work devoted to an historical example of the contact process in South America, IWGIA departs from its usual policy. But we believe that this poignant history of the indigenous peoples of northern Argentina is not without relevance at the present day, for it can help in the broader analysis and understanding of processes at work as white society expands and encroaches upon indigenous land.

Enormous difficulties face researchers trying to unearth the history of contact between white society and peoples living in the tropical lowlands of South America. Very few detailed studies exist to date which discuss the earlier phases of the capitalist expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Outstanding in this field is the work by Stefano Varese on the Campa of the tropical lowlands of central Peru (1968 and in brief, IWGIA, 1972). Despite the difficulties, Nicolás Iñigo has made a valiant attempt at reconstruction. He has discovered a wide range of relevant contemporary documents and has pieced together this information in order to analyse certain aspects of the contact process. But the very nature of the written

source material virtually determines that he approach the contact process through the actions and reactions of the invading society. Sadly, the indigenous people themselves emerge as only shadowy figures.

Historical records of the contact process, as in the Argentinian case, are one-sided. They represent the voices of military men, government officials, priests, entrepreneurs and more rarely, small-holder colonists. These writings are all imbued with the "pioneer" ideology of the invading society towards the "natives" irrespective of the fact that white society was itself divided along class and interest lines. As José de Souza Martins (1980) has emphasised: "a pioneer is someone who takes into other regions, for this very reason conceived of as new ones, the old virtues, ideas and social relations which are essential to the society he represents. The pioneer has always been someone who recognises these characteristics alone as being those of the human condition itself. For this very reason, observation always shows that a 'pioneer' is someone who does not recognise the humanity of previous occupiers of the frontier areas" (p. 99). This ideology not only permeates the sources quoted by Iñigo, it underlies the actions of the invading society. Though desperately in need of Indian labour, the army though representing settler interests brutally massacred indigenous people; exemplified in this text by the massacre of 1924.

The testimony of indigenous people concerning the earlier phases of contact can rarely be discovered in the written word. But indigenous response and reaction can sometimes be traced in more subtle and indirect ways. For example, Nathan Wachtel (1977) attempted to show how the impact of the Spanish conquest can be seen to reverberate through the songs, dances and tales of the highland Indians of Peru; and how the cataclysmic event 500 years before has been interpreted and assimilated into indigenous thought. Indigenous reaction in the northern Argentinian case can be glimpsed at through some of the evidence given here by the author. The extreme violence and rapidity

of the process of incorporation (together with the virtual impossibility of retreat into lands as yet uncolonised) meant that indigenous reaction was correspondingly desperate. As physical flight was precluded, so other forms of emotional flight were attempted: the attempt at isolation from the white man's economic world; the desperate effort to negate the white man's violence through the belief that Christian bullets would not cause harm; and finally the sinking into apathy and passivity, readily played upon and deepened by the fundamentalist missionaries.

In this Document, Nicolás Iñigo discusses the contact process in relation to the phases of capitalist expansion in Argentina which are seen to have dictated the timing and nature of the advances; which agents from white society made and consolidated contact with tribal peoples; and the economic purposes to which Indian land and labour were directed within the capitalist sphere. The overall lines of capital's advance into the tropical periphery was replicated in other South American countries at the same time. It was an expansion taking place at a continental scale. For example, in the tropical lowlands of central Peru, after military conquest successfully won back Campa and Amuesha land for white society in 1847, in the 1870's the first major commodity bonanza (of cane alcohol) was generated in the region with entrepreneurs rapidly developing their wooded land concessions into thriving plantations using indebted labour. Though in this case, lowland Indians were generally seen as a less valuable labour force compared with highland Indians from the adjacent Sierra or indentured Chinese coolies brought up from the coast (Wilson, 1982).

The history of contact with hunter/gatherer societies in northern Argentina did differ from that taking place elsewhere in the same period in certain respects at a more detailed level of enquiry. In the first place, given the form of capitalist expansion taking place simultaneously in Argentina,

Paraguay and Brazil, these indigenous groups in northern Argentina were rapidly surrounded and effectively cut off from possibilities of escape. It proved far more difficult to keep lowland Indians on colonisations or mission stations located on the Amazon frontier; and generally along the eastern slope of the Andes, lowland Indian populations retreated further and further into the forest as permanent colonisation advanced.

Secondly, Argentina suffered an acute overall labour shortage; not just a problem of getting hold of labour power that already existed in the country. Several strategies were tried with the aim of securing more sources of exploitable labour. One strategy was reflected in the emphasis placed by the state on pushing back the northern frontier and the formation of an indigenous workforce there; another was the policy developed later of importing large numbers of European seasonal workers ("golondrinas") mostly from Italy. Comparatively speaking, the hunter/gatherer groups of northern Argentina were recognised to be of relatively greater overall importance as a potentially stable supply of labour during the consolidation phase of capital's advance than were lowland Indian groups living in tropical zones elsewhere. For this reason, the conservation element appeared early in the state's policy towards these indigenous groups.

This need to incorporate lowland indigenous peoples as a permanent labour force for the burgeoning capitalist enterprises helps to explain why the process of integration took place at such a rapid pace and was overseen and controlled by the state apparatus to a high degree. Generally speaking, two phases can be distinguished in the process by which hunter/gatherer communities in South America have been brought into the sphere of exchange with the outside world and capitalist relations from the late 19th century onwards. Barbira-Scazzocchio (1980) has recently characterised these two phases in Amazonia in the following way. During the early phase,

extractive activities were based on the control of the forest areas whose inhabitants were recruited to work in a virtual slave status. Debt relations were combined with violence and coercion to ensure a continuous labour supply. Boundaries of these control areas were implicitly recognised in the Amazon and the system reached a peak in the rubber boom in the early 20th century when "rubber barons" controlled "seringales" of huge extent, sometimes the size of England.

In the later phase, frontier expansion has been characterised by the shift from an implicitly recognised occupation of forest areas to appropriation of land on the basis of ownership. In this later phase, forest clearings become landed property through the legalisation of the *de facto* occupation by colonists. Land then becomes a commodity that can be sold and thus is capable of producing ground rent. Associated with this shift in the form of land control is a change in the form of labour control. While simple occupation is associated with a pattern of labour exchange, clientage, debt relations and forced labour services, ownership entails the spread of wage labour. Although in the earliest phase of capitalist expansion a great variety of forms of labour control can be distinguished, "increasingly as land becomes privatised, cash is used as a reference in exchange of labour and product until eventually it changes hands" (*ibid*, p vii). In northern Argentina the first phase lasted only a short time; transition to the second phase took place rapidly and at a comparatively early date.

A third area of difference that distinguishes the Argentinian case at least from Andean countries, was the relatively highly developed Argentinian state. Argentina thus had a greater capacity to intervene, direct policy and follow it through; the state was present as an actor in the expansion process along with individual capitalist entrepreneurs and colonists. Whereas in other South American countries where a similar process of expansion was taking place, state action tended to be both sporadic and ineffective. The policy pursued

by the new nation state of Argentina bore a resemblance to that of its Spanish antecedents. A similar policy of forced settlement was used to contain and conserve Indian labour as had been employed by the Spanish from the time of Viceroy Toledo's administration in the 17th century; even the word "reducción" was retained.

But the world system into which Indian peoples were inserted in the course of the 19th and 20th century had changed profoundly. Capital had need of the indigenous land and labour in northern Argentina at a certain period of its development; then it had not. Indigenous workers already robbed of so much during the process of making them into suitable workers, were then made redundant. For them economic destitution has followed quickly on from cultural deprivation.

Fiona Wilson
Copenhagen, October 1982

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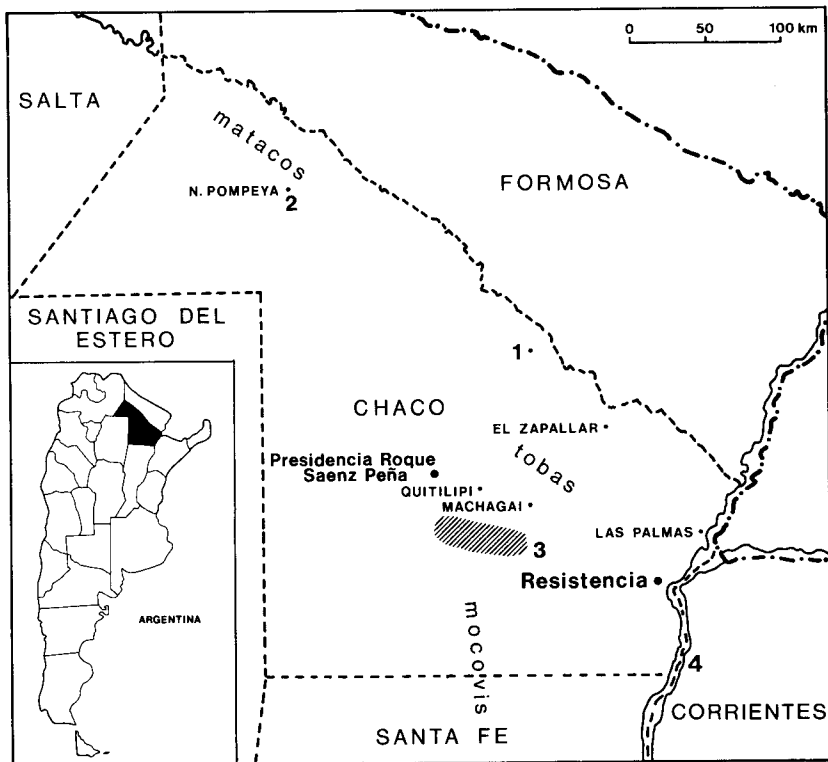
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REFERENCE MAP SHOWING PLACES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT, CHACO
PROVINCE, ARGENTINA



- Key: 1. Pampa del Indio
2. Misión Nueva Pompeya
3. Reducción Napalpí
4. Río Paraná

(Map: Jørgen Ulrich)

"VIOLENCE" AS AN ECONOMIC FORCE: THE PROCESS OF PROLETARIAN-
ISATION AMONG THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE ARGENTINIAN CHACO
1884 - 1930

The expansion of capital

In this study we shall analyse the role played by the policy carried out through the state apparatus which aimed to create conditions necessary for the development of a new system of production in the Argentine Chaco, especially in the cotton region in the centre and west. The period under discussion is from 1884 to 1930. We shall look specifically at measures taken within this policy framework to force indigenous people to become wage workers as their labour power was vital to the expansion of capital in that zone.

In the mid-1880's, the Chaco was the only part of the country to remain in the hands of the native population. But in the latter half of the year, 1884, troops from the Argentinian army (supported by a battalion from the navy) under the leadership of Dr. Benjamín Victorica, Minister for War and the Navy, launched a military campaign. This campaign, like an earlier one waged in Patagonia in 1879, reflected the expansion of capital, a movement that gained momentum between 1876 and 1889.

The period 1876 to 1889 represented an important phase in the development of commercial agriculture in Argentina as can be seen from the following statistics. The area sown with crops rose from a total of 580,000 hectares in 1872 to 2,500,000 hectares in 1888. Exports of wool and jerked beef (the two principal products from the livestock sector) incr-

eased from 89,200 tons to 128, 400 tons in the case of wool and from 29,700 to 32,000 tons in the case of jerked beef, from 1876 to 1885. Foreign capital flowed into the country especially from Europe; this expansion is shown in Table I.

Table I
FLOW OF FOREIGN CAPITAL INTO ARGENTINA: 1881-1889
(in millions of gold pesos)

1881	2,108,000
1882	9,568,000
1883	27,903,000
1884	12,158,000
1885	15,522,000
1886	40,800,000
1887	116,200,000
1888	198,300,000
1889	93,800,000

(Source: Di Tella and Zymelman, 1967, p 215).

The composition of imports was also changing in this period as shown in Table II.

Table II
COMPOSITION OF IMPORTS INTO ARGENTINA: 1878-1884
(as percentages of the total import value)

	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884
Consumption goods:	89.5	85.8	87.0	86.6	77.8	76.0	34.8
Raw materials:	6.2	7.3	7.4	7.6	10.8	13.6	60.9
Fuel:	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.0	1.7	1.5
Capital goods:	2.6	5.1	3.7	3.8	9.4	8.7	2.8

(Source: Di Tella and Zymelman, 1967, p 196).

Commenting on the sources of data, Di Tella and Zymelman (1967) state: "Very little statistical information exists concerning investment taking place in Argentina from 1876 to 1885. However, one can get some impression of the broad outlines of this investment pattern and can discern the evolution of the different sectors of the economy. A major expansion of the sown area can be noted, and this is

indicative that important investments were taking place in agriculture and livestock rearing. Not all the expansion in the area devoted to crops represented an addition of new land because a large part of these new farming lands had formerly been dedicated to stock rearing. The cattle displaced by agriculture were pushed out into previously unutilised areas." This shifting of entire zones of production shows the size of the investment going into the agrarian sector. "In addition, considerable investment was made in basic social capital. 2,000 kilometres of railway track were laid in the period of the expansion cycle, mostly 1881-1885. Important public works were constructed, or at least started at that time " (p 198).

Table III shows how investment was expanding in particular branches:

Table III

GROSS INVESTMENT IN SPECIFIC BRANCHES: 1885-1890

(in thousands of pesos of 1950)

	Public Works	Private building (not in agrarian sector)	Rail track and installations
1885	238.6	907.6	696.1
1886	226.8	935.1	295.2
1887	279.3	962.7	273.6
1888	302.5	996.2	922.5
1889	326.0	1,029.6	1,332.7
1890	221.1	1,064.3	2,323.0

(Source: Di Tella and Zymelman, 1967, p 196).

Finally we have the evidence provided by the dates at which new Argentinian companies were registered in the public register of commerce; foreign firms were not required to register. The scale of this investment is indicated in Table IV.

Table IV
NATIONAL COMPANIES REGISTERED IN PUBLIC COMMERCIAL REGISTER
(in thousands of peso bills)

1882-1883	19,000
1884-1885	24,000
1886-1887	129,000
1888-1889	574,000
1890-1891	203,000

(Source: Williams, 1920; cited in Di Tella and Zymelman p 216)

Capitalist development in Argentina had reached the stage of consolidation and expansion of industrial capital. From the late 1870's to the mid 1880's, the Argentine bourgeoisie was pressed into demarcating the territory over which it aimed to exercise its control; a territory that would constitute the nation state. Integral to the expansion of capital through the processes of capital reproduction and accumulation was the advance into new territories. Once new territories were incorporated into the sphere of capital, larger numbers of people were brought under the sway of capital thus fuelling its expansion at an ever increasing rate. At the same time, the military campaign in the Chaco meant that the Argentinian bourgeoisie was defining the territory under its domination as opposed to the competing Brazilian and Paraguayan bourgeoisies in connection with the European bourgeoisie.

The newly conquered lands and their inhabitants were to have quite different destinies. Their specific histories were to depend on a number of factors: the requirements of the national and international markets, the possibilities of meeting these demands open to Argentinian capital, and the particular quality of soils and other resources in the peripheral regions. The region of the Pampas, where the lands were of the highest quality (among the best in the world for agriculture and stock raising) was immediately appropriated and settled and the products were destined for

the European market. Patagonia, on the other hand, was opened up primarily for sheep raising; the sheep having been displaced from the Pampas. In Patagonia, the indigenous inhabitants were exterminated because their labour was not needed in a local economy based on sheep farming. Furthermore, indigenous people were accused of "thieving" and thought to constitute a threat to the development of livestock production.

In the Chaco region, one zone was already producing for the capitalist market. The zone of glens lying close to the River Paraná and its tributaries, contained huge forest reserves whose timber was much in demand in the rapidly expanding construction sector. Wood was needed as well for railway and road construction. The exploitation of the forestry resources increased still further after the discovery that tanin could be extracted from the quebracho colorado tree for use in curing leather. In marked contrast, in the central and western zones of the Chaco the quebracho colorado was much less abundant. Even though the agricultural potential of the soils in these zones were far higher than in the adjacent forest land to the east, these resources could in no way compete with those of the Pampas. For that reason, by the time of the world crisis of 1890, capital was intensifying its hold over lands already occupied in the eastern part of the Chaco while the central and western area remained in the hands of the indigenous inhabitants for another 25 years.

The Chaco campaign of 1884 ended in the military defeat of the indigenous people, though they were not completely subjugated for the time being. The national government had already decreed that all conquered lands were to remain under the state's jurisdiction and it went ahead with handing out land concessions under the terms laid down in Law 817 that dealt with immigration and colonisation.

Investment in land and in settlement was extremely important throughout the country in this period, as can be seen from Table V.

Table V

NATIONAL COMPANIES REGISTERED IN THE PUBLIC COMMERCIAL
REGISTER ACCORDING TO ECONOMIC BRANCH: 1882-1891

(in thousands of peso bills)

Land and colonisation:	275,000
Communications:	244,000
Insurance:	139,000
Banking:	137,000
Industry and other:	154,000
Total:	949,000

(Source: Williams, 1920, cited in Di Tella and Zymelman p 216)

This form of land colonisation represents a specific policy with respect to the distribution of land. Its fundamental objective is to create a rural bourgeoisie among the settlers. In the period, land was mainly distributed in units suitable for family based enterprises in agriculture and stock raising.

Incorporation of the Chaco and its indigenous population

In the Chaco, the lands handed over by the state as concessions were located in the eastern zone of hills and glens extending as much as 40 kilometres outwards from the banks of the River Paraná. In 1890 as a result of the world economic crisis, the distribution of land concessions as well as investment on those lands, came to a halt. However, at the same time, a small number of men holding concessions were able to appropriate considerable areas of land that had already been awarded. Under Law 2875 (on the subject of the settlement of accounts), a man who had been awarded a concession could become its full legal owner merely through the payment of a cash sum. Land holders had been released thereby from their previous obligation to the state of clearing and colonising the concession before application could be made for ownership. Investment in the Chaco was directed primarily towards the extraction of timber for construction, railway-building and to produce

charcoal; and in the production of sugar, as in the case of the mill of Las Palmas.

With the world economic crisis of 1890, this form of expansion by property-owning colonists in the eastern zone of the Chaco was brought to an end. And from that date, land was put into production through the employment of wage labour.

To the west of a line known as the frontier* the native peoples remained in full control of their land. At the time of the 1884 campaign, the productive activities of the Tobas, Mocovíes, Matacos and Vilelas were hunting, fishing, gathering fruits and horse rearing, to which could be added attacks on the settlements to the east of the frontier in search of additional livestock. In some cases, above all among the Vilelas and Matacos, these activities were already supplemented with wage work in the sawmills bordering the River Paraná or in the sugar harvests on the plantations in Northeast Argentina.

One impact of the 1884 campaign was to stop native peoples from having access to rivers where they used to fish. The progressive expansion of the settlement in the zone of hills and glens out from the River Paraná at the same time was reducing the area available to the indigenous people for hunting. In this way they were beginning to be deprived of the material conditions necessary for their existence. Thus a process had been initiated by which the native peoples were transformed into wage workers, forced to sell their labour power in order to survive. This was a necessary pre-condition for the penetration of capitalist relations of production in the area.¹⁾

As Benjamín Victorica, General in charge of the Chaco campaign, commented: "It will be difficult now for the tribes

* This was the name given to the boundary between indigenous territory and the territory under the jurisdiction of the state. Later, the name "frontier" was given to the limit of land under production.



Indigenous workers employed at a sawmill in Colonia Aborígen, Chaco province, 1970.
(Photo: the author).

to re-organise due to the impact of the punishments they have suffered and when military outposts are found on the Bermejo and Salado to demoralise and deter them. Deprived of their fishing resources by the military posts along the rivers and impeded from hunting in the way that they used to do, the scattered members of the tribes will make haste to appeal to the benevolence of the authorities and run to the forced settlements or the sawmills where already many are living and benefitting from civilisation" (1885 p 15).

An understanding of this pre-condition necessary for the spread of capital underlay official policy toward the indigenous peoples. Within this policy, the 1884 campaign was an integral part. It was a policy of extra-economic coercion brought about through the use of violence practised on those who were expropriated to make possible the setting up of an exploitative working process.²⁾ The fundamental aim of official policy was clear to its proponents. According to reports by Leopoldo Arnaud, a member of a scientific team accompanying the 1884 campaign, "if the Chaco were to specialise in sugar production with the mills manned by Indians, perhaps in a very short time, this industry could become the principal basis of wealth in this Republic" (quoted in Victorica, 1885, pp 556-7).

José I. Garmendia noted that among the achievements of the military expedition was the "establishment of a military frontier - a line of forts - which defended a rich territory of more than 6,000 leagues. Here some 15,000 to 20,000 strong workers who were previously useless dedicated only to lives of barbarity and robbery will be obliged to deliver themselves over to the benefits of civilisation" (ibid, pp 151-2).

These "benefits" were explained by Victorica in the following way: "I believe that it will be advantageous in the civilising of these tribes to favour their contact with the colonies of the coast where they will not wait long

before finding useful work in the industries that are developing there. I do not doubt that these tribes will provide supplies of cheap labour for the sugar industry and for the sawmills, as a few do already in the haciendas of Salta and Jujuy. I also consider it vital to adopt a system whereby they can be settled permanently at convenient points, limiting the extent of the lands they can occupy with their families, with the effect that little by little their customs will alter and they will be civilised" (ibid, p 23).

In the eastern zone of the Chaco, as noted above, the process of land settlement went hand in hand with the spread of capitalist relations of production. This was greatly accelerated after the discovery of the industrial uses of tanin. In the north of the province of Santa Fé and in the east of the Chaco the quebracho trees were felled and factories established to extract the tanin. These factories needed labour.

In the central and western parts of the Chaco, the zone which later was to be devoted to cotton, the indigenous people had been able to maintain their way of life albeit in a more circumscribed way, as described above. But as a result of the economic expansion during the first decade of this century, there was a new advance into the Chaco, which this time was to affect directly the centre-west zone. According to Di Tella and Zymelman: "The increase in agricultural production, especially in grains, stimulated the economy...Greater production gave rise to larger export surpluses and this gave the country considerable purchasing power. With this increase in purchasing power, the people were able to start engaging in trading enterprises of growing importance and numbers. In time, this served to recreate the progressive economic climate that had existed prior to the 1890 crisis...But while formerly, the key sector of the economy had been agriculture, now investment grew in all economic sectors as a result of the increase in resources obtained from exports" (pp 257-8).³⁾

In 1909 construction of a rail link was begun across the Chaco from the port of Barranqueras on the River Paraná to the province of Salta. In 1911 when the railway was beginning to penetrate into indigenous territory, a new military campaign was launched to definitely occupy the zone. As with the 1884 campaign, the action was explained by the need to transform the indigenous population into workers. A second stated objective was to "secure this huge region of forest for the energies of our peoples dedicated to the progress of agriculture and livestock raising, as well as for the Indian wanting to submit and work under the direction of a colonist or the Ministry of Agriculture" (Rostagno, 1969, p 31).

Among the instructions given the leaders of the regiments carrying out the campaign was the order to transmit all information on "the location of encampments; changes in their location; approximate numbers of fighting men and 'chusma' (women, children and old people) and source of information; whether they work or not; in which sawmills and sugar mills do they work; at what times of the year do they come or go from this work; what types of weapons they carry and what types they bring back from their place of work; whether they are peaceful; whether they have access to an abundance of resources and of what kind; what type of work might they profitably be employed in, if they were forcibly settled and what opportunities exist in this respect" (Rostagno, p 68).

The campaign of 1911 finally achieved the goal that had been set for the 1884 campaign: the indigenous people could no longer continue to attack settlements in search of livestock, they lost all access to the rivers and they lost their herds of horses. Conditions were being created which would open up the central and western zone of the Chaco to new settlers - namely owners of sawmills, farmers and livestock rearers - who by their very presence would reduce the size of the hunting grounds available to indigenous people as well as frighten away game.



Toba wood cutters in Chaco province, 1970
(Photo: the author).

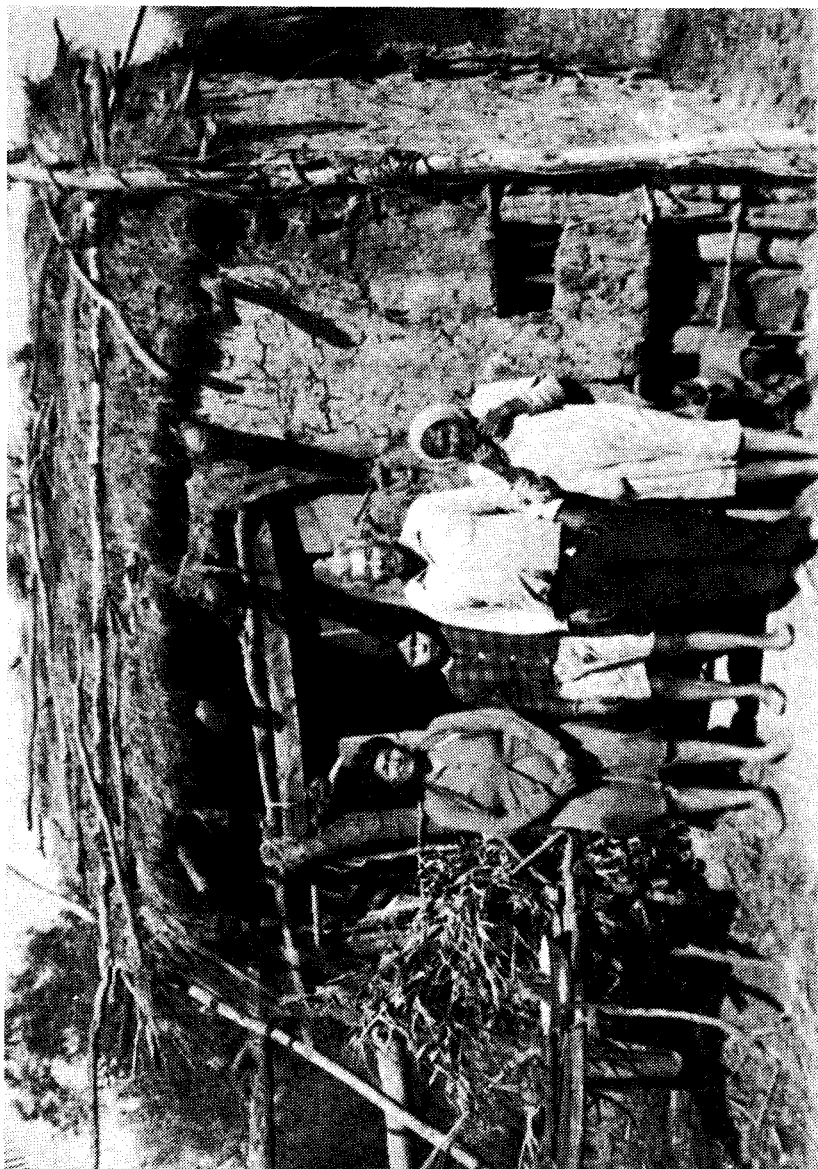
On the other hand, contact with the sawmills of the east and with sugar mills of the northwest had inculcated consumption patterns among indigenous people which could only be met with money. As a report from the Ministry of the Interior noted: "The Indian is forming new habits through his relations with civilisation, which are changed into true necessities and which he will try to satisfy with the product of his labour" (1915-1916, pp 311-312). According to a later source: "The tools which are used (by the Indians) to prepare food and the tableware do not belong to the crude artefacts and pottery from the material culture of the tribes, but instead are the products of purchases made at stores in the colonisations or in the adjacent settlements. It is common to find gramophones in the shacks we visited" (Pardal, 1936). This growing dependence on the market was also a goal of the official policy being implemented as demonstrated by the following quotation: "You will not break the habits of many generations from one day to the next; above all when necessities are not created which forces them to work in order to have access to the means of subsistence" (Rostagno, p 24).

To summarise: one mode of production had been destroyed and the first pre-condition for the spread of capitalist relations of production into this territory had been set in motion: the creation of "free" workers, independent from and deprived of the material means for their own reproduction. This was an important but not a sufficient step. It was also necessary to form a particular type of worker: one who was "disciplined" and trained for the type of work he was to perform. The "disciplining" and training of the indigenous worker was achieved through an institution especially created for the purpose: the "reducción" or forced settlement. In the Argentinian Chaco, two forced settlements of this type were set up: Napalpi in the centre of what was later to become the cotton-growing region (in the present province of Chaco, see reference map) and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (in the present province of Formosa).

The policy of Indian "reducciones" (forced settlements) as a means of conserving Indian labour

The establishment of forced settlements was not the first attempt at disciplining the indigenous population. In 1884, Colonel Obligado, leader of the "northern frontier", founded a colony (called San Antonio de Obligado) where after military defeat, the Mocovíes people were given plots of land and were forced to undergo military training. The plan was to incorporate the Mocovíes into the National Guard as a separate regiment. This colony lasted only a short time as the Mocovíes rebelled against the "excessive severity of the soldiers in charge of the military training" (Miranda, 1955, p 74). After killing the officer in charge of the battalion, they fled for their lives into the bush. Lieutenant Colonel Rostagno, Commander of the 1911 campaign, clearly had this experience in mind when he said: "It is not possible to force him (the Indian) into regular, methodical work for fixed hours signalled by the bell, bugle or whistle of the sergeant. Nor will the Indian work while faced with the temptations that nature offers him in the different seasons, giving him 'chanar' and carob beans to eat and make alcohol (aloja) from, as well as honey, game and all the other things which thrive in abundance in these hot climates" (Rostagno, p 24).

The Government's decree authorising the setting up of "reducciones" or forced settlements in the Chaco thought otherwise. The third clause stated explicitly: "That prolonged experience has shown the aptitude possessed by the Indian of the Chaco and Formosa for work in the sugar mills, sawmills and in the cotton harvest. They therefore constitute an important economic factor which it is vital to conserve" (ibid, p 129). The decree stipulated that lands be distributed to the indigenous people and that they be given "seeds, agricultural tools and draft animals so as to cultivate them and obtain the products necessary for their subsistence under the immediate direction of competent people". That is to say, the Indian should be isolated from the "temptations that nature offers him..." and at the same time he should be put



A Toba household in Colonia Aborigen, Chaco province, 1970
(Photo: the author).

under the immediate direction of "competent people" in order to make him into a useful worker.

At the same time, the "reducción" fulfilled another function: workers were being trained for specific branches of production. These had one feature in common: all of them (cotton, sugar, and timber) required a very heavy labour input at particular moments during the production cycle. For sugar and cotton, this was at harvest time and in the timber industry, this was when the temperature allowed felling to take place. Seasonality in the demand for wage workers posed the problem of how to maintain or "conserve" this labour force when their labour power was not needed.⁴⁾ The alternative open was to allow indigenous people to continue their traditional activities of hunting and gathering during that part of the year when their labour power was redundant, in an area that was marginal to commodity production. This alternative was dismissed with the following argument.

"The abundant large and small game existing on the Reserve (a reference to a later proposal to create an Indian reserve in the region of the River Teuco), was not to be countenanced by the commission. The nucleation and settlement of the population which had been decreed and set up for the Indians, should fulfil the ultimate goal by which those living in them would improve under the discipline of work their moral and material situation. They should not live from hunting or fishing because the only way of compelling the Indian to change his way of life and his customs and to train him for productive work is to separate him from the forests, the open spaces, the places where he would be tempted to continue to live in misery, ignorance and idleness" (Comisión Honoraria de Reducciones de Indios, 1928, pp 14-15; this Commission was an official body in charge of administering official policy towards the natives). Thus the alternative of preserving a hunting-gathering economy was rejected on the grounds that it did not serve to discipline or train the native population for incorporation into wage

work. The forced settlement solution had the "advantage" that while it inculcated work habits among the inhabitants for agriculture and forestry, it did not impose so harsh a military discipline as had the failed colony of San Antonio de Obligado.

It is interesting to note that the objection to the preservation of a hunting-gathering economy was not made with respect to the Matacos, who for a long time had sold their labour power to the sugar mills of the northwest. In this case, there was no need for special disciplining. For the Matacos living further away from the frontier with Salta, the Mission of New Pompei (see reference map), founded by the Franciscans at the beginning of the century, fulfilled the role of a forced labour settlement.

In the forced settlements, indigenous people received land where they could undertake subsistence production when they were not needed as wage workers. In this way, this labour force was "conserved" and the permanent availability of its labour power assured. At the same time, this subsistence production helped to keep that labour force cheap, since by farming the workers obtained part of their own consumption needs. Given the stage reached in the process of capital accumulation and the type of economic sector in which investment was taking place in the Chaco, only a middling rate of profit could be achieved even with the existence of a cheap labour force, or in other words, despite the enormous exploitation of the workers. "Free" settlements as well as commercial enterprises also served to maintain a labour force that was permanently available, as will be discussed below.

Some contemporary quotations can be given by way of illustration. For example, one author wrote: "...in our opinion here is the secret of the sugar industry in the Chaco in the future: cheap hands. The indigenous people provide them" (González, 1890). The Minister of the Interior noted: "The administration believes that the solution which is best and

which would reflect the culture of the Republic, would be to confront definitively the problem of the Indian. This is not only for reasons of humanity and higher moral order, but also because once incorporated within civilisation, the Indian will make a valuable contribution to the unfolding of the economy in the regions of the North of the country. Already, farming and industries which need a labour force that is cheap and accustomed to the climate have been set up in various provinces based for the most part on the labour of indigenous people. In spite of the attempts made, it has not been possible to replace them with advantage by Hindu immigrants or immigrants from other countries" (Camara de Diputados, 21 July, 1925).

Some Argentinians looked to the experience of other countries. As one writer commented in 1910: "There is no doubt that the negro represents an important factor for cotton production in the USA; on account of their numbers, their simple needs, as well as their real sobriety and their simple customs, they can produce cotton at a cost that is impossible to compete with. Similar conditions are found reproduced in other cotton-growing areas, such as by the poor fellahin of Egypt, or the miserable Indians of India, or the low caste Chinese of China, and these distinct groups constitute a factor of no small influence in the spread of this crop. It is not that it is impossible to produce using white workers, but there is no doubt that those population groups offer advantages for this type of production above all when the price of cotton is low. It is by reflecting on these experiences that I have concluded that the best chance of speeding the cultivation of this crop in the cotton region of Argentina is through the utilisation of Indians on a far greater scale than happens at present" (Girola, 1910, pp 162-3).

Writing in a very different vein, Marcelino Buyán addressed the Chamber of Deputies as following: "We have proved that the cotton pickers are the real outcasts of our economic

system: men who receive starvation pay; men who are paid 60 centavos for every 10 kilos of cotton they pick; men who must work excessively hard for 14 hours to pick 50 kilos of that crop; suffice it to say that for 14 hours work, they receive a daily wage of 3 pesos. For cotton pickers to earn sufficient to allow them to support a family, they must, according to our investigations, take with them their wives and children (sometimes extremely young children) to work with them in the cotton harvest" (Camara de Diputados, Diario de Sesiones, 1936, p 357).

Another observer noted: "The cotton farmers who are for us exploiters, these cotton farmers in order to exploit us more completely in most cases have set up dirty little stores stocked with the worst quality goods at exorbitant prices. These stores established with such forethought, are for no other reason than to ensure that at the end of the harvest, the owners have recouped all the money which the workers earned through such great sacrifices in the cotton fields. When the accounts are finally settled, the workers return home with one year less of life, without money and without hope or anything to show for their labour except disease" (Sindicato de Oficios, 1936).

The "reducción" possessed still other advantages. It was no longer necessary to pay the soldier-colonists as in the military colony of San Antonio; the inhabitants of the forced settlement now supported themselves through the sale of goods that they produced. "The Argentinian system of forced settlements for the indigenous people involved giving the Indians remunerated work immediately thus allowing them to meet the costs of the food needed by so large a number of people without making demands on the public purse; that is, the settlements are financially independent and commercially autonomous. It is for these reasons that the industry selected to provide work for the Indian has been the sawing of timber and not agriculture as in the religious missions. Without

ignoring the great educative services of the latter, it will not have escaped Your Excellency's notice that the Indian to whom we refer is at a higher level in his evolution...The saw mill is an intermediary point between the wandering life of the savage hunter or fisherman and that of the farmer - a stable productive element rooted to the land he cultivates" (Ministerio del Interior, 1915-16, p 85).

As we shall see later, the "reducción" allowed the close supervision of the Indian's economic activities. And furthermore, nothing stopped the inhabitants from going to work in the neighbouring farms and sawmills. In 1915, Enrique Lynch Arriabálzaga, manager of the settlement at Napalpí recorded: "...the settlers in the vicinity try to get the Indians of the 'Reducción' to go and work in their fields. They ask the administrator for his permission, and up to now no request has ever been turned down as the policy adopted is to favour a complete freedom of work" (Ministerio del Interior, 1915-16, p 302). When "there is no cacique (leader) who himself initiates these labour movements, it is the so-called contractor of Indians, agents of the sawmills and sugar mills, who reach an agreement with the leader as to the travel and work of the Indians, zealously coming as far as the 'reducciones' themselves in pursuit of the object of his endeavors" (Ministerio del Interior, 1919-20, p 410-11).

In addition, "reducciones" could become sources of workers needed for permanent employment when necessary. In 1928, the growth of cotton production meant that the increasing demand for labour led to a rise in the wages offered cotton-pickers. Wages in that sector rose to levels higher than the payments offered in the sugar harvest at the enterprise, Las Palmas del Chaco Austral. As a consequence, the indigenous workers who used to go every year to harvest sugar at that mill were employed instead as cotton-pickers so that the mill faced an acute shortage of manpower. The inspector for the Honorary Commission for Indian "Reducciones", after failing in his

attempt to recruit indigenous workers in the zone of the cotton farms, addressed himself to the Commission's President. He wrote: "By virtue of these circumstances and at the same time realising the legitimate interests of this firm (the sugar mill), and in recognition of their needs, permit me to request Mr. President the valuable assistance of the Honorary Commission to confirm that a certain number of Indians be sent to the enterprise chosen from those who are living at present in the 'reducciones'" (Comisión Honoraria, 1928, p 69).

The Commission replied saying that "in recognition of the support which the enterprise Las Palmas del Chaco Austral has accorded the initiatives of the Commission in procuring all types of improvements for the aborigines, and furthermore in consideration that the request submitted presents an opportunity to eliminate the intermediaries recruiting Indians who offer no effective guarantee for the treatment given to those contracted or for the lengthy journeys they have to make to get to the mills, the Commission is resolved that the Indians requested by that enterprise be allowed to leave the 'Reducción' Bartholomé de las Casas (ibid, pp 70-71).

Finally, the "reduccion" fulfilled yet another function: indigenous people were kept in groups and under supervision in one place during those times of the year that their labour power was not required. In the request that lands be reserved for indigenous people near Napalpí, the Commission for Indian "Reducciones" stated that these lands were destined for "the concentration of tribes which wander in the places known as La Tambora, Tres Isletas, Colonia Benitez, Zapallar, etc. and also for the majority of the Indians of the Teuco region, as well as for the gangs of Indians who every year leave Las Palmas del Chaco Austral, once work in the harvest is over so as to avoid them causing trouble in the settlements round about because they have no fixed or stable point where they can settle" (Comisión Honoraria, 1927, p 11).

The advocates for the creation of a reserve at River Teuco (a project which, as noted already, was abandoned because it would have led inevitably to the Indians retaining their traditional economic activities) also emphasised that it was necessary "to compel all indigenous people who were not found in other permanent settlements to move to the reserve, Colonia Teuco, and to refuse them permission to leave except at harvest time and after prior notice had duly been given to the authorities of the place which would oblige them to return immediately they had finished their work" (Cordeu and Siffredi, 1971, p 55).

The growth of "free" settlements

The "reduccion" was not the only type of settlement created for the indigenous population of the Chaco. There also existed "free" settlements which were neither founded nor administered by the state, as well as settlements established by private enterprises. In both cases the settlements were to fulfill the same functions as the "reducciones": the conservation of the indigenous workers during times of the year when their labour power was not required and the formation of a cheap labour force. At the same time, and to the extent that it was not possible for the population to feed itself through a hunting-gathering economy, they continued to have the additional function of instilling a work discipline through the cultivation of the land or cutting of timber.

The settlements belonging neither to state or private enterprise were generally located on lands on the outer limits of the colonisation zone (such as at Pampa del Indio, Miraflores and Cabá Nard) not occupied by colonists or sawmills. The land of the central-western zone of the Chaco was not yet carved up into private properties so the indigenous people could settle freely in clearings in the bush. As the frontier of colonisation advanced, so the lands occupied by Indians were progressively appropriated by colonists. But the Indians were never totally expelled from the colonisation area because first, they were needed there as a labour reserve and second,

it was thought necessary that the process of their socialisation should be completed.

The best-known example of a private firm which set up its own indigenous settlement was Las Palmas del Chaco Austral, an enterprise devoted to the production of sugar cane. The Tobas were employed there as cane cutters during the harvest season, coming from many parts of the Chaco. During the strike of 1920, inspired primarily by the workers in the processing plant, the indigenous labourers working the fields were used by the enterprise in the bloody repression of the strike. (Garcia Pulido, 1977).

When cotton production was spreading rapidly in the Chaco during the 1920's, the demand for labour was intensified, as noted above, and wage levels rose thus making labour more expensive and difficult to obtain. We have noted already the quick reaction of the Honorary Commission for Indian "Reducciones" in finding a solution to the appeal lodged by Las Palmas and in sending Indians from San Bartolomé de las Casas. But the longer term solution was for the company to set up an indigenous settlement on its own land. A representative of the Honorary Commission commented: "This labour crisis produced by the massive cotton production highlighted the great inconveniences which could be caused by the absence of Indians living nearby enterprises which have the need to gather them: an argument I invoked at the time and which has fully convinced the present administrator (of the sugar mill)" (Comisión Honoraria, 1928, pp 68-69).

Origins of the cotton bonanza in the Chaco

At the start of the 1920's in the period immediately before the cotton bonanza, the indigenous people were already incorporated as wage workers in productive activities in the Chaco, especially in the production of tanin, wood and sugar which were the most important sectors at the time. There "no longer existed fierce, savage, stubborn Indians except in the imaginations of the timorous, indeed it would be very hard to find one who had not lived at one time or another

on a sugar mill or sawmill..." (Ministerio del Interior, 1915-16, p 303). As another contemporary commented: "Without them (the Indians) the providers of labour for all types of work in the regional economy, there would not exist such flourishing farms or industries in the lands where they were born but of which they have been dispossessed. Tobas and Matacos have laid across the forests, valleys and bogs in the marvellous territories of the North, the tracks of two state railways which run parallel to one another from Resistencia and Formosa to Metán and Embarcación crossing from side to side; they have made up the squads of workers who canalised the River Bermejo; they have planted sugar cane and sown cotton and maize; and from their number, the timber industry has recruited many excellent workers" (Niklison, 1919).

By the middle of the 1920's, cotton had become the principle product of the Chaco especially in the centre-west region; this expansion of production was closely linked with conditions prevailing on the world market. At the end of the 19th century cotton had been one of the major raw materials demanded by industries located in the capitalist countries and it had constituted the most important single item in international trade. But European capital encountered a major obstacle: more than 90% of the production of the cotton varieties most in demand was concentrated in the USA. This meant that the European textile industry was highly sensitive to variations in output and price in that country alone. The need to break this monopoly over production provoked European capital, especially English capital, to seek alternative cotton-growing regions in the lands in the belt between latitudes 40° north and south where natural conditions were favourable. The search for new areas was intense up to the crisis of the world system in the 1930's after which it resumed again (Zischka, 1960).

From 1910 conditions on the world cotton market began to change sufficiently to allow the entrance of new suppliers. The cotton fields in the USA were ravaged by a plague of boll weevil which not only destroyed the crop in the short run, in the longer run it led to changes in the location of production

in the American South. As a result, US production fell greatly during the period 1914 to 1925. By the time that output had recovered and had regained its former level, the world market had changed irrevocably. While US production accounted for some 60% of world output in 1914, it accounted for only 40% by 1930. South American countries (particularly Brazil, Peru and Argentina) had greatly increased their level of participation in the world cotton market by that date.

Table VI

COTTON PRODUCTION IN THE USA AND THE WORLD: 1911/2 - 1934/5

(in thousands of tons)

Year	US	World	Year	US	World
1911/12	3,403	4,748	1923/24	2,199	4,270
1912/13	2,971	4,575	1924/25	2,955	5,405
1913/14	3,069	4,813	1925/26	3,492	6,056
1914/15	3,493	5,247	1926/27	3,898	6,161
1915/16	2,422	3,859	1927/28	2,809	5,210
1916/17	2,482	4,315	1928/29	3,139	5,803
1917/18	2,447	4,271	1929/30	3,214	5,783
1918/19	2,606	4,486	1930/31	3,021	5,664
1919/20	2,474	4,618	1931/32	3,707	5,983
1920/21	2,912	4,575	1932/33	2,819	5,191
1921/22	1,723	3,346	1933/34	2,829	5,789
1922/23	2,115	4,176	1934/35	2,089	5,160

(Source: García Mata, 1937)

The situation in the world market and the development of capitalism in Argentina created the conditions for the expansion of a new branch of production: cotton, initially produced for the export market but from the 1930's increasingly supplying the domestic market. The Chaco region, especially the centre-west where conditions were most suitable, was destined to become the main cotton producer. From 1923 the Ministry of Agriculture launched a campaign to introduce cotton in the Chaco following the collapse of prices in the world market for Argentina's leading agricultural and livestock exports. The campaign consisted of distributing leaflets explaining how to grow

cotton; the importing and distribution of seeds; the use of the railways to send demonstration teams round to the villages and the contracting of North American technical experts to study and advise on cotton production and marketing. The area sown with cotton increased fourfold in the Chaco in only three years, and the region became the leading producer in the country.

Table VII

AREA UNDER COTTON IN THE CHACO: 1894/5 - 1937/38

Year	Hectares	Year	Hectares
1894/95	100	1923/24	50,000
1909/10	1,182	1924/25	82,690
1910/11	1,300	1925/26	97,233
1911/12	1,629	1926/27	65,000
1912/13	2,700	1927/28	77,366
1913/14	1,650	1928/29	90,000
1914/15	2,450	1929/30	112,000
1915/16	2,800	1930/31	117,105
1916/17	2,800	1931/32	130,753
1917/18	11,200	1932/33	133,000
1918/19	12,500	1933/34	177,480
1919/20	12,000	1934/35	231,117
1920/21	20,000	1935/36	290,000
1921/22	12,000	1936/37	290,000
1922/23	20,610	1937/38	299,000

(Source: Junta Nacional del Algodón, 1938)

Labour demand for cotton growing and implications for indigenous workers

During the growing phase, cotton plants need only a small labour force but constant attention. In contrast, the tasks of hoeing and picking demand a large but unskilled labour force, working extremely hard for relatively short periods in the year. Two types of job, two types of worker and to create them. two policies were formulated at the precise moment when capital was expanding in the zone and in the country as a whole.

The unskilled worker; the "hoer" and the "picker," already existed in the Chaco. These workers had emerged following the destruction of the hunting-gathering economy of the indigenous

people. But as we have seen, the indigenous people had already found plentiful employment in other branches of production: in forestry and the sugar industry. It was necessary therefore to renew the policy of extra-economic coercion in order to create the pre-requisite conditions to enable the new productive sector to develop: workers needed to be made available at the right time of year for hoeing and picking.

In 1920 a new policy was begun directed at the indigenous people to make them better acquainted with agriculture. The "reduccion" of Napalpí stopped buying in timber for the inhabitants and began to buy in only cotton. At the same time, cotton seeds were distributed among the indigenous population of the "reduccion". Thus attempts were made to train workers who would be adept at hoeing and picking cotton. But the greatest problem faced, as already noted, was that a large number of the Chaco Indians, including those who lived on the settlement at Napalpí (especially the Mocovíes), were already travelling to work in the sugar mills of Salta and Jujuy during the period of the sugar harvest (Rutledge, 1974, pp 26-29). In 1925 a local newspaper recorded that: "... as the sown area has expanded, the demand for labour is greater and the problem is more and more difficult to resolve because the Indians flee, preferring to go to the sugar mills where as the supplies of this 'canon fodder' are beginning to dry up, they are better looked after than before" (cited in Cordeu and Siffredi, op cit., pp 58-59).

Illustrative of the problems confronting the new cotton growers are the comments contained in a letter sent by 50 settlers in the Colony of Presidencia Roque Saenz Peña to the Minister of Agriculture in Buenos Aires. "... At the beginning of the cotton harvest, we pointed out to the local merchants that there would almost certainly be a shortage of manpower and to request help from the public authorities, to stop what was happening at this time, with local Indians being

recruited by a trader from here for a sugar mill in Salta and being taken away to that province. It is because the labour force going to the sugar mill is almost irreplaceable for the cotton harvest. The merchants promised to look into it; but certainly took the recruiters' side. They have thwarted the progress in the region by doing nothing. And thus we find ourselves with what is already underway on a huge scale: the departure of the Indians. In the past when a plague threatened to ruin all our efforts, we came to ask for help from the public authorities, and today with the same urgency we beg for your intervention in the face of this disastrous threat signified by the labour shortage. Detain the Indians who have not yet left and make those who have gone come back. This would make a fine solution to this ill, and then concede lower fares for workers and direct immigrants to these regions..." (quoted in Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1970).

Resistance by indigenous people and Government response

The solution to the problem of labour shortage was first tackled by the regional authorities which in 1924 prohibited Indians from leaving the Chaco. This measure was strongly resisted by the indigenous people, especially by those living in the "reduccion" of Napalpí, who formed a protest movement which took a religious or messianic form. Tobas and Mocovíes united for the first time and settled along side each other in one part of the settlement. There they danced hoping for the arrival of the moment which would bring the end of the "whites". Finally they were attacked by police who killed some 200, thus quelling the incipient movement.

An eye-witness left the following account. The Indians saw the soldiers arrive on horseback and then fling themselves on the ground and take up positions. The unfortunates never believed that they were going to attack them, so they made no attempt to defend themselves. The noise of the first round of gunfire was heard, followed after some interval by a second and then a third round, after which soldiers continued to fire

at will. The first round was mostly aimed too high but it still caused some casualties, the second and third were well aimed and they shattered the encampment and brought panic and flight. It should be born in mind that the leader or 'God' Gomez had said that the bullets from the Christians would not harm Indians. It was because of that that after the first round and before the third, nobody tried to escape. On the contrary, they came out to look at the soldiers, who lying on the ground were firing at them. The Indians did nothing to defend themselves, let alone, as has been stated, attack the soldiers.

"Almost all, or at least the majority of them who came out to look, fell: some dead, others wounded. Receiving the worst of the attack were the Mocovíes whose huts lay to the right of the attackers firing from 500 to 600 metres. After the third round, the firing stopped for a moment and it was then that the Indians started to flee, not without taking advantage of the lull to collect their wounded kinsmen who could not walk and to snatch some of their clothing and household goods, thus reaching the bush which was at their back...

*When nobody could be seen on his feet by the huts, then even the horses cropping round about were killed. The police withdrew in order to advance together and finish off the wounded who still remained alive, hacking the corpses about, cutting off the ears and the testicles from one of them which a little later were exhibited in the police station at Quitilipi, putting lighted cigarettes in the open mouthes and committing other atrocities which the pen cannot write. Then came the pillaging: the soldiers appropriated everything they found in the huts...The soldiers of the police arrived back at Quitilipi laden with war booty, showing off their trophies, acquired with such ease and without any danger whatsoever, for the cost of 4,000 shots fired in the space of barely half an hour" (Cámara de Diputados, 1924, p 422).

In the same year, the national government "in response to the denunciations arriving at the Ministry of the Interior concerning the bad treatment to which the Indians in sugar mills of Salta and Jujuy were subjected, decreed a resolution prohibiting the contracting of Indians by private persons and the sale of fire-arms to them" (Ministerio del Interior, 1924-25, p 638). Finally on January 11, 1927, the national government issued a decree which according to article 6 ordered that "from this day forward, within the national territory it is henceforth prohibited to contract Indians for work in the sawmills, sugar harvests, drainage and railway projects outside the zones where they live without previous intervention by the Honorary Commission for Indian 'Reducciones'" (Secretaría de Trabajo, 1945). In this way, the indigenous people were prevented from taking employment in sugar harvesting and saw-milling while they were not prevented from working in the cotton harvest.

The sugar mills of the Argentinian North-east had employed Matacos, Lules and Vilelas as wage workers from the middle of the nineteenth century. At that date, the introduction of more modern machinery into the sugar industry brought an end to the previous labour system. Later, Tobas and Mocovíes were also incorporated as wage workers.

Official policy to control Indian labour

National government policy to prevent the contracting of Indian workers outside their zone of residence, which in this case meant that indigenous labourers could not go to the sugar mills of the north-east, indicated that a major redistribution of the available labour was taking place in response to the growth of new branches of economic production: the Indians of the Chaco were destined for the cotton fields. To replace the Chaco Indians, the sugar mills of Jujuy and Salta had to look

elsewhere for labour. One possibility was to force Indians of La Puna, a district in the province of Jujuy, to work for capital as harvesters. Up to that time, the Indians of La Puna had worked as share-croppers on the lands of the huge haciendas, to which they paid rent in kind and sometimes in personal service.⁵⁾ After 1930, the sugar mills began to rent or buy these haciendas in La Puna and instigate various changes. "In the haciendas which had been rented by the sugar mills, the Indian share-croppers were converted into sub-renters of the sugar estate owners. In the haciendas which had been bought outright, the Indians simply had a new landlord. In both cases, the Indians were no longer required to pay rent either in cash or in goods, but instead had to pay with their own labour. The Indians now paid rent in labour service on the sugar plantations of the mills, working six months a year as cane cutters in the harvest" (Rutledge, 1974, p 43).

Intervention by the national government expressed a general problem concerning population in Argentina, which in this specific time and place was manifested in labour shortage. Through this measure the government hindered the free movement of workers selling their labour power as a commodity. The bourgeoisie thus resolved the problems of labour shortage and labour maintenance (or settlement). Through this restriction on labour mobility, there was a break in the process through which a working class was being formed. Workers who had been becoming increasingly proletarianised from the time of the military campaigns were now prevented from making the transition into a permanent wage labour force.

The labour power provided by the indigenous workers of the Chaco was not sufficient to harvest the whole of the cotton crop. It was necessary to attract additional workers from other places. While the principal productive activity had been forestry, this had produced a migration stream of timber cutters from the neighbouring provinces of Corrientes

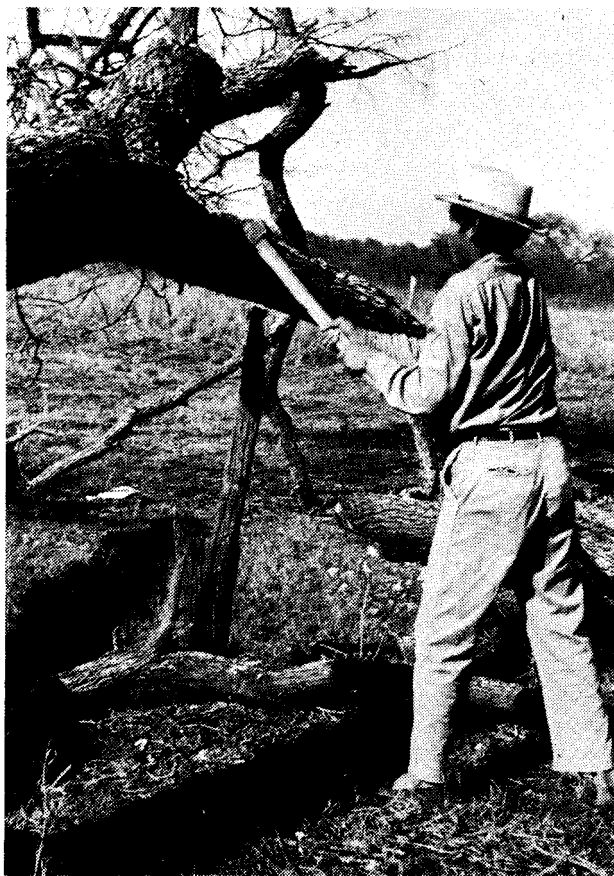
and Santiago del Estero. With the development of cotton production, another measure was applied. In the harvest season, the state railways began to charge reduced fares to those travelling into the Chaco from the surrounding provinces: "If the harvest was delayed, the trains unloaded masses of workers every day who stayed in the villages wandering about during the day and at night gathering in the street near the station as if they were coming to take the train back home with their earnings. But even though they wanted to go home, they could not do so. The ticket to the Chaco cost the worker: one peso to which ever station they chose; whereas the return trip costs 5 pesos at present for a 2nd class ticket as far as Resistencia" (Pavlotzky, 1960). With these measures it was hoped to create the prime pre-condition for the development of capitalist relations of production: the existence of a labour force.

Successive governments implemented a policy through the state apparatus in which "violence" was a necessary element enabling the setting up and development of a new system of production. In the first place, the state needed to monopolise physical force through the military defeat of indigenous peoples from whom they then expropriated the material base necessary for their survival. The measures that followed (which included settlement in "reducciones", disciplining, training for particular branches of production and the quelling of all resistance) represented the exercise of this monopoly. Through it suitable workers were formed for the new system of production which the state wished to foster and whose fundamental character persists to the present day.

"When one speaks of a 'governmental economic policy' which was implemented through the 'state' what this really means is the decision to apply extra-economic coercion to the production process. That is to say, to use the monopoly of

physical force with the aim of implementing the interests (the social being) of certain sectors of society" (Marín, 1978).

"War has been developed before peace ..." (Marx, 1974, p 66).



Indian wood cutter from Colonia Aborigen, Chaco province, 1970.
(Photo: the author).

Some notes on the later evolution of the indigenous population of the Chaco, 1930 - 1976

A productive system that focussed on cotton was being consolidated in Chaco province during the 1930's. But early in that decade changes were taking place in the cotton market supplied; exports declined and cotton increasingly supplied the domestic market. This productive system was to maintain its fundamental characteristics for the next forty years.

As noted already, through the exercise of physical coercion the indigenous inhabitants of the Chaco were converted into seasonal wage labourers. During the summer and autumn months they worked in the cotton harvest while during the winter and spring they worked in the sawmills and sugar harvest within the Chaco. Since the wages they earned were insufficient for them to live on, they had to augment their earnings by cultivating tiny plots, hunting and fishing. The constant loss of their hunting grounds as a result of the expansion of the cotton farms and the government's prohibition which stopped them from working outside the Chaco, meant that their very existence came to depend increasingly on the possibilities of selling their labour power to local settlers. Years of poor harvest were inevitably years of hunger.

In 1933 a serious drought ruined the cotton crop and also reduced the output from the subsistence plots and the amount of game available. Beginning in Naplplf, an indigenous movement was initiated by the starving people which then spread to the villages of El Zapallar and Pampa del Indio. This movement, the first of any importance since the defeat of 1924, took a millenarian form. They tried to withdraw themselves from 'white' society, avoiding any relationship with 'white' people, refusing to work for them, and obtaining their food through appropriating cattle they found.⁶⁾ At El Zapallar, the movement was bloodily repressed by the police and settlers; at Pampa del Indio, the leaders were arrested and deported.



Toba workers after a meeting, Chaco province, 1970.
(Photo: the author).

This movement had no relationship with the one beginning at the same time among a fraction of the wage workers in the cotton region. This latter movement occurring in 1934 and 1936 was already institutionalised (in terms of legal admission) and it aimed at securing higher wages and union recognition. In this 1934-1936 movement, wage workers mobilised themselves in alliance with part of the rural petty bourgeoisie.

After 1933 there were no more movements among indigenous wage workers for almost 40 years. Within this fraction of the working class, the religious cults of the evangelical and pentecostal churches spread. These churches preached an acceptance of the situation and life conditions of the poor and the hope of a radical transformation that would take place after the "end of the world" which was fast approaching. An example of this is shown by the words spoken by an active member of the evangelical church to the author in 1970: "What can I do if they take my land away from me? It is God's will, I must bear it... The Bible says that when the end of the world comes, the last will be the first; and who can be more last than us?" The conditions of social isolation under which they exist is reflected by their participation in these cults. In contrast, the rest of the workers and peasants in the Chaco rarely join, even though their objective situation and living conditions draw them together.

Production of cotton and tanin were the principal productive activities at the beginning of the 1950's. In this decade as a result of the development of new areas of tanin production outside the country, a crisis occurred in this branch. Many sawmills closed and the seasonal employment cycle of many rural workers (cotton harvesting/sawmills) broke down. The existence of land owned by the state in the Chaco allowed them to settle on small marginal plots, where they undertook subsistence agriculture (D'Alessio, 1969).

For a time, increases in the price of cotton meant that many small-holders were tempted to replace subsistence crops with cotton for sale to the market (ibid). But in the mid

1960's it was cotton's turn to experience a crisis: over production led to a dramatic price fall. Finally to northern Argentina's ever greater distress, sugar production also suffered a crisis and this culminated in the closure of the sugar mill at Las Palmas.

The semi-proletarian peasants of the Chaco (who combined wage work with agriculture) had greatly extended their cotton plantings when prices were high. But owing to the small size of their plots and to the impossibility of getting hold of machinery, they could not easily alter production after the price fall. These cultivators responded to the price fall by cultivating more and more cotton in order to compensate for the fall in price by higher output. This implied an intensification in the labour input.

The only viable alternative open for this group was out-migration. In many cases, some family members stayed behind working the land while others left for work in the big cities. Between 1960 and 1970, about 141,000 people left the Chaco: a figure that represents 25.2% of the total provincial population. One result of this process has been that land ownership has become more heavily skewed: semi-proletarian peasants and members of the non-capitalised bourgeoisie have lost access to land while the capitalised bourgeoisie and wage workers have increased their holdings.

Table VIII

LAND DISTRIBUTION IN THE CENTRE-WEST OF THE CHACO

Size (hectares)	1960	1970
Less than 5	6.6%	9.3%
5 - 25	23.0%	19.4%
25 - 100	50.6%	45.7%
100 - 200	8.8%	11.7%
More than 200	8.7%	13.8%

(Source: Besil, no date)

The indigenous population of the Chaco were as deeply affected by the series of economic crises as were non-indigenous workers and peasants. They were also deprived of wage work once the seasonal cycle of employment of wage work in the sawmills and in the cotton harvest broke down. Those thrown out from this wage work were compelled to move from the countryside and settle on the outskirts of the larger urban centres such as Resistencia and Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña where they sought work as casual labourers. The crisis in cotton production led to a speeding up in the rate of migration to the towns of the Chaco and also, though to a much lesser extent, to the large cities especially Buenos Aires and Rosario. Table IX gives some impression of the distribution of indigenous people at a relatively early stage in the migration process.

Table IX

PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION: 1969

Type of settlement	Number of inhabitants	% of native population
Rural settlements	8,562	54%
Agricultural colonies	5,451	34%
Urban fringes	1,865	12%
Total indigenous population in Chaco	15,878	100%

(Source: Bartolomé, 1969).

The rate of rural-urban migration has quickened since 1968. The abandonment of rural settlements and movement to the towns reflects economic coercion; the impossibility for indigenous peoples to earn a livelihood in the countryside in recent years. The result for the indigenous population has been a much greater degree of integration into Argentinian society. Indigenous wage workers have now joined other worker and peasant sectors. They have participated equally along side these other social groups in the social confrontations in the period 1973 - 1976.

Notes

1). "The process of capitalist development reproduces, therefore, through its own development, the separation of the labour force from the means of production" (Marx, 1973, p 486). "...the process generated by capital can only be one thing: the process in which the worker is disassociated from the ownership of the means of production." (ibid p 608).

2) "...innumerable social relations are established between social classes. Which are those which fall specifically within the orbit of the state? ... Those which make possible the constitution of a working process "to exploit" one section of the society" (Marín, 1978).

3) "The percentage of investment with respect to gross national product in these years is very high; one of the highest in the history of Argentina" (Di Tella and Zymelman, p 258).

4) For a discussion of a similar situation in Chile, see Marín, no date.

5) Before 1930, the situation was the following: "the land is divided among a small number of landowners, most of whom live in Jujuy. Each one of these properties is of enormous size and is inhabited by a hundred Indians or more, who must hand over to the landowner the major part of the product from their small flocks of sheep and in addition, they are compelled to offer personal service when required. Most of the landowners never visit their property in the Puna. They just send occasionally a representative to sort out the problems of the Indians and return with the fruits of their labours" (Bowman, 1908, p 472). However, Bowman may have exaggerated the extent to which the hacienda system had survived the attacks during the period of agrarian unrest and its aftermath. The Indians, not only continued to press for the return of lands to the communities, they also, it appears, insisted on paying so low a rent that the economic viability of the system was threatened (Rutledge, 1974, pp 31-32).

6) An investigation into these "millenarian" movements is now being finished by researchers at CICSO.

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