I. Introduction.

The aim of this paper is to show that change in work organization is a process that allows work force changing itself from being the labor force to become a real agent of the production, in order to developing new strategies for Union Power.

We expose it in three parts. In the first one we describe some outstanding topics and approaches in the perspective of the union renewal and the self-reform, in order to highlight the importance of work places, as the scenario where work force emerges as subject of the production and its relationship to union renewal.

In the second part we set out the way by which labor force and unions, while appropriating of the high performance work systems’ content (HPWS), allow the emergence of a new subject of the production which we have characterized as production agent, contrary to its main-d’œuvre condition, characteristic of the Taylorist/Fordist pattern of organization. This subject of the production impacts in the process of union redefinition, granting it a wider perspective on the resources of power created from a new kind of membership.

In the third section, we present some conclusions on its potential in the construction of union power resources and in the reinforcement of its citizenship perspective.

II. Union Self-reform/renewal: definitions and paths in America. Beyond a reactive position facing new realities of the world of work.

The Canadian researchers, Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk (2006) point out five fundamental transformations that have affected syndicalism in the context of globalization: 1) gradual integration of economies promoted by multinational corporations whose competition intensifies labor flexibilization and encourages the spread of dismissals and the increase of outsourcing; 2) the increase of job insecurity in non conventional work, with no permanent recruiting, half time or temporary hiring; 3) the emergence of new demands and aspirations linked to age, gender and ethnicity; 4) the reorientation of public policies towards privatization and market needs and 5) macroeconomic integration of regions such as North America and Europe that resulted in a decrease of wages and social security with the aim of creating a “level playing field” (Kumar and Schenk, 2006:34). We add to this: 6) the lack of strategic answer from unions on new contents and demands of HPWS; 7) the emergence of new social figures who are not represented by the old forms and hierarchical and compartmentalized union structures; 8) the presence of great workers contingents in
thoroughfare who develop their forms of work defense which are different from that of the union and 9) the millions of migrants who become part of the informal labor market in the most developed economies who, within their trip trajectories, may work temporarily under conditions of precariousness, including prostitution, slavery or the fact of being victims of extortions. Thus,

“in addition to the changes in external environment, the unions also face pressures from members’ rising expectations, poor union image, and worker resistance to unionize due to either unsatisfactory union performance or a lack of awareness of union instrumentality” (Kumar & Schenk, 2006:35).

Facing a panorama of crisis, so much internal as external, unions and researchers have promoted and encouraged different renewal and self-reform strategies. Since the end of the nineties, particularly in countries such as Italy, England, United States and Australia, the topic has come to the fore in academic discussions and within the union organizations. At the beginning of the twenty first Century the subject spread over Europe and North America, while in Latin America, the Confederation of Workers of America (CSA, by its initials in Spanish) pushed its sprawl at the regional level.

The diversity of generated perspectives doesn’t allow a unique definition of union renewal/self-reform, but the proposal of Kumar and Schenk summarizes key features:

“Union renewal is the term used to describe the process of change, underway or desired, to ‘put new life and vigour’ in the labour movement to rebuild is organizational and institutional strength. It refers to the variety of actions/initiatives taken or needed by labour organizations to strengthen themselves in the face of their declining role and influence in the workplace and society” (Kumar & Schenk, 2006: 30).

In Latin America there has also been an effort to boost union self-reform: in April, 2009, the CSA, with the support of the project of Strengthening Latin America’s Syndicalism (FSAL, by its initials in Spanish) of the ILO, and having as a reference the experience of the General Union of Workers (UGT) and the Spanish Workers’ Commissions, the Working Group on Union Self-reform (GTAS) was constituted to face the problem. A diagnosis of the problems of the syndicalism was elaborated in the Founding Congress which took place in Panama and which is in agree with that of other regions.

In April, 2012, the first stage in which the GTAS issued a resolution to restate the need of a self-reform within the unions concluded: “Honesty, transparency and democracy are values and principles of our union culture which we should strengthen in order to boost the action of our organizations” (CSA, 2012); besides, the Congress urged to the recovery of an element which has so far been excluded in the CSA project of self-reform: the “articulation of syndicalism with other social and political actors of our countries” (CSA, idem). For the new phase of the strategy, they proposed to develop the System of Exchange and Pursuit of the Union Self-Reform (SISAS) to spread and communicate the experiences.
A break of union condition and a will of developing full citizenships, based on the internal unions’ democratization are profiled with the proposal of linkage to sectors in precarious condition, those with no organization and others. Although the relevance of recovering the *work place* as a privileged space of development of the internal capacities of the work force and of the union for the development of their resources of power in the design of the strategies for the union renovation is absent. In the following section, we will show the potential of the political recovery of the work space as part of union renewal, based on data coming from a national survey and two case studies (in the auto parts industry and in the terminal automotive one).

III. Change in work organization: construction of a new production subject and source for innovating union strategy.

Based on the National Employment, Wages, Technology and Training Survey (ENESTyC, by its initials in Spanish, 1992, 2001 and 2005) and interviews to line-workers and union leaders (Arteaga García, 2011) we propose a set of dimensions and descriptors to disaggregate the process of introduction of HPWS in the two considered cases, as it can be seen in Diagram 1.

**Diagram 1**

*Source: Arteaga García (2011).*

The HPWS dimension describes the way companies’ managements entered the model and the role of actors, workers and unions. The *RSIT* dimension includes the recruiting, selection and initial training mechanisms, particularly during the stage of HPWS, where
subjective and ideological aspects, besides technical habilitation, become strategically relevant for the operation of new management models. The WTW (FET) dimension describes the functioning of the working teams—a base for work organization since the introduction of HPWS—and shows the new areas of responsibility: productivity, quality, security, work environment and training that imply the delegation of work agency at the plant floor to the working teams. The TWBSS (CRSPT) dimension recovers the permanent actions of training, as a permanent action of labor force education, as well as of the work belonging sense strengthening, the encouragement of versatility, the role of union, the role of the “facilitator” as the negotiator among management, workers and working team, and the contradictory aspects in the operation of the model. The OPL (VE) dimension describes the effects of administration models in the outside plant life where we register indications and hints for deeper and more systematic inquiries.

The theoretical-methodological approach raises the fact that management has the prerogative of defining the rules of the production administration process at the work place and, in the first place, it establishes the frontiers of the control of productive process. Nevertheless, widening this approach, we recognize work places as scenarios where the actors of the production participate with their own interests, visions, values, in a context of permanent dispute and negotiation, without stopping to admit capital’s hegemony, represented by management. So, the range of social production actors’ interaction fluctuates from conflict to consensus.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that HPWS constitute a managerial strategy, both labor force and union, based on the appropriation and learning of those systems, can apply those knowledge to develop favorable labor scenarios to innovate the union resources of power and to strengthen the relationship between work place and citizenship.

In order to sustain the aforementioned, we suggest hints based on statistical aggregated information coming from the ENESTyC and from field. Without exhausting the complexity of work places reconfiguration process and, in general, of the production space, data constitute references to infer trends on its possible evolution and its influence on those subjects of the production and of union strategies.

Using the ENESTyC, we verified long term changes in work organization in the automotive industry in Mexico, as a result of this industry reconversion/restructuring at the global scale. Changes that arise mainly in the Japanese automotive industry, and which have been implemented—with nuances— in other places and productive sectors (Abo, 2006) characterized as HPWS (Arteaga García, 2011).

From 1992 to 2005, there is a sustained trend towards increase in work organization (WO) change, but it differs from the type of carried out change; the growth among the base year, 1992, and the following data gathering, 2001, is 36.7%, and it is emphasized if we consider the whole period (1992-2005) since it accounts for 95 per cent. This rhythm of change growth in WO would be also consistent with the dynamics of foreseen investments of many of the companies that come generally accompanied by the implementation of HPWS, as it can be seen in Graph 1.

Graph 1
They told us how the team work developed, which the commitment was. Sitting down, planning and solving the “X” problem; arranging a department, fixing machines’ leaks. And the 5 “s” were applied. Jorge, APSC.

In order to analyze the evolution of the modalities of change in WO, we focus on the most significant ones of labor force intervention in the management of the production process such as: just-in-time, job rotation, statistical production control, working team, introduction or improvement of quality control areas and/or methods, workers’ participation in decisions’ making.

With regard to the introduction of the just-in-time system (JIT) we confirm that there is downward trend, since it moves from 32.7% of the total changes carried out in the establishments to just 5.2% during the period. The implementation of JIT has as a prerequisite that the supplying company has orchestrated the total quality control (TQC), for what it demands that the chain of suppliers, mainly those located at the first line, has applied the TQC. The efficacy of this system lies in quality assurance from production lines to eliminate client’s inspection. Besides, it demands a logistic system which ensures that supplies arrive in the required moment, in the necessary volume and with zero defects\(^1\). The

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\(^1\) The quality control is a crucial issue in labor force involvement –as expressed by one of the interviewees– due to the kind of troubles that the non-fulfillment of quality standards may generate as well as the kind of corrective actions that must be implemented in order to guarantee its assurance.
economic impact of the implementation of these systems is of great importance for companies since it allows the elimination of financial expenses for inventories costs, it diminishes reworks, wastes and guarantee costs. The synchronized working of inventories also allows accelerating the rotation of fixed and working capital increasing companies’ rate of profit (Marx, 1976). Based on the data, we can infer that the decrease of change is due to the fact that, in the considered period, most of the establishments have been operating with base in this supply system that is, in turn, condition and result of the HPWS (Arteaga García, 2011).

The modality of job rotation, foundation of the functional flexibility, is one of the prerequisites of the HPWS; data showed by the ENESTyC would reveal a scarce vocation of the establishments of the AI since, in absolute and relative terms, it is almost nonexistent in the total of changes, since it moves from 1% to 0.5% in the considered period. Nevertheless, from the testimonies of workers and union leaders, we find references of its implementation as well as of managements’ inconsistency at the moment to applying it. The first one clearly refers to the assimilation on the part of union leadership:

*Working groups* which acts by means of “working cells” that control the production process itself and, well, this system of workers’ groups generates us versatility among workers themselves (emphasis added. Hereafter e.a.), where positions are no longer defined as limited operations and are presented as versatile operators and polyvalent workers. Genaro, GS of the TSC.

While the second accounts for management ambiguity, particularly in face of certainty of keeping production under fixed positions:

[Versatility] is on play, although many times the company fears (...) in some departments to make use of multiskills, because it says (...) ‘here people must not be moved, they are ok this way, I don’t have problems with quality, I don’t have problems with volume, they are properly fulfilling the goal, people must stay like this’. But [the worker wonders] what does it happen when somebody is out of work, gets sick or goes on holidays, somebody must take this place. And if that people is already spread trying to put multiskills into practice (e.a.), when that moment arrives, [there will be none who solves] the problem. Jaime, TSC.

Implementation of **statistical control in the production process** has an erratic behavior, since although in absolute terms there is an increase during the period (from 20 to 24 establishments), in percentage terms it loses weight within the set of changes when moving from 20.4% to 12.6 per cent. Nevertheless, as a management technique, it is fundamental for the operation of HPWS, in at least two strategic aspects of the competitive performance of companies. One is that of productivity, since it can be documented in a very precise way the acting of machines because of its installed capacity, the correct use of auxiliary and direct materials, it also included the productive time of each one of the operators. The second is that of quality since its insurance in the process is achieved from the control of
the variables and the adjustment to the specifications of each operation and of the components in process, whether they are at machining, adjustments or assembling (Kawamura and Shimada, 1993).

The option of **introducing working teams** has a downward importance since, in spite of having an upturn in the middle of the considered period, at the end it practically disappears of the scene (from 5.1% to 0%). These data differ substantively from that mentioned by the interviewed workers. It has been supposed that, being an indispensable condition for the operation of HPWS, their widespread incorporation has been before the first gathering of the ENESTyC or that, exactly, this is one of the greatest challenges for managements from the point of view of power exercise in the production line. Beyond the outlined assumptions, the team work, under its different denominations and even the width of its functions, is an essential device to reach pattern cohesion, the sense of belonging, as well as the *self-control* of all the members of the working team, in an individual and collective way:

> And I believe that from the union point of view this was very good, it generated high savings for the company, the created working teams looked for to improving quality, productivity and there were competitions among themselves. Using the best tools worldwide, it was not something like that 'let's see what comes out', but following the methodology of Japanese themselves. Carlos, GS, APSC.

The **Introduction or Improvement of quality control areas and/or methods** have an evident consistent dynamic both in absolute and relative terms, since in the first item it moves from 11 to 65 and in percentage terms from 11.2% to 34% along the period. This increase would be contradictory to the dynamics of introduction of the statistical control reported in the ENESTyC. But, if we see its behavior as isolated, it expresses the growing interest of establishments in quality as a competitiveness factor and its application is directly related to control exerted at the shop floor.

> ... which requires a systematic individual qualification to each worker: mathematics, graphics, quality control, among others. Josué, APSC.

We want to draw attention to one last feature, that of **workers’ participation in decision making** because, although in absolute and relative terms its importance is small, it has a growing dynamics since it moves from 0 establishments to 10 and in percentage terms it moves from 0% to 5.2 per cent. Assuming this responsibility constitutes a necessary component for passing *from a main-d’œuvre to one in which they are production agents*. Decision making supposes that the decision maker knows the consequences of his/her decision; consequently, his/her participation has to be based on co-responsibility. This is a

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2 In the first draft of the questionnaire, it was included as it is referred in the table *Participation...*, but, in the 2001 and 2005 versions, the officials responsible for its revision, decided to modify it and they included the variable as *Workers are allowed to participate in decision making...* For reasons of simplification, we choose the way as we define it in the first draft.
contradictory issue due to the fact that worker as an exploited being, in the Marxist sense, would consolidate the mechanisms of his/her own exploitation; but in a wider vision, it implies that he/she is able to assume his/her condition of producer of social wealth and of the possibility of impacting on the way things are made from production lines and, therefore, of disputing from that space his/her role as negotiator within the company. The new condition of working force as decision makers also supposes the circulation of information inside the firm, as expressed by Ramiro:

Well, in the first place, something we find very important is information. We find that the behavior of the plant should not only be managers privilege and, considering the executive committee, this information must reach all workers because, ultimately, they are all interested in knowing which the present is, which the past has been and which the future of the industrial unit is wherein we work. In recent years, we have given priority to information, to make workers know all that happens within the plant, positive and negative, difficulties and successes. Ramiro, GS, TSC.

IV. Workforce and Union Assimilation of the Model

The previous description allows emphasizing the long term trend in the modification of work force administration and its consequences, recognizing the negative effects (compulsion, competition, work intensification, loss of collective and union identity) as much as the positive ones (self-esteem, technical-social qualification for the resolution and improvement of products and processes, self-conception and greater managerial and union identity). This process –besides being contradictory and ambiguous– is a condition which manifests when worker is really loyal to the company for which he/she works and, at the same time, he/she remains loyal to the union organization; therefore, we seek to trace how these factors represent simultaneously a different way of citizenship construction from work places and their relationship with union, under new administration conditions in the use of labor force:

but (...) with technology’s coming, the evolution that had to be operated at the company, (...) all that came to give rise to worker assumes more responsibility, he/she becomes in charge of quality, of his/her volume, of fulfilling guidelines, because if he/she fulfills well guidelines, as it should be [and] he/she doesn’t go wrong in those points that are established, he/she will originate that he/she goes (...) climbing economically (e.a.) And that, didn’t happen before, there wasn’t a lot of responsibility... Jaime, TSC.

This work organization allows the learning and the achievement of the domain in a tract of the process and it makes more feasible that, within the group, tasks’ rotation takes place as a training process and as a versatility implementation one, which is associated to promotion and higher incomes:
Then, he/she has to carry out the task inside that stage, yes, and now, once they are carrying out it they are getting more skilled and they shorten that stage (...), but it is also managed that (...) everybody already knows his/her task, they know how to manage it well, they are all experts. Now, what will be all about? Well, it will be about that anybody, you <now you come here and you come here> and trying to make [another operation] (...) rotation, to make them multiskilled (e.a.). If, people already know, they can already move there, and (...) quality comes out. Guillermo, lineworker, APSC.

Admitting that HPWS implementation inside the automotive industry is an ongoing process, where there are ups and downs, consensus and conflicts, the observation made by Carlos about the visible results on the kind of worker that emerges from these new productive contexts is very enlightening:

We are talking about an autonomous worker, self-disciplined; with high performance groups (...) production is better. Somebody could suppose <Hey, if you leave it to workers’ will, maybe there will be more time outs and more waste of everything and we will have less production> and, on the contrary, productivity has been increased in wide sense (...), which has generated higher levels of quality, smaller levels of waste, more internal savings. Carlos, SG, APSC.

So, from the worker point of view, five features are retrieved: 1º) the role of learning for rotation, its effects on task enrichment, which leads to a re-qualification; 2º) the internalization of task execution with approaches of quality; 3º) sizing of their work at the international level as part of benchmarking processes of the own companies; 4º) learning of several operations becomes the promotion and income improvement mechanism and the evidence of the necessity of overcoming the “blind promotion system” and 5º) verification of the responsible involvement of the worker with regard to the company, but also with regard to the development of his/her own professional trajectory and of his/her income and to the union.

Another strategic aspect of labor force functions is planning. This always implies the development of an always implicit ability in the exercise of any activity on the part of the person who executes it, but which Taylorism systematically tried to deprive worker from as a form of standardizing work (Taylor, 1974) based on times and movements captured in jobs handbooks.

The testimony of the General Secretary of the TSC shows what this model has generated from the labor force perspective at the company and union levels. We are not trying to extrapolate the opinion of a single union leader, but to stand out some hints to detect what was developing from the shop floor as the environment and condition for labor force reconfiguration, as a new subject of the production and its influence on union organization.
I believe that learning is a process (...). This idea is not often exploited, it simply stays as a knowledge. I believe that, over the years, some of those who have been in touch with the agreements (initials) and who keep labor relationship, see that union cannot stand as a simple executor of company's instructions (e.a.); a new generation of representatives appears soon after 2000, (whose) position is in the sense of generating ideas and alternatives through the union figure (...) this is what is presented (and) this is a hard work because the company, during its whole life, until before the year 2000, was used to the fact that what it said was what it must be done. It must run, it was the one that must administrate and it is the one that has to manage issues such as quality, productivity, competitiveness, planning They don't see it in a first moment; they don't conceive that they hear it from a worker's mouth, from a union representative or from a working group (e.a.). Ramiro, GS, TSC.

It also recognizes that it is possible to move towards an unprecedented position in Mexican syndicalism not only by self-learning but by the influence of the experiences obtained for belonging to a transnational corporation. This position recovers the possibility of reaching autonomy in the production spaces, with the worker assuming himself/herself as the subject of the production, who recognizes his/her co-responsibility in the management of the company and the social character of what takes place in it:

As autonomy, overcoming what today is the working group and in order to arrive to autonomous groups, highly efficient (cm), (in which) workers decide how to make the productive process, how to modify it with the aim of delivering better results. Those results must be evaluated together; they have to be distributed among the workers. It would be (...) what is made in European unions, what they call self-determination, the “co-management “. That is to say, to have an influence on the union, understood as including as all the workers, in all the decisions that have to do with results toward the production process, planning, administration, quality audits, waste material, material handling, control of attendance by the technicians. Basically, what we are saying is to allow us, the workers, to enter all the spaces that have to do with the company. Ramiro, GS, TSC.
Some conclusions:

Although what has been shown cannot be generalized, it allows examining the world of the work in more detail, venturing with relative certainty and broadening horizons of the research guiding some conclusions:

1) Transformations in the world of work arising from changes in its organization within globalization must be analyzed from a long term perspective. History is a tool to learn on long term processes; we must take into account that Taylorism-Fordism system had to cross two world wars and a severe crisis so that in the second postwar period it consolidated as a form of administrate work organization but, more importantly, as the foundation for the construction of the institutional structure supported by the Welfare State, with unions as central actors of that process.

2) This verification must not take us to a regressive perspective on past as the best of all possible worlds, but recovering the historical experience on the capacity of working classes and its organizations in leading processes of deep and long term changes of social equalization.

3) The spread of the new paradigms is not a homogeneous, simultaneous and applicable process whatever the labor context is. On the contrary, its paradigmatic character lies on the fact that its location in the “old” sectors or those of the “new economy” that command the most dynamic processes of capital reproduction, have a demonstration effect on the rest of the productive apparatus in the definition of the ways of productive regulations and of labor relationships. This doesn’t imply its isomorphic reproduction, just general trends on organizational forms and specifically on the use of working force as benchmarks for the construction of the labor relationships system structure.

4) As administration and work force reproduction paradigms, it is important to draw upon the differences between the Taylorist-Fordist model and the HPWS and their effects on work force. The first one was exclusive regarding the administration of the work force, but inclusive when concerning the reproduction process due to Keynesian policies: wage and full employment constituted a capital reproduction boosting factor. On the contrary, HPWS, in reproduction, are exclusive since wage and full employment cease to be a factor in the design of the economic policies to encourage capital reproduction. As long as they are inclusive in work administration, they propitiated work force involvement based on a relative return of know-how and greater training for their involvement in production planning, execution and improvement. Therefore, the form of work administration in HPWS promotes, as a trend, a wider vision of labor force condition, but also of unions one.

5) Particularly, for the work force, as a trend, it means a favorable land for the construction of a new subject of the production with more demands as much for the company as for the union. For this latter, it also supposes that its membership acquires renewed capacities to impact as much inside the company as in union organization. Consequently, on its own, this transformation implies an innovation and transformation source, as well as a source for the development of new strategies from negotiation renewed ability within the company, inside the union and also in its relationship with society.

6) The brief testimonies we included here served to show that the implementation of these
models, although in occasions they are not orchestrated from what has been preached by the same pattern, so much work force as union are able to assimilate, appropriate and recover the initiative from the factory floor, incorporating learning as negotiation strategies and for the generation of scenarios alternative to those of management for conflicts resolution which derived from bad administration.

7) Another aspect of the influence of functional organizational structures on HPWS, whose result we could not verify, is that they can influence the redesign of union structures themselves to propitiate a greater involvement of bases, disassembling the highly compartmentalized and hierarchical structures to promote in a more direct way bases’ participation in the internal life of unions and, let it be said, to participate in its continuous improvement.

8) Lastly, not without a wishful and optimist accent, we consider that the instrumentation of these models, which call for the responsible involvement of labor force and for the relative return of its know-how, can promote the recovery of its role as social wealth producer to think about key questions such as: who does make the things?, how does he/she produce them?, why does he/she produce them? These and other questions point to strengthen, from work places, the role of union as negotiator within the company; in the society, as expression of a participatory citizenship.

Thus, the union that is able to innovate using this perspective must also recognize new social actors in the world of the work, must recover the forms of work administration, the context of laws, of new occupations, new technologies, new relationships that derive from teleworking and works located outside the circuit of capital appreciation in order to develop organization strategies which also transform it into their legitimate representative.

**Bibliography and hemerography**


