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> The old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.
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> —Antonio Gramsci, *Sections from the Prison Notebooks*

On a chilly day in July 1996 former miner Leonidas Rojas and I were chatting on his patio, where we had taken refuge from the unheated interior of his home. The searing midday sunshine felt wonderfully hot, but it did little to heat up the thin air of El Alto. Rojas and I were discussing the Bolivian labor movement, a topic that animated him and one that he knew a great deal about. For more than thirty years, Leonidas Rojas had worked in Bolivia's largest and most militant mining complex—Catavi-Siglo XX—where he was active in the mine workers' union. Over the years he had also held various national positions in the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), which the miners dominated from its inception.

At one point I casually mentioned that in the United States, we celebrate Labor Day in September, not on May 1, as is customary in Bolivia and many other countries. Rojas was incredulous. "What about the martyrs of Chicago?" he asked me. "Don't North Americans know that the police killed the Chicago workers on May First?" I replied that some U.S. citizens were aware of the 1886 police massacre of labor activists in Haymarket Square, but many others were not. "How," he then asked, "has the U.S. government been able to suppress the significance of the occasion for so long?" Rojas found it difficult to believe that U.S. citizens do not understand the significance of their own history, especially because it is a history that holds such importance for working people around the world.

During the labor celebrations associated with May 1, the miners routinely commemorate the "Chicago martyrs," as well as working-class heroes from Bolivia and other parts of the world. Indeed, the way in which Bolivian miners became "workers" entailed the creation of a history that

stressed class solidarity and linked miners' struggles to those of working people elsewhere. This history was strongly anti-imperialist, but it also turned on a nationalist vision of the past that emphasized apparent continuities in the struggles of miners against domestic foes, such as the early twentieth-century tin barons and then the Bolivian state. Yet it was silent about the cultural ruptures and social dislocations that created mine "workers" and distinguished them from "Indians" and "peasants." It also had very little to say about the participation of women in the protracted struggles about work and daily life that engulfed the mining communities and sometimes even the entire country.[1]

After the state closed its mines in the 1980s and "relocated" the mining proletariat, the miners' version of their history could not survive the fragmentation of their communities and the debilitation of the union. A much broader struggle for subsistence replaced class struggle, which they had understood in terms of exploitation at the point of production (Nash 1992, 1994b), and confronting El Alto's wretched conditions with the resources that miners had at their disposal was next to impossible. Former miners found themselves subordinated to a new and wider set of competitive relationships with other people whom they increasingly encountered as individuals. They, like Aymara peasant immigrants, were obliged to address the needs and vulnerabilities arising from unemployment and underemployment in El Alto by turning to others like—or almost like—themselves, but these people could not provide everything that was necessary.

Former comrades became competitors for the basic necessities of daily life. Unemployment and forced migration disrupted mutual support networks based in the mining communities and frequently pushed conflicts within households to the breaking point. At the same time, old ways of identifying as workers found little resonance amid the heterogeneous mix of street vendors, petty merchants, and artisans of El Alto. Consequently, forging new alliances to press claims on the state and constructing a vision of the future based on a sense of continuity with the past was extremely problematic.

The experience of Bolivian miners was not unique. In 1973 the repressive military regime of Augusto Pinochet had launched a wave of state terror against the miners of El Teniente, Chile's largest copper mine, while imposing a harsh neoliberal restructuring program designed by economists at the University of Chicago. The military dismantled corporatist welfare programs that had prevailed in Chile since the 1930s and wrought radical changes on the lives of workers. Severe repression and economic policies that cut wages, reduced job security, and abolished benefits for most workers broke up the tightly knit mining community of El Teniente. Miners

ceased to believe that collective action could improve their situation, and as individual miners tried to survive in the market economy, consumerism overwhelmed their culture of class solidarity (Klubock 1998).

The fate of miners in Chile and Bolivia is emblematic of the new reserve armies of unemployed or underemployed people that the decline of the Fordist system of labor regulation is creating (e.g., Palmer 1994; Moore 1990; Gilbert 1994). These marginalized individuals and their families draw our attention to relationships among impoverished peoples in areas such as El Alto, where Fordism never took hold and where many of the refugees of capitalist restructuring, with different perspectives and divergent histories, are encountering each other. Miners, once the elite of the Bolivian working class, now confront the task of reconstituting fragmented social relationships and developing new perspectives and institutions to replace old forms of struggle based in the mining communities. Understanding the miners' failed, yet conscious and organized, struggle is crucial to grasping how they confront the desperation and divisions among them and other impoverished alteños.

The experience of defeat and dispersal shapes the ways that miners conceptualize the past, and it informs the ways that they connect with and separate from other people in El Alto. As Steve Striffler (1998) demonstrates in Ecuador, disorganization and defeat—like mobilization and victory—are central aspects of the ongoing process of class formation, and histories of partial or total defeat must be judged together with victories that are almost never absolute. This chapter explores how miners struggle within and against the imposed disorder, as they advance new and old claims within a changing field of power.

Miners and the State

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Bolivian tin miners comprised one of the most militant working classes in Latin America. Their union and the national labor movement, which they led, not only pressed for higher wages and better working conditions in the mines but also advanced a much broader array of political and social demands that shaped national politics for decades. Miners, for example, played a major part in the 1952 revolution that led to the nationalization of major mines and produced important health, education, and welfare benefits for the workers. They were also instrumental in bringing down the first regime of General Hugo Banzer (1971–1978), one of the most repressive military dictatorships in recent Bolivian history.

Isolated in remote encampments high in the Andes, miners developed a strong sense of collective identity and common cause. The unions, organized in the 1920s, and the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB), formed in 1946, nurtured and expressed this solidarity. The strength of the unions lay not in the number of workers, who were always a small percentage of the Bolivian working class, but in the strategic position that mine workers occupied in the production process and the ways that the unions articulated their experiences. Until the mid-1980s, when cocaine replaced tin as the country's primary export commodity, mineral sales accounted for the majority of Bolivia's foreign exchange earnings, and union-led strikes therefore had repercussions well beyond the mining communities. Indeed, the strength of the miners' class-based solidarity and the strategic position that mine workers occupied in the export economy explain the victories that workers occasionally enjoyed and their ability to have things their way at least some of the time.[2]

In assessing the long history of collective action in Bolivia's tin mines, it is perhaps easy to accept the miners' official version of their past and to attribute to workers' struggles a unity of goals and purpose that never completely existed. Class solidarity developed not only in opposition to the state but also out of conflicts and divisions among working people themselves. Over time, worker solidarity varied according to a number of factors, such as the quality and honesty of leaders, internal skill hierarchies, and the effectiveness of state repression. Similarly, as rural people were drawn into, or expelled from, the mining economy, the continual creation and transformation of cultural categories affected worker unity and the ways that people identified themselves and their relationships to each other.

Throughout the twentieth century, for example, "miners" and "Indians" were unequal and opposed categories, despite the considerable similarities that characterized the individuals so defined. Workers born in the largest mining complex of Catavi-Siglo XX referred derogatorily to peasant immigrants as "Indians," who were ostensibly less civilized than themselves. Such distinctions were most sharply drawn in the major mining camps, which paradoxically were the centers of greatest worker militancy.[3] By the midtwentieth century, many workers in these camps had few, if any, ties to rural peasant communities, and their fathers had often been mine workers before them. They also belonged to an urbanized culture that they shared with merchants and so-called *vecinos de pueblo,* or town dwellers, who exploited peasants and were routinely despised by them. Many miners of Catavi-Siglo XX spoke Quechua and Spanish and associated Aymara, another indigenous language, with the backward countryside. Peasants, for

their part, commonly lumped these workers and merchants together and called them cholos, a pejorative.

Thus the largest mining camps, especially Catavi-Siglo XX, produced a major share of prominent labor leaders who ascended to high-level positions in the national labor movement. They tended to be relatively well educated, because, after the 1952 revolution, the public schools in the mining districts were the best in the country, and most miners had little firsthand experience of life in the countryside, where schooling rarely extended beyond the third grade. Although these men consistently advocated worker-peasant solidarity in their public pronouncements, peasants frequently experienced miners' entreaties as condescending and paternalistic. A peasant leader commented in the 1970s that "the miners talk a lot about helping us and about [our] common struggle; but after they take to the streets, [miners] call a peasant to carry their bundles and pay them with a little piece of bread" (Harris and Albó 1984:109).

Worker solidarity, then, represented the victory of certain perspectives among miners that carried more resonance and had a stronger institutional base than others. It emerged, at least in part, from struggles among working people about the best way to engage the political and economic power of capitalism in the mining centers; as historian Steven Volk says, the union movement, not political parties, gave form and meaning to this solidarity (1975). The state constantly sought to undermine it and to foment armed conflicts between miners and peasants but never completely achieved these objectives. Then, in the mid-1980s, the relative inefficiency and diminishing reserves of the state-operated mines made them a focus of neoliberal restructuring.[4]

The first major blow to workers came in 1985 when the state curtailed subsidized food allotments. The state had long subsidized four basic items—meat, bread, sugar, and rice—through company stores, or *pulperías*. The withdrawal of the subsidy, which could amount to as much as half of a worker's income, would have been a major setback for miners even under relatively stable economic conditions, but skyrocketing prices on the free market and wage freezes in the aftermath of Supreme Decree 21060 demolished household budgets. The consumer price index rose 174 percent between August 1985 and August 1986, as prices adjusted to their "real levels." Meanwhile, the average miner's wage was set at $60 per month in August 1985 and had diminished to $43 per month a year later (Latin America Bureau 1987:14–15).

Miners were quick to respond to the unfolding disaster. They understood the New Economic Policy as an assault on the working class and par-

ticularly the miners' union. More generally, they saw it as an attempt to privatize the economy and role back the gains that workers had won in the 1952 revolution. Through a long series of meetings, marches, and demonstrations, they fought to defend their jobs and protect their way of life.

In 1986, delegates to the Twenty-first Congress of the FSTMB approved the "Catavi Thesis," which outlined a union-directed plan for the reactivation of COMIBOL, the state mining corporation, that would not reduce the number of workers. The plan, according to one worker, stated that "we had to go and produce despite all of our problems. The miners agreed to sacrifice themselves even more, in spite of the government's insensitivity, because the most fundamental thing was to maintain a source of jobs." Later the same year five thousand miners and their supporters set out from Oruro on the celebrated "March for Life and Peace" to La Paz, but the army stopped them before they reached their final destination, and police arrested about two hundred people (Nash 1992).

The COB responded by calling an ineffective one-day general strike. It was then forced to suspend the march and sit down with government representatives at the negotiating table, where COB leaders signed an agreement that provided for the retention of only half of COMIBOL's employees. The rank-and-file subsequently rejected the agreement, because it did not contain sufficient financial compensation for those miners who were being forced to quit. This precipitated a major split within the miners' union, as workers became divided about the best way to proceed: some argued that they had to defend jobs at all costs, whereas others sought to better negotiate the conditions of job surrender.

The latter group had lost faith in any possibility of reactivating COMIBOL and desperately wanted to secure some financial compensation from the company before it went bankrupt and left them with nothing to show for their years of service. Their fear was understandable. All miners had seen their salaries reduced to almost nothing, and the company no longer paid even these pittances on time. COMIBOL not only curtailed basic food subsidies to the pulperías but also stopped providing spare parts for machinery. Medicines were no longer available in the company hospitals, and COMIBOL-operated schools lacked supplies. The government had already forced workers older than sixty into early retirement while encouraging those aged fifty to fifty-five to take "voluntary retirement."

The government's assault on the miners highlighted the latter's almost complete dependence on the state for the minimal necessities of life. Moreover, as cocaine replaced tin as the country's primary export commodity, the miners' union lost the leverage that it had once used to advance polit-

ical and economic claims with the state, and it became deeply divided. The strike became ineffective as a weapon for resistance, and work stoppages only expedited the decline of the industry by releasing COMIBOL from the obligation to pay wages.

A sense of panic pervaded the mining centers in late 1985 and 1986, as people weighed their need to keep working against the government's pressures to quit. Ex-miner Romulo Mercado described the rising feeling of hysteria that pervaded Catavi-Siglo XX:

> There were rumors that they were going to close the mine. [Workers feared that they] were going to be without jobs and that longtime miners, like me and my father, would lose our benefits. Where was the company going to get the money to pay us? This psychosis made people desperate, and they began to present letters of voluntary resignation. In the middle of December 1985, four hundred workers over fifty-five quit. For all their years of work, they only received a maximum of fifteen hundred dollars, and to receive this they had to give up their homes. They picked up the money at the door of the administration building, where a truck loaded with all their possessions waited to take them away.

The dispersal of the mining workforce did not happen all at once. It was slow and sporadic until 1986, the year thousands of miners departed, and then diminished once again, as periodic mine closures and reorganizations further depleted the number of workers for the next several years. A new term—*los relocalizados* (the relocated ones)—emerged to describe displaced workers. It arose from the government's initial promise to provide ex-miners with new jobs and to relocate them to other parts of the country, but the label proved to be misleading. The government rarely provided alternative employment.

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s the government bought workers off with wildly different settlements. For example, the first group of workers to leave the mines received $1,500 as compensation, but a second contingent that departed in late 1986 obtained $3,000. In 1987 the government dangled a "three-for-one" offer before the remaining hold outs—it would make payments at three times the standard rate to those who quit voluntarily. The state further sweetened the deal in 1990—a $1,000 bonus for each year of work—in a bid to dislodge a relatively small number of stalwarts. Not surprisingly, a major demand that emerged from the ranks of the relocalizados was that the government equalize its payments to everyone.[5]

Miners adopted a variety of survival strategies as they departed from the mines. The majority went to large urban centers, such as El Alto and Cochabamba, where they hoped job opportunities were greatest. Those with the most years of service in the mines had acquired small lots and houses through a cooperative housing program; the less fortunate counted on the assistance of urban relatives. Another group organized themselves into mining cooperatives and continued working those parts of the mines that the government was not selling off to foreign corporations. These individuals had little, if any, capital for exploration, tools, and repairs, and their social benefits no longer existed. A small group of miners returned to their communities of origin, where they still retained access to land. Others migrated to lowland frontier zones. They hoped to claim or purchase unsettled land, particularly in the mountain valleys of the Chapare where coca leaf cultivation was attracting many immigrants. Finally, some unemployed saw no future in Bolivia and left for the major cities of neighboring countries, such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina.[6]

Those miners who settled in El Alto joined a heterogeneous labor force that was considerably more diversified than the mining communities, and few found new jobs. The factory positions in El Alto's nascent industrial sector were rapidly disappearing in the 1980s, and employers were slow to hire ex-miners because of their well-deserved reputation as labor militants. Unemployed miners often had no choice but to participate in the poorly paid and insecure work that engaged the vast majority of El Alto's residents. They entered a variety of different labor processes, and the economic distinctions between them and peasant immigrants were often blurred.

Yet even as alteños increasingly shared a more generalized poverty, a new relationship between domination and subordination emerged that turned on their increasing autonomy as individuals. This was particularly the case with former miners. In the aftermath of the disruption of their communities, the virtual destruction of the union, and ex-miners' immersion in a highly commodified economy, where the basic necessities of daily life were no longer subsidized, the ties that had once bound them to each other and the state were severed. Former miners could not make effective claims on the state as individuals; moreover, with the exception of its repressive apparatus, the state's presence in El Alto was diminishing. Compared to the mining communities, where the omnipresence of COMIBOL overshadowed work and daily life, in El Alto the state was much more removed from the daily round.

Displaced miners quickly learned that the terms for engaging the dominant society were different than in the past. And the lessons of the past did

not always apply to the present. Yet because of the way that economic restructuring had ruptured their own social relations, developing strategies and approaches for confronting domination proved to be extremely difficult in the depressed economic situation of the city.

Security, Subsistence, and Struggle

Establishing themselves in El Alto was not an easy process for most miners and their families. Although some people had acquired homes in El Alto through a state-sponsored cooperative program, most had not. Families had to rent rooms or move in with relatives; some even lived in tent encampments for a time. Those who eventually built their own homes did so by using their redundancy payments to purchase urban lots.

One of the most brutal consequences for many families was the dissolution of the delicate balance between cooperation and conflict that had characterized gender relations in households. The relocation of the mining proletariat not only reterritorialized the working class; it also redivided this segment of the labor force. It pushed more women into the labor force as their male companions lost work and were unable to obtain comparable positions. Although their earnings were meager, women's contribution to domestic income did grow in proportion to men's. This challenged men's already besieged sense of themselves as providers and prompted confrontations about work and domestic labor arrangements within households. As one man explained:

> A lot of people started drinking and marriages broke up. Women out of desperation went with other men [who were not their companions] because the men had some sort of job. It was everybody for themselves. There were many compañeros who were skilled workers—electricians, mechanics, drillers—but they could not find work so they started to drink. In the mines, there was always solidarity: you knew if your compañero was sick and then went to help him, and you complained to management when the company didn't provide food to the pulperías. Here, no. If you die, you die.

The disruptions entailed by forced migration were also stressful for children, who learned hard lessons about social position and exclusion. Many left school, because the desperate financial straits of their families obliged them to find work. Others could not immediately find places in overcrowded public schools, which were unable to accommodate late-term arrivals. All experienced the pain, loss, and anxiety that relocation entailed.

As children became helplessly enmeshed in the changing dynamics of class, they found themselves in the impossible position of being both loved and resented by their parents, who had to contend with debilitating economic circumstances that made children a burden. Children also witnessed the rupture of the domestic and social power of their fathers and the conflicts that frequently ensued between fathers and mothers. Fathers had once claimed considerable authority in households because of their ability to provide for families. Although what they offered was often very meager, and their livelihoods were always threatened by poor health, accidents in the mines, and the vagaries of the mining economy, life as a miner was preferable to unemployment and its daily humiliations in El Alto. In fact, if one had to be a poor Bolivian, being a miner was better than a lot of other occupations, because of the benefits—schools, health care, pensions, and subsidized housing and food—that the miners had extracted from the state. Being a miner could also be *classy,* at least as they were regarded by Left-leaning urban intellectuals who admired the miners' political tenacity.[7] But as the position that miners occupied in Bolivian society changed, so too did the meaning that miners held for their children.

Children were poorly equipped to make sense of the changing life circumstances of their families. Before settling in El Alto, most already knew that they could not always have what they wanted, but this message was driven home even more forcefully in the city. The large marketplaces of El Alto and La Paz tantalized children with an array of expensive consumer goods. Yet the goods were completely beyond the reach of impoverished mining families and reinforced a painful lesson about class exclusion that children were already learning far too well. Aggravating the children's longings was the influx of expensive commodities that neoliberal policies encouraged. These longings were not simply a manifestation of greed or a nascent consumerism propelled by increased globalization. They were, rather, an appropriate expression of the unfulfilled desires created by a society that allowed some people to possess the things that these children were denied.[8]

The strains of imposed poverty in an unfamiliar environment were particularly difficult for sixteen-year-old Juana Revollo. She came to El Alto in 1986 with her parents, Ema and Jaime Revollo, four brothers, and a sister after her father lost his job in the Colquiri mine. The family was fortunate to own a modest house, which her parents had originally envisioned as a retirement home, and her father initially hoped to subsidize the family's expenses by placing his $2,000 severance payment in a high-interest investment scheme that would supposedly produce a monthly yield of $200. Shady individuals were promoting a number of similar investment plans

among the relocalizados. Juana's father heeded the investment advice of a *compadre* (a godparent to one of the Revollo children), who claimed that he had been reaping generous returns on his capital for two years. Yet the very month that Juana's father invested his money, the scheme collapsed, and like many other former miners he lost all his money.[9]

The family's situation became more precarious. Ema and Jaime Revollo sought out a series of part-time jobs. Jaime Revollo manufactured adobe bricks for a time and then found short-term employment on a road construction project that was financed by the World Bank in the aftermath of its structural adjustment agreement with the Bolivian government. Ema Revollo sold baked goods on the street. Both parents left home early in the morning and did not return until late in the evening, and the four oldest siblings, who had completed high school before leaving Colquiri, searched for jobs as well. When the family was together, mounting tensions and anxieties about the economic difficulties strained relationships between family members. Jaime Revollo, for example, was utterly despondent about the loss of his entire severance payment and started drinking heavily. This, in turn, prompted more frequent fights with his wife; to make matters worse, neither parent seemed to have much time for Juana.

Juana Revollo grew depressed. She could no longer tolerate life with her family and decided to leave home. She did so to escape the emotional stress and to earn money for herself that she could not request from her parents. With a friend, she went to Cochabamba, where she found a job as a domestic servant. But the work did not go well. The employer refused to pay her a wage and provided only a food ration in exchange for hours of hard, demeaning work. After seven months, Juana Revollo had had enough and returned to El Alto without a cent to her name. She eventually married and moved to another part of the city.

Reflecting on the situation in 1994, several years after their daughter's return, Jaime and Ema Revollo blamed themselves. Jaime Revollo explained that "the children were very disoriented [by the move to El Alto], but we, as parents, were unable to orient them, because we didn't know what to do, either. Leaving the mine, we were like children in diapers." Jaime Revollo blamed his naïveté on the miners' union, which he believed had failed to adequately prepare people for life in El Alto. "They [the leaders] knew about the low price of tin, and they should have at least told us that decree 21060 was going to bring certain consequences. They should have oriented us: this is going to happen, that is going to happen. It's the leadership's obligation to orient us. But the problems came, and they simply put us aside."

As former miners grappled with the difficulties of life as relocalizados and set about the task of finding employment, intense competition among individuals rapidly replaced the collective solidarity of the tin mines. The miners frequently expressed this competition in ethnic stereotypes: some relocalizados claimed that the Aymaras were "closed" and socially inaccessible; many Aymara immigrants, for their part, viewed the relocalizados from the mines as arrogant and overbearing. Sometimes animosities boiled over in soccer matches.

Jaime and Ema Revollo, for example, lived in a neighborhood where former miners and Aymara immigrants lived side by side, and soccer matches among the young men of the neighborhood frequently erupted into fights. Ema Revollo explained that "the miners' children are better prepared and usually win the matches, but the Aymaras are very jealous and want to win too. There are always fights." Her husband added that "there are even fights among the fathers who come to watch, because the play is very hard. And the Aymaras criticize us [*nos echan palo*]. They call us crazy miners in Aymara. They don't participate well."

Nowhere, however, was the competition more intense than in the realm of street vending, where women vendors sit side by side on sheets of blue plastic or woven shawls for hours, selling identical products and earning very little by the end of day. They voice a common complaint that "there are more sellers than buyers" [*Hay más vendedores que compradores*]. Genoveva Villarroel, the leader of an organization representing street vendors in one part of the city, explained that her job primarily involves the mediation of disputes between women. These fights, she said, "are usually about jealousy, because one person sells more than the other."

The experience of Fermina Díaz, a relocalizada from the Corocoro mine, is typical of many others'. When twenty-year-old Díaz, her parents, and her seven siblings moved to El Alto, the family was obliged to scrape together an income from a variety of sources. The father and eldest brothers worked sporadically on construction projects, while Díaz and her mother prepared food and sold it on the street in a distant, more commercialized part of the city. Because they were too poor to pay for transportation, the two women carried their wares and walked.

The sale of food initially provided a modicum of income for the family, but as competition from other vendors in the area increased, the women lost more money than they earned and finally ceased selling altogether.[10] Commenting on the other vendors, Díaz stated that they were "really bad. People here are very egotistical, and they don't know how to cooperate. If you ask them something, they'll give you the wrong answer or

say that they don't know, and they always answer in Aymara. I don't understand Aymara, only a few words." She then went on to negatively compare this experience with the more cooperative atmosphere of the mining region, where neighbors knew each other and collaborated. For Fermina Díaz the past had acquired an idyllic quality that distinguished it from the contentious divided present. Indeed, constructing new cooperative networks with others whom they encountered as competitors was extremely problematic. The sense of collective oppression that emerged from a way of life and work so directly controlled by the mining company was absent in the individualized ways that these women found themselves situated in the labor process. Identifying as "workers," which had always been a designation more closely associated with men, lost any meaning that it might still have retained for these women, and this posed new problems for developing a path to the future that retained some continuity with past experience and struggles.[11]

Leonidas Rojas's situation is a good example. He came to El Alto with a well-formulated sense of himself as a worker, developed through years of union activism, work in the mine, and confrontations with the state-owned mining corporation and the Bolivian armed forces. The many versions of Marxism that shaped political debate among the miners also shaped his view of himself as a worker. In one of our conversations he explained what being a worker meant to him. We were talking on a bench, surrounded by female street vendors, in one of El Alto's many open-air markets. "A worker," he said, "lives from the sale of his labor power and cannot exploit others because he does not own or control the means of production." I gestured toward the street vendors and asked about them. The women were not workers by his definition, because they did not sell their labor power, but they did not own means of production, either. Rojas insisted that despite the common poverty of these women, which they shared with many former miners, the vendors were not really workers because of their "petty bourgeois mentality" and their "constant preoccupation with social mobility."

Yet when his health permitted, Rojas himself was engaged in commercial activities similar to those of the women he described as "petty bourgeois." After leaving Siglo XX, he had refused to invest his redundancy payment in a secondhand minibus and become an urban transporter, because, like many working people, he viewed the transporters as exploiters. He disliked banks for the same reason and, in any case, did not trust them with his money. But Rojas eventually decided to "put his money to work" by traveling to Chile, purchasing merchandise in the commercial port of Iquique,

and reselling the goods to consumers in El Alto and La Paz at higher prices. Did this not make him petty bourgeois and an exploiter? "No," he explained, because he "still had his formation as a worker" [*formación obrera*].

Clearly, Rojas's sense of class pride, developed in the mining center, continued to be an important source of personal dignity and respect for him. Yet neoliberal restructuring had forced him to interact and compete with others who were much like him and had undermined the social relationships that constituted the very foundation of worker solidarity. Indeed, when he told me that he "still had his formation as a worker," Rojas was explicitly referring to an orientation that he had acquired in the past, not something that emerged from his present social relationships. By defining himself in opposition to the Aymara vendors who surrounded us in the marketplace, Rojas was clearly distancing himself from these less educated, ethnically distinct women, who were, like him, engaging in a form of work that was not entirely of their choosing.

Even as reestablishing worker solidarity proved illusive, dealing with the negative stereotypes associated with being relocalizados grew more burdensome and difficult to overcome. Functionaries of the emergent neoliberal state increasingly defined miners and their unemployed brethren as parasites (Nash 1994a:12), and public sympathy for the relocalizados, which had initially been strong, began to decline as well. In 1992 a La Paz daily declared that the conflict between the government and the relocalizados was over.[12] The erosion of sympathetic support among city dwellers came in the context of an economic crisis that threatened many people's jobs and identities, and support for the relocalizados became an indulgence that fewer people would allow themselves. The public and the government increasingly ignored public protests by former miners and their families. This situation moved relocalizados to adopt desperate and futile tactics to call attention to their situation: some crucified their bodies on fences and flagpoles in highly public places, while others dangled from upper-story windows, threatening to jump. These tactics initially shocked public consciousness but inflicted little or no damage on those most responsible for the miners' plight. Meanwhile, an organization formed to represent their interests vis-à-vis the government grew moribund and ineffectual.

For Romulo Mercado the denigration of the relocalizados and the conflicts that erupted among miners in the aftermath of Supreme Decree 21060 recast the meaning of the lessons that he had learned from work and life in the mining centers. Union activism ceased to be a reference point for collective action, and he chose to distance himself from the pain and humiliation of the past and the present as he became immersed in new social

relationships in El Alto. "To put it concretely," he told me, "I was a dedicated union activist. I grabbed hold of Siglo XX and said that I would die there with my companions" [*compañeros*]. Because of this political commitment Mercado refused to leave with the first contingent of relocalizados, vowing instead to fight for the retention of jobs and the revitalization of the mine. Such determination and militancy were nothing new for him. His union activities had led to periods of exile during the years of military rule, when he had worked underground in La Paz to help persecuted workers leave the country. Yet in the mid-1980s Mercado gradually came to the realization that the battle was lost.

He and his family left the mine with a $3,000 severance payment. Although he was fortunate to possess a small urban lot, the family used the bulk of the severance pay to construct a home. Mercado, however, did not have a job and all his attempts to secure one were futile. Relatives, acquaintances, and the union were either unwilling or unable to help him, and, perhaps most painful of all, his former workmates were divided and fighting among themselves.

Mercado became depressed; he had lost not only the ability to support his family but his dignity as a worker. He passed through a period of excessive drinking but eventually pulled himself together and entered teacher-training school. For two and a half years he studied, while his family scrapped by on the money that he and his wife earned from part-time employment. Then, in 1988 he acquired his first teaching position and subsequently acquired the seniority necessary to move up in the system and fight the same battles all over again.

When I met Mercado in 1996, he had been teaching for eight years, and he told me that he does not publicly refer to himself as a relocalizado.

> It's not because I am ashamed. The problem is that society thinks that I'm something that does damage to people. There is incredible denigration of the relocalizado. Why is this? It's because relocalizados are manipulated by politicians; their leaders rob them; the government fools them; people blockade roads in the name of the relocalizados, and [nongovernmental organizations] get money from abroad in the name of the relocalizados and then do nothing. Everything is the fault of the relocalizado. They have become a sickness in this country. You can't go into an office and say that you are a relocalizado—anything but that. They treat you very badly.

As Mercado joined the ranks of El Alto teachers, he became part of a profession that, despite the proletarian salaries, conferred a higher social status

than that of market vendor or day laborer. By representing himself as a teacher, rather than a worker or a relocalizado, he distanced himself from domination and the demeaning ways that the larger society portrayed relocalizados. He also separated himself from a long history of collective struggle that came to appear increasingly futile and pointless in the context of a present where competition and individual opportunism, rather than cooperation, increasingly structured relations among and between old workmates and their Aymara neighbors.

His success in separating himself from these struggles was by no means complete, however. In the aftermath of Supreme Decree 21060 and the reorganization of mineral production, state bureaucrats and the World Bank turned to reforming the public education system and scrutinizing the jobs of thousands of teachers, whose occupational security had been eroding for years. The 1994 Educational Reform Law, which emerged from their deliberations, sought to undermine the teachers' union and make it more difficult for teachers to retain their positions (see chapter 5). The teachers did not react passively to these threats; indeed, after the defeat of the tin miners, they moved to the forefront of popular resistance to the privatization of the public sector, and the similarities between the plight of the miners and the situation of teachers were not lost on Mercado. "The essence of [the Educational Reform Law] is to privatize public education," he said. "And if education is privatized, a lot of teachers are going to be 'relocated,' so to speak, just like the miners." Yet Mercado was reticent about taking a more active part in the teachers' union, despite pressure from his colleagues to do so. "I was a tremendous fanatic," he told me. "At this stage of my life, I just have to say no. What for?"

Shaping the Present

The lives of Romulo Mercado, Fermina Díaz, and Leonidas Rojas illustrate how the dislocations occasioned by the reorganization of mineral production gave rise to new tensions surrounding social reproduction and subsistence. Clearly, these are tensions that people cannot completely resolve through their social relations, and their past experience provides little guidance to the future. The economy has brutalized former miners because of the ways it forces them to engage each other in order to survive; this brutalization creates a collective bad faith, as it undermines trust and the ability to collectively organize. Former miners and other impoverished immigrants now face a crucial strategic question: how can they construct a form of solidarity in El Alto from an ethnically diverse social constituency char-

acterized by widely different individual histories, a mosaic of work relations, and intense internal competitiveness? In the absence of strong representative organizations, former miners and other poor alteños have a difficult time formulating demands and advancing them with the state and international organizations.

Any form of independent grassroots organization must contend with a handful of political parties, which represent the interests of dominant groups, and a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which often maintain ties to the parties but are more directly accountable to a variety of different international organizations. The parties and the NGOs control some of the essentials of subsistence in the city—jobs, credit, access to social services, and even, in some instances, food, which they distribute through a variety of local organizations. They contend with each other for control of these organizations—neighborhood associations, mothers' clubs, and the like—and at times the NGOs may even create local organizations.

"Affiliating" with a party or an NGO is one way that former miners and other poor residents address the daily problems of subsistence. Many ex-miners occupy leadership positions in a variety of parties, NGOs, and popular organizations. As one former miner explains: "Many relocalizados have become leaders [in El Alto], because the mines were revolutionary universities, especially Catavi and Siglo XX. They have a long history of producing important leaders. And when the miners rose up, there were revolutions and coup d'états." Several immigrant Aymaras with whom I met also recognize the leadership skills of the miners and acknowledge that they "talk well" [*hablan bien*], but their status—as former miners and others affiliated with the parties and NGOs—frequently robs them of their autonomy. The social fragmentation that forces them to engage these institutions in order to meet their basic needs multiplies as they become clients of these organizations, a relationship that deprives them of any political initiative, individual or collective. Factional cleavages come to characterize the struggle for resources. These cleavages are not based on horizontal class alliances but turn on ties of patronage and dependence that people use to forge shifting alliances tinged with partisan politics or imbued with the discourse of NGOs.

Fermina Díaz, for example, was no innocent to the workings of political parties and signed up with several on the eve of the 1993 elections in the hope of extracting a few benefits. As she explained:

> Militants from all the parties came to [my neighborhood] to rent space prior to the elections. The MNR [Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionaria] was in the plaza; a little beyond was CONDEPA

> [Conciencia de la Patria]; and over their was the UCS [Unión Cívica Solidaridad]. That's how it was. They all set up tables where people could register. I signed up with them all and got t-shirts from everyone. You've got to take advantage of them just like they take advantage of us.

To emphasize her point, Díaz took off the sweater she was wearing and displayed a tattered t-shirt. It bore the image of ex-dictator Hugo Banzer Suárez and the logo of his political party.

Despite his personal dislike of the mainstream parties, Romulo Mercado had also affiliated briefly with one of them at election time. As he explained: "I, the longtime enemy of the MNR and a leader in Siglo XX, went to a couple of MNR meetings. Why? Because they told us that they would help if they got elected. I thought maybe they would. They took us to their proclamations so that it would seem like they had a mass of people behind them. But when they got into power, nothing happened."

As his comments indicate, party patronage networks emerge most intensively at election time, when the parties need votes and at least the appearance of massive popular support. Yet for both strategic and financial reasons, a party's willingness and ability to maintain a vast system of clients on a regular basis is much more problematic; more important, the mainstream parties are not speaking to the needs of people like Romulo Mercado, Fermina Díaz, and Leonidas Rojas.

One major consequence of neoliberalism for ex-miners has been the debilitation of class-based organizations through which they had built up a sense of shared struggle, expressed in the language of class and class solidarity. Consequently, exploitation has become much more rooted in the fabric of local social relationships. As miners and their families confront the difficulties posed by daily life in an impoverished city, they must develop new approaches and affiliations. The past is of only limited use in this endeavor. At the neighborhood level, however, some former miners have reestablished affective ties with people they knew in the mining communities, and these bonds continue to have meaning. At the funeral of an exminer in the Ciudad Satélite neighborhood, for example, most people in attendance were other former miners and their family members from Catavi-Siglo XX. And Romulo Mercado allowed that although the past is gone forever, people who worked together for years still seek each other out in El Alto. "The friendship was very deep," he said. "Maybe with the passage of time, it will disappear, but the ties are very strong. . . . I would like my daughter to marry someone from my town."

After the government dismantled the mining communities and ren-

dered the miners' union toothless, public school teachers moved to center stage in the popular struggle against neoliberalism. Public school teachers still have a combative union that has staked out its members' objections to the neoliberal attempts to reform teachers and public education. The next chapter explores teachers' confrontations with the state and the divisions between them and parents, which the 1994 Educational Reform Law has aggravated.