

"With dignity we will fight!"

Worker Self-managed Hotel BAUEN Once Again Under Threat

by Katie Sobering

Located in downtown Buenos Aires, self-managed workers in Hotel BAUEN are appealing for international support as they confront the threat of eviction. Hotel BAUEN is one of over 200 worker-recuperated enterprises (empresa recuperada por sus trabajadores) operating under worker control.

Following the 11th anniversary of worker recuperation this year, an Argentine bankruptcy court renewed an eviction order against the cooperative operating Hotel BAUEN. While [workers have confronted eviction orders in the past](#), this order marks the most serious threat to the cooperative to date.



Photo posted by workers in the Greek recuperated business Viome on Facebook, April 15, 2014. The sign reads "half of our heart can be found in Buenos Aires. Viome stands in solidarity with Bauen."

Transforming the workplace

Hotel BAUEN is one of the most visible and emblematic worker-recuperated businesses in Argentina. Located in downtown Buenos Aires, the cooperative operates a 20-story tower just blocks away from the seat of the national government. Moreover, it plays a central role in efforts to organize and support worker-recuperated enterprises across the country.

As you walk into the lobby of Hotel BAUEN, it is not uncommon to see an eclectic mix of people. Overnight guests with suitcases wait to check in and out at the reception desk; passersby drink coffee in the café; and different groups—from workers and students to indigenous organizations and tourists—hold all sorts of events in the hotel's various conference rooms.

Yet this busy hotel would not be what it is today if its workers had not taken matters into their own hands. In the wake of Argentina's economic crisis in 2001, the owners of Hotel BAUEN closed the hotel as part of fraudulent business maneuvering, leaving their workers without jobs or the back pay they were owed.

On March 21, 2003, a group of former workers entered the hotel, left stripped and abandoned by its owners, and found it in a state of total disrepair. They decided to occupy the building and began a process of recuperation that has since created 130 jobs and transformed the business into a self-managed worker cooperative. In addition to creating jobs, workers have also made major investments in the property. They not only invested their own paychecks into initially reopening the rooms and ballrooms, but they have continued to maintain and update this aging, mid-century modern hotel with little external financial support.

Even under threat of eviction, business in Hotel BAUEN continues as usual. Today, Hotel BAUEN is a vibrant space that not only operates as a hotel, but also as a meeting place for social movements, unions, and workers' organizations. Since its inception, the cooperative has hosted hundreds of events, from academic debates to press conferences, theater productions, and expositions.

Fighting for the future

Since workers occupied the hotel, they have also fought for the legal right to operate the business. When workers reopened the hotel to the public, they also opened a legal case against the former owners.

Hotel BAUEN was constructed in 1978 in preparation to host the World Cup. It's original owner received financing from the national bank, which was then controlled by Argentina's military dictatorship. To date, these loans—made with public funds and approved by unelected military dictators—have never been repaid.

Highlighting the collusion between the dictatorship and wealthy business interests, workers in Hotel BAUEN argue that the outstanding debt on the hotel is a public debt. Because the loans remain outstanding, workers and their supporters have appealed the state to recover the property on behalf of its workers. Despite their efforts, the courts have consistently ruled that the former company is the rightful owner of the hotel. The workers' lawsuit has been rejected at all levels of the Argentine justice system, leaving them without any more channels for appeal.

Appeals for international solidarity

In recent days, workers' organizations, social movements and people around the globe have expressed their solidarity and support with the workers in Hotel BAUEN. The cooperative's Facebook page alone is a testament to this outpouring of support: from government ministries, unions and social movements in Argentina to workers' organizations and cooperatives in Spain, Italy, France and Greece, and scholars in the United States and Canada.

Workers in Vio.me, a worker-recuperated enterprise in Greece, posted a photograph of ten workers holding a banner that reads (in Spanish): "half of our heart can be found in Buenos Aires. Viome stands in solidarity with Bauen."

Supporters have also created multiple online petitions—in English ([here](#)) and Spanish ([here](#))—and organized international days of solidarity with the workers in Hotel BAUEN to take place on April 15 and April 16, 2014. These days of solidarity are scheduled to coincide with a social and political forum organized by workers in Hotel BAUEN to present a new collection of essays on the workers' economy and screen a documentary about worker self-management in the hotel.

A definitive solution

The most recent eviction order delivered on March 14, 2014 notified the workers that they must abandon the building or be forced to leave in 30 days. During

that period, workers in Hotel BAUEN organized to resist the eviction in the hopes of finding a definitive solution to their uncertain legal position. In one statement, workers call for a solution that “recognizes our work, investment, and the social, economic and cultural role of a self-managed enterprise, instead of rewarding corrupt businesspeople complicit with the military dictatorship.”

While the 30-day window has expired, workers in Hotel BAUEN remain vigilant. As one worker in Hotel BAUEN explains, “the older workers are used to the eviction notices—it’s been five years since the last one—but newer workers are preparing for action. We aren’t scared, we’re just uncertain.”

After over a decade fighting to find a solution by submitting bills to the national legislature, negotiating in bankruptcy courts and even appealing to the Argentine Supreme Court, workers have exhausted almost all their options. Now, more than ever, workers are appealing for international support so that they can continue self-managing the hotel as an example to the world.

With yet another unfulfilled eviction notice, one worker in the hotel describes the best-case scenario: “to pass a bill through the [national] legislature that expropriates the hotel.” While workers’ previous attempts to pass such a bill have been unsuccessful, workers in Hotel BAUEN in conjunction with federations of worker-recuperated enterprises are preparing to introduce another bill that would create national expropriation law. Until then, the fate of self-managed workers in Hotel BAUEN remains uncertain.

Workers, however, are adamant. They won’t leave. “We are going to recuperate this hotel,” one worker explains. “With dignity, we will fight. We aren’t leaving!”

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