

Going back to reality  
BOTNIA PROVES BOTNIA FALSE

The recent announcement of a change in the holding of Botnia's capital stock, by which UPM will retain the totality of the common stock of Botnia in Uruguay, has allowed knowing some real details on the magnitude of employment absorbed by these companies in the country.

Víctor L. Bacchetta

At the time of its launching in Uruguay, Botnia's forecasts indicated that, once construction of the plant was finished during 2007, 300 people would be working in the daily operations of the plant, whilst employment in the forestry area and other sectors that are direct suppliers of the plant process would come close to 5,000. On top of that it added the "indirect employment" effect on private consumption and investment, which Botnia estimated at an additional 3,000 job posts, growing throughout the years. Thus, Botnia promised the creation of more than 8,000 new job posts in the country.

During 2008 the official statistics of the company started to change. According to Botnia's website, the plant, the maintenance company, the chemical industry and the forestry division provided employment for 220, 100, 40 and 2,190 people, respectively, totalling 2,550 people hired on a direct basis. Additionally, it accounted for 3,591 indirect job posts, which comprised from the industry, commerce and transport, through the governmental services (sic). Based on these statistics, Botnia generated 6,141 jobs, almost 2,000 short of what it had announced back in 2007.

During the current year 2009, Botnia again changes the figures. Now it talks about global figures, that estimate at 4,023 the number of direct job posts – attributed to the plant, forestry and logistics – and at 3,723 the indirect posts, which would add to a total of 7,746 job posts. In this way, we would be again approaching the figure of 8,000 job posts initially promised, but it so happens that these statistics are not confirmed by the majority partners of the company. Together with the announcement of a new management for Botnia's shares, the new owner of the business in Uruguay, the Finnish multinational company UPM, submitted figures far smaller than those divulged in the webpage of Botnia-Fray Bentos. According to UPM, the job posts at the cellulose plant are some 200, whilst Forestal Oriental has 360 direct jobs and around some 2,400 indirect ones. These figures are supported by the partner that is selling its share, Metsaliitto, who reports that the plant and Forestal Oriental have 550 employees in the country.

In this way, we come to know that Botnia, including the cellulose plant and the forestry activities provides stable work for barely some 550 workers. As far as indirect job posts, appraisals can not be made because they cannot be measured anywhere and, furthermore, the company continuously changes them. Anyhow, it is clear that they are by-the-piece workers or specific contractors, without any labour stability.