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José de San Martín, one of the founding fathers of Latin America, comparable in his military and political achievements with Simón Bolívar, and arguably incomparable as a model of disinterested leadership, is known to history as the *hombre necesario* of the American revolution. There are those, it is true, who question the importance of his career and reject the cult of the hero. For them the meaning of liberation is to be found in the study of economic structures, social classes and the international conjuncture, not in military actions and the lives of liberators. In this view Carlyle's discourse on heroes is a museum piece and his elevation of heroes as the prime subject of history a misconception. Yet the independence of Spanish America is incomprehensible without the action of the liberators and its subsequent history would be empty without the intervention of personal leadership. From the liberators we can learn something of the modes of leadership, what was necessary and what was available to govern the peoples of Spanish America. Moreover, to study the lives of the liberators is to discover the present as well as the past, for these figures still evoke public passions and polemics, and reveal the ambitions of their successors as well as the mentalities of their contemporaries. San Martín has not suffered the fate of Bolívar or been captured for particular regimes, but he has not entirely escaped the polemicists. In Argentina historians, writers and politicians still fight the wars of independence and keep alive the controversies of San Martín's career, especially the three turning points in his life: his decision to abandon Spain for Argentina in 1812, his adoption of the trans-Andean strategy in 1816, and his abandonment of leadership in 1822. And while one Argentine historian produces a British author for the grand strategy, another denounces San Martín as a British spy, herald of a third British invasion.

San Martín, Argentine soldier and American hero, spent more than two-thirds of his life in Europe. His career as liberator was marked by a curious chronology: thirty-four years of preparation, ten years in action, twenty-eight years in exile. His American career was concentrated in one brief decade, from the time he arrived in Buenos Aires on 6 March 1812 to his retirement from Peru on 20 September 1822. The years of preparation were important. During his twenty-two years' service in the Spanish army, in the course of which he was promoted from infantry captain to lieutenant-colonel of cavalry, he served on numerous fronts in North Africa and Spain and for the last three years against the French invaders of the peninsula. He acquired a combination

of talents unique among all the liberators: military skill as a strategist and tactician, a knowledge of enlightened ideas, and above all perhaps an authority born of participation in some of the crucial events of modern history.¹ It is difficult to penetrate his motives in these early years. In the light of his lengthy royal service and the scant contact with the land of his birth, which he had left at the age of six, his decision to return to Buenos Aires in 1812 is not easily explained.

His last years in Spain were a time of reckoning for the Spanish Bourbons, of fatal instability in Spanish government and of great suffering for the Spanish people. Faced with this Goyaesque spectacle, a Spanish American had to re-think his loyalties. San Martín was the son of Spanish parents; he was born in Yapeyú on 25 February 1778 in the remote Misiones province of the Río de la Plata, where his father was a military officer in the colonial service.² Within a few years the family returned to Spain. By an accident of birth, therefore, he was an American, a creole as they were called, not a peninsular Spaniard. His American identity, long dormant, now revived at a time of weakness of Spain and opportunity for America. Opportunity, too, for San Martín himself, conscious as he was that Americans could not normally satisfy their highest ambitions in the mother country. When, in 1808, the metropolis was severed from its colonies by the French invaders, a crisis of authority arose. Who ruled in America? Who should be obeyed? As legitimacy and loyalty were disputed San Martín had every reason to question his own position.

These years brought him into touch with a number of Spanish Americans who were in the peninsula for one reason or another, messengers or perhaps exponents of new political ideas. They were not impressed by what they saw. The institutions of liberal Spain – the Junta Central, the Council of Regency, the Cortes of Cadiz – lacked legitimacy in the eyes of Americans. Moreover, they were just as imperialist as the Bourbons had been; they claimed to be anti-colonial but they resisted American demands for equal representation, freedom of trade, and political autonomy. Years later, San Martín declared that in 1811, ‘In a meeting of Americans in Cadiz, knowing of the first movements which had occurred in Caracas, Buenos Aires and elsewhere, we resolved to return each to our country of birth, in order to offer our services to the struggle which we considered was bound to intensify.’³

For San Martín this meant a return to Argentina. ‘I preferred to come to

¹ Patricia Pasquali, *San Martín: La fuerza de la misión y la soledad de la gloria. Biografía* (Buenos Aires, 3rd edn. 1999), pp. 29, 35, 43–55.

² The genealogy of San Martín has become an exercise in fantasy; for a summary see *Desmemoria*, *Revista de Historia*, No. 26, 2° cuatrimestre 2000, pp. 8–44.

³ San Martín to Ramón Castilla, 11 September 1848, *Museo Histórico Nacional (MHN)*, *San Martín: Su correspondencia, 1823–1850* (3rd edn., Madrid, 1911), p. 296.

my country of birth.⁴ He resigned his commission in the Spanish army, setting a false trail by giving as the reason the need to settle personal affairs in Lima, and prepared to reorder his life. He appears to have been motivated not by private ambition or search for power, but by liberal political ideas, disillusion with Spain, and a sense of national identity; the creole awareness of patria was so strong that it overcame his long association with the Spanish cause and the Bourbon regime. But San Martín wanted a firmer launching pad than a decrepit metropolis, which although it was fighting for its own liberation from France was still opposed to Spanish America's liberation from Spain. He wanted the experience, the contacts and the prestige which he could only gain from a visit to England.

The members and motives of the American group in Cadiz were already known to British agents. The two sides were far apart in political ideas. The Americans wanted liberation for their countries and some looked to Britain for support. The British government made it clear that its priority was not the independence of Spanish America from Spain but the independence of Spain from France, and this meant support for Spain as a colonial power. San Martín was not disturbed by these differences. In Cadiz he had a valuable British friend, James Duff, 4th Earl of Fife, who had fought for Spain in the peninsula and became the bridge for San Martín between Spain and England. Duff obtained a passage for him on a British warship to Lisbon and thence, in September 1811, to London.

San Martín stayed in London for four months, too late to meet Bolívar and Miranda but long enough to converse with the Venezuelans Andrés Bello and Luis López Méndez, the Mexican Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, and the Argentines Carlos de Alvear and José Matías Zapiola, all of whom he met at the home of the absent Miranda in Grafton Street. This was the venue of the Gran Reunión Americana, one of a network of pseudo-masonic lodges which Spanish Americans formed to plot independence and which were in fact secret political societies rather than affiliates of pure freemasonry. In London San Martín did not reproduce the role or the resonance of Miranda. But we can deduce that his presence in Britain, the greatest naval power in the world, the defender of freedom against despots, and the home of liberal ideas, followed by his return to Buenos Aires with important, if informal, British contacts, gave him a qualification and a legitimacy as a revolutionary leader that enabled him to occupy immediately a position of authority in the independence movement.

⁴ San Martín to Supreme Director, 31 June 1819, in Ricardo Piccirilli, *San Martín y la política de los pueblos* (Buenos Aires, 1957), p. 119.

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He arrived in Buenos Aires on 6 March in the company of other patriots including Alvear on board the British frigate *George Canning*. His first months he spent making new contacts and marrying a young bride, María de los Remedios de Escalada, daughter of a wealthy merchant with influence in the revolution, twenty years his junior whom he described as his 'wife and friend'.⁵ In Buenos Aires, aloof from the politics of suspicion and rivalry and relying essentially on his own curriculum vitae, San Martín contributed to the revolutionary movement not only a new corps of mounted grenadiers but a military professionalism and training which it had previously lacked and which was to be decisive in the years to come. He led his troops to an early victory over a royalist detachment from Montevideo at the battle of San Lorenzo. But it was some time before his influence could determine wider strategy and his membership of the Lodge, a secret society of the revolutionary elite and its key instrument of unity and control, could show results.⁶

The years 1814–16 were years of depression for the Spanish American revolution. The end of the Peninsular War and the restoration of Ferdinand VII enabled Spain to turn its sights on America. In the north General Morillo's army crushed the Venezuelans and New Granadans. In Upper Peru the royalists threw back the last porteño army of liberation and threatened Tucumán. In Chile the counter-revolution was triumphant. By 1816, as a British naval observer noted: 'it was impossible for appearances to be more unfavourable to the revolutionary cause.'⁷ San Martín referred to the risk of utter ruin in 1816: 'I fear this not from the Spaniards but from domestic discord and our own lack of education and judgement...it was a moral impossibility that we should organise ourselves properly; we are very young, and our stomachs are too weak to digest the food they need.'⁸ But on the ruins of the first revolution the liberators created a second movement of independence, and this became a pincer movement on a continental scale, converging from north and south on the heart of Spanish power in Peru. The northern movement was led by Bolívar, the southern by San Martín.

⁵ Tulio Halperín-Donghi, *Politics, Economics and Society in Argentina in the Revolutionary Period* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 214; Pasquali, *San Martín*, p. 102.

⁶ Piccirilli, *San Martín y la política de los pueblos*, pp. 124–8; Pasquali, *San Martín*, pp. 121–32; Halperín-Donghi, *Politics, Economics and Society*, pp. 216–21. The Lodge in fact was so secret and San Martín so silent on his membership that it escapes historical research.

⁷ Bowles to Croker, 22 June 1817, in Gerald S. Graham and R.A. Humphreys, eds., *The Navy and South America 1807–1823: Correspondence of the Commanders-in-Chief on the South American Station* (London, 1962), pp. 202–3.

⁸ San Martín to Bowles, 7 September 1816, *ibid.*, p. 169.

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In January 1814 San Martín was appointed commander of the battered Army of the North, replacing Manuel Belgrano with great reluctance, such was his admiration for the senior statesman. If his rivals for leadership in Buenos Aires thought they had marginalised San Martín, they misread the situation. This was the beginning of his American mission. In Tucumán he made his own rules, first to clothe 'the naked army', then to pay it, and finally to train it, and in securing the defences of the north-west he began to show that organising ability and concern for officer quality which became the hallmark of his military success.⁹ Inspired by Belgrano, he looked to the gauchos of the north. He identified the 'valiant' Martín Güemes, caudillo of Salta, as his most reliable ally and his guerrilla forces as the most effective means of waging a *guerra de recursos* on the royalist army; he preferred to reinforce these with men and supplies rather than commit the Army of the North to yet another wasteful campaign.¹⁰

It was now that a new conviction began to dominate his thinking. He came to see – as other experienced soldiers and advisers also saw – that the northern strategy of the revolution, the attempt to carry independence from Buenos Aires to Lima by way of Upper Peru, was fatally flawed. In April he was granted permission to retire to Córdoba for reasons of health and he relinquished command of the Army of the North. In August he requested and received from the authorities in Buenos Aires the governorship of Cuyo, and at the beginning of September he set up his headquarters in Mendoza. He had left the Army of the North; he now had to create the Army of the Andes. His strategy was based on the thesis that the South American revolution could not be secure until the heart of Spanish power in Peru had been destroyed; that the northern route to Peru was 'not the true strategical line of the South American revolution', closed as it was by the terrain, the altitude, the hostility of the local population, all of which made Upper Peru a barrier not an opening to Lima; that the way ahead was by a gigantic flanking movement across the Andes to Chile, then up the Pacific in a seaborne invasion of Peru.¹¹ After the defeat of the Chilean patriots at Rancagua in October 1814 and the subsequent revival of Spanish power, this presupposed that Chile too would first have to be liberated. In 1815 San Martín estimated that he would need an expeditionary force of 4,000. These plans coincided with the interests of the

⁹ San Martín to Supreme Director, 11 February, 5 March 1814, in A.J. Pérez Amuchástegui, *San Martín y el Alto Perú* (Tucumán, 1976), pp. 371–3.

¹⁰ Pérez Amuchástegui, *ibid.*, p. 78; San Martín to Supreme Director, 23 March 1814, *ibid.*, pp. 354–5.

¹¹ Bartolomé Mitre, *Historia de San Martín y de la emancipación sudamericana* (3 vols., Buenos Aires, 1950), vol. I, p.198.

Chilean revolution and they appealed to its leader, Bernardo O'Higgins, and to most of the Chilean émigrés.

San Martín's Plan Continental, like many problems in Argentine history, was an object of dispute in his own day, of rival claims in subsequent generations accompanied by the inevitable apocryphal documents, and of active controversy in recent years. The question is: who was the author of the plan? At the time San Martín had to use all his powers of persuasion on his political chiefs in Buenos Aires to introduce and to preserve his plan. In this sense he was certainly the author. After his death his supporters had to fend off other candidates – Enrique Paillardelle, Bernardo Vera, Tomás Guido – whose plans pointed in the same direction but lacked the precision and the scope of the final project. Guido, a senior official in the war ministry, a friend and collaborator of San Martín, focused on the occupation of Chile as the 'principal object', not Lima.¹² But at least these were Argentine rivals. More recently Rodolfo Terragno has astonished nationalist historians by uncovering a British author of the plan, Sir Thomas Maitland, a Scottish military officer and colonial administrator, who submitted to the British government a plan of attack on the Spanish empire, a plan which was received by Henry Dundas in mid 1800 but was shelved when the government of William Pitt fell from power in the following year. Maitland's plan, discovered by Terragno in the Scottish Record Office, proposed an expedition (British of course) to capture Buenos Aires, establish a base in Mendoza, cross the Andes, defeat the Spaniards in Chile, and then dispatch a further expedition to emancipate Peru, 'the end of our enterprise'. Maitland planned a force of 3,400 and a crossing of the Andes in five or six days.¹³

Terragno refers to the 'extraordinary similarity' between Maitland's plan and San Martín's actual campaign, fifteen to twenty years later, and further argues that it is 'probable' that San Martín knew of the plan from his contact with British officers in the Peninsular War.¹⁴ Actually there were many plans at this time and the subject was hardly secret; Spanish American projects became something of a genre among British strategists. The thesis presented by Terragno is reasonable. It can be inferred that San Martín knew of Maitland's paper, though whether this made any difference to developments and decisions in the combat zone is open to discussion. In 1814 San Martín's own views were confirmed by direct observation in north-west Argentina and

¹² Guido, 'Memoria', 20 May 1816, Ministerio de Educación de la Nación (MEN), Documentos para la historia del Libertador general San Martín (15 vols., Buenos Aires, 1953–79), vol. III, pp. 425–44, especially p. 433. See also Pérez Amuchastegui, *San Martín y el Alto Perú*, pp. 85–8.

¹³ Sir Thomas Maitland, *Plan to capture Buenos Aires and Chile and then emancipate Peru and Quito*, published by Rodolfo H. Terragno, Maitland & San Martín (Quilmes, 1998), pp. 81–99.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 31, 224, 234.

the advice of experienced colleagues, including Güemes as well as Guido. In February 1816 he wrote: 'Chile is the country, if skilfully managed, that is capable of determining the fate of the revolution...Its occupation is the highest priority. Once that is secured Peru will be free, and the legions of our soldiers will advance with greater success. Lima will fall, starved of supplies.'¹⁵ By May, speaking of Lima as 'the scourge of liberty...the fortress of tyranny', he was more specific.

Let us not think small as we have up to now but on a large scale, and if we lose at least it will be with honour...Peru cannot be taken without first making sure of Chile: that country can be totally conquered by the end of April next year with 4,000 to 4,500 men. These troops should embark immediately and in eight days disembark in Arequipa. By the end of August this province will have 2,600 men available. If the rest are forthcoming I will answer to the nation for the success of the venture.¹⁶

While San Martín in Mendoza applied his mind to the strategy and logistics of the enterprise, in Buenos Aires Guido was drafting and communicating the plan to the government. The true author was San Martín, professional soldier and experienced campaigner, who designed the plan of action. He had already staked his own career on it when he requested, and received, the governership of Cuyo in August 1814. Now he declared 'We need to think big; it is our own fault if we don't...Chile is ours for a little effort, and that country will enable us to take Peru, without which all our efforts are in vain.'¹⁷ To think big, in other words, was to replace a national objective by a continental one.

As he approached his fortieth year, San Martín left a vivid impression on his English friend, Commodore William Bowles, commander of the British South American naval station, who mistook his age but in other respects judged him well:

General San Martín is about forty five years old, tall, strongly formed, with a dark complexion and marked countenance. He is perfectly well bred and his manners and conversation extremely agreeable. He is simple and abstemious in his ways, and rarely sits down to table, eating in a few minutes whatever food is ready when he feels hungry...He disdains money and I think he is very little richer now than when he first came to this country, though if his intentions had been self-interested or personal he could easily have amassed a considerable fortune since his arrival in Chile...He is enlightened, well read, and well informed on affairs in general. His political views are wide and liberal, espe-

¹⁵ San Martín to Supremo Director, 29 February 1816, quoted in Pasquali, *San Martín*, p. 232.

¹⁶ San Martín to Godoy Cruz, 12 May 1816, MEN, *Documentos para la historia del Libertador general San Martín*, vol. III, pp. 392-6.

¹⁷ San Martín to Godoy Cruz, 19 May 1816, *ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 419-20.

cially on matters of trade which he understands well.¹⁸

Bowles was struck by San Martín's fanatical devotion to work; no detail escaped him. To his troops he was a hard disciplinarian, but he earned their allegiance through his concern for their welfare. The Englishman was fascinated by the policy as well as the personality of San Martín; he noted with approval his determination to restore peace as soon as possible, once independence was gained, his aloofness from politicians and what he regarded as their endemic corruption, his liberal views, especially on trade, and his evident partiality towards Britain. Bowles's views of San Martín evidently influenced other British observers, including Henry Chamberlain, the British consul general at Rio de Janeiro who informed the foreign secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, that 'his moral character stands higher than that of any other person of the independent party; his military abilities are evidently of the first class'.¹⁹ Here was a soldier without personal ambition or acquisitiveness, a loving, if distant, husband and a caring father. His taciturn manner masked a well-informed mind, and his notorious caution was accompanied by an ability to take decisive action when it was needed.

As a soldier San Martín had two great qualities, the ability to think and plan on a large scale, and a positive genius for organisation. He now needed all his resources of mind and will, for he had to prepare his trans-Andean expedition in the face of two great obstacles – the creeping anarchy that threatened to engulf the whole of the Río de la Plata, and the complete lack of financial resources. Many observers, impressed by the magnitude of the task and the strength of Spanish defences in Chile, doubted the capacity of the general to attain his objective: the reports of Bowles, supportive though he was, were sceptical about the outcome.²⁰ Yet from late 1814 he began to translate his vision into reality, converting Mendoza into a military as well as a civil headquarters, and making Cuyo in effect into a separate province isolated from the anarchy surrounding it and geared economically and psychologically to the demands of war. To the Army of the Andes he applied his basic priorities: uniforms, pay, training. And he insisted, as he had done in Tucumán, on high qualifications for the officer corps. San Martín established a security screen to prevent the infiltration of royalist spies, put out patrols in the cordillera and personally reconnoitred the mountain passes to test the routes his army would take. And he organised his own intelligence service, procuring regular details of royalist plans in Chile, and spreading alarm and confusion

¹⁸ Bowles to Croker, 14 February 1818, in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South America*, p. 227.

¹⁹ Chamberlain to Castlereagh, 5 April 1817, in C.K. Webster (ed.), *Britain and the Independence of Latin America 1812–1830: Select Documents from the Foreign Office Archives* (2 vols., London, 1938), vol. I, pp. 103–4.

²⁰ Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South America*, pp. 139–60.

among the enemy through agents across the Andes. He led the way not only in the more obvious work of recruiting troops, assembling supplies, and liaising with the Chileans, but also in the unpopular tasks of raising money.

The United Provinces had insufficient revenue for even ordinary expenditure, and its economic position was precarious until the 1820s. Cuyo itself, with a population of some 43,000, had a relatively healthy economy based on agriculture and livestock, with commercial production of wines and fruits. San Martín and his officials directed this regional economy to the continental war effort. They expanded agricultural production, set up an arms industry, reformed the incidence and administration of taxation, and drew a revenue from customs, sales tax, municipal dues, donations, forced loans, sale of public lands and confiscation of royalist property.²¹ It was a hard regime, as San Martín acknowledged, observing that they either raised revenue or fought without arms: there was no middle way. Cuyo in general and Mendoza in particular responded generously. In Mendoza project and people met. Without the participation of the citizens of the province the whole plan would have failed. The popular response was inspired by San Martín himself. Patrician though he was, he had the common touch.

By the end of 1816 all was ready, an army of 5,000 built around regular troops from the Río de la Plata, a vast quantity of equipment and supplies, and thousands of mules. In Cuyo the army of the Andes was joined by a number of British volunteers, including James Paroissien, who was appointed chief surgeon to the army, and subsequently William Miller, who became one of the most distinguished soldiers around San Martín. It was a multiracial as well as a multinational army. General Belgrano, commander of the second Argentine expedition to Upper Peru, had remarked that 'the Negroes and mulattos are a rabble, as cowardly as they are bloodthirsty...the only consolation is that white officers are on the way'.²² San Martín, on the other hand, went out of his way to recruit blacks in the conviction that 'the best infantry soldiers we have are the Negros and mulattos'. Former slaves were a large part of the army of the Andes – 1,500 out of 5,000 – and of the armies of liberation in Peru. General Miller, who became second-in-command of the 8th or 'Black' Battalion of Buenos Aires in San Martín's army, recorded:

The privates of the Battalion No. 8 were Creole Negroes, and had been for the most part in-door slaves previously to the commencement of the revolution, when, by becoming soldiers they obtained their freedom. They were distinguished throughout the war for their valour, constancy, and patriotism...Many

²¹ Alfredo Estévez and Oscar Horacio Elía, *Aspectos económico-financieros de la campaña sanmartiniana* (Buenos Aires, 1961), pp. 97–128.

²² Belgrano to San Martín, Jujuy, 25 December 1813, San Martín to Godoy Cruz, 12 May 1816, MEN, *Documentos para la historia del Libertador general San Martín*, vol. II, pp. 52–3, vol. III, p. 394.

of them rose to be good non-commissioned officers.²³

There was a price to be paid for this kind of freedom. The black infantry of the patriot armies suffered heavy casualties, and conscription often led not to freedom but to death.

From 9 January 1817 the liberating army began to move out of Mendoza. The first challenge was the awesome Andes, a mountain range crossed by only a few precipitous passes at heights between nine and twelve thousand feet, and never before traversed by a force of this size. San Martín sent his main army through the central passes of Los Patos and Uspallata, and smaller detachments via the northern and southern routes. They accomplished one of the great feats of the revolutionary wars, equalled only by Bolívar's march to Boyacá. No doubt European generals of the Napoleonic wars mobilised and led greater armies than this, but the environment in which they operated was simple and benign compared to the terrain facing San Martín. If his experience in Europe prepared him for the task of organising and training an army, nothing in the combat zones of the Old World prepared him for leading it across the Andes. Here he had to set a new example of courage, endurance, and mobility, and establish the belief that it could be done. To cross this great barrier by its precipitous passes and at immense heights was itself a heroic achievement; but to bring the whole force, men, supplies, armaments, and animals to their correct place at the appointed time was a model of military precision. The subsequent victories of the army at Chacabuco and Maipú made San Martín master of Chile, but he preferred to make Chileans sovereigns of their own land. He was determined that O'Higgins should head the government of Chile upon liberation, partly because O'Higgins was a national and liberal leader, the two political touchstones for San Martín after 1811, partly because he himself was dedicated to an American role and wished to remain free for the invasion of Peru, his greatest ambition.

4

The years 1818–20 were difficult years for San Martín, when his momentum seemed to falter and his strategy to stop. Towards Spain his policy was as implacable as ever. Indeed the bloody Spanish counter-revolution and the violent response from Lima towards the southern movement of independence filled him with loathing and he saw no possibility of reconciliation between creoles and Spaniards. This was a deep-seated conviction. During a previous time of inaction, convalescing in Córdoba in 1814, he brooded on the stagnation of the revolution: 'This is a revolution of sheep, not of men.' A peon

²³ John Miller, *Memoirs of General Miller in the Service of the Republic of Peru* (2nd. edn., 2 vols., London, 1829), vol. I, pp. 271–2.

came to complain that the Spanish overseer of his hacienda had beaten him. San Martín was outraged: 'What do you think? After three years of revolution, a maturrango [Spaniard] dares to raise his hand against an American.'²⁴ Since then he had taken the war to the Spaniards and vindicated his American identity in battle. His preferred level was the war of ideas. But the means were open to development, and it was now more than ever that he looked to Great Britain.

In May 1817, during his first visit to Buenos Aires from Chile to prepare for the campaign in Peru, he sought out Robert Staples, unofficial British consul, and made his views and needs known to the British government. He would appreciate, he explained, the views of the British government on his future operations in Chile and Peru. He needed warships and officers; and he advocated a British naval presence on the Pacific coast to protect commerce from Spanish aggression. He appreciated the difficulty of receiving any direct assistance from Britain, which he did not require, but he relied upon British neutrality and influence against intervention by the reactionary powers of Europe. He offered Britain implicitly a special relationship with the liberated countries, and expressed a preference for monarchy over republicanism, though excluding any branch of the Bourbons.²⁵ In January 1818 he backed a request from O'Higgins to the Prince Regent for British mediation in favour of the American revolution and against Spain.²⁶ In a conversation with Commodore Bowles in Valparaiso in February 1818 he outlined an idea for dividing liberated America among a number of European princes which would satisfy all the major powers, and sought the good offices of the British government and its participation in the scheme.

The overtures to Britain, made from a base in Chile and independently of Argentina, invite speculation concerning the Liberator's thinking in the years 1817–18. In the first place, was San Martín completely confident that military action alone would overcome Spanish power in Peru? Second, was Argentina itself a problem? Was British support a possible substitute for wavering commitment in Buenos Aires? On 11 April 1818, only a few days after the victory of Maipú, he wrote to Castlereagh renewing a previous request for British mediation. He argued that the victory of Maipú was absolute and in effect 'decided the fate of South America'. The military power of the patriots ruled out any need to sue for peace, but the interests of the new states had been damaged and their prosperity impaired by the prolonged war. Therefore he sought British mediation to reach an accommodation with Spain and so put an end 'to the sufferings of the South Americans by contributing to the consolida-

²⁴ Mitre, *Historia de San Martín*, vol. I, p. 203.

²⁵ Staples to Hamilton, 25 May 1817, in Webster, *Britain and the Independence of Latin America*, vol. I, pp. 553–4.

²⁶ O'Higgins to Prince Regent, 20 November 1817, *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 554–6

tion of their political liberty'. The mediation he sought at this stage of the war was not between equals but between victor and vanquished in the interests of peace. And in the final analysis he insisted that 'South America is resolved to be buried under her ruins, rather than submit to her former yoke'.²⁷

The British government was non-committal. The times were not propitious for intervention, and the British government had never envisaged mediation of this kind. So San Martín received no response to his overtures. There was no alternative to the armed struggle, and that meant first a search for resources. San Martín had to make three arduous journeys across the Andes back to Argentina in search of money and support, to endure constant frustrations, changes of plans and policies from a crumbling government. And he had to resolve the cruel dilemma of two loyalties. A break was inevitable, given the local priorities of Buenos Aires and the continental commitment of San Martín. Distancing himself from his colleagues' preoccupations with Spain, Uruguay and provincial montoneros, San Martín set his sights on a different route, and he sacrificed his loyalty to Argentina in favour of his greater loyalty to America. In an act of 'historic disobedience', as it has been called, he ignored orders to return with the Army of the Andes to Buenos Aires and committed himself completely to the liberation of America.²⁸ 'Se va a cargar sobre mí una responsabilidad terrible, pero si no se emprende la expedición al Perú todo se lo lleva el Diablo.'²⁹ But on whose authority did San Martín take the Army of the Andes out of Argentina into Peru? The fall of the government in Buenos Aires enabled him to argue that the Army itself conferred that authority; by the so-called Act of Rancagua (2 April 1820) the commander in effect consulted his officers and the officers chose their commander, an instant solution but a future liability.

The congress and the supreme director of the United Provinces no longer exist: from these authorities derived my own as general in chief of the Army of the Andes. Consequently I believe that it is my duty and obligation to explain these facts to the officer corps of the Army of the Andes, so that they themselves by their own volition may nominate a general in chief as their commander.³⁰

Bartolomé Mitre described this as 'a revolutionary act'. 'It was an act of dou-

²⁷ San Martín to Castlereagh, 11 April 1818, Chamberlain to Castlereagh, 14 August 1818, in Webster, *Britain and the Independence of Latin America*, vol. I, pp. 104, 558–9.

²⁸ Pasquali, *San Martín*, pp. 342–3.

²⁹ San Martín to O'Higgins, 9 November 1819, *Academia Chilena de la Historia, Archivo de don Bernardo O'Higgins* (28 vols., Santiago, 1946–58), vol. VIII, p. 193.

³⁰ Quoted by José Pacífico Otero, *Historia del Libertador don José de San Martín* (4 vols., Buenos Aires, 1932), vol. II, pp. 667–71, who rejects the idea of disobedience and argues that it was simply a question of deciding whether San Martín's authority fell with that of the government, 'un punto de pura doctrina.'

ble insubordination, which compromised both discipline and authority, and meant that from then onwards the general only gave orders to his subordinates on the basis of consent and comradeship, for he was obliged to consult the will of each and all.³¹ Only leadership could make this work: another task, another test, for San Martín.

5

As Mitre wrote, Peru was the Carthage of San Martín and had to be destroyed.³² By 1820 San Martín was ready to embark upon the last stage of his grand strategy. It was a costly strategy, and from Chile as well as Argentina it demanded great sacrifices. The expedition brought out strengths and ambiguities in San Martín's policy. Some of his advisers, including the British admiral Lord Cochrane, wanted to land near Callao, engage the royalists immediately, and occupy the capital. Instead San Martín landed at Pisco and there he remained for six weeks. These bitter differences between San Martín and Cochrane were the product not only of personal incompatibility, though Cochrane was a very difficult man and probably the only British colleague with whom San Martín fundamentally disagreed. The British, too, found Cochrane difficult, and he had been dismissed by the Admiralty and expelled from Parliament before accepting command of the Chilean navy. He was a talented naval officer, though an arch mercenary, and now a thorn in San Martín's side. But it was also a question of conflicting strategic concepts.

Cochrane maintained that it was both necessary and possible to destroy Spanish power. After his brilliant capture of the Spanish frigate *Esmeralda* in Callao harbour he urged San Martín to attack Lima while the royalist defences were in disarray; apart from the opportunity Cochrane knew that to keep a fleet inactive for any length of time was an extremely expensive proposition. San Martín had other priorities. He too sought an absolute victory in Peru: 'to destroy for ever Spanish rule in Peru and place its peoples in the moderate exercise of their rights, this is the essential object of the liberating expedition.'³³ But his methods were more subtle than those of Cochrane. San Martín believed that a foreign liberating expedition could not in fact liberate Peru on its own, that liberation depended upon the cooperation of Peruvians and should be completed if possible by Peruvians, with the minimum of violence to their country and its institutions. 'He has always expressed the greatest anxiety to prevent if possible any revolution in Lima which might occasion

³¹ Mitre, *Historia de San Martín*, vol. II, p. 256.

³² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 269.

³³ August 1821, in J.A. de la Puente Candamo, *San Martín y el Perú* (Lima, 1948), p. 3.

bloodshed and calamity.’³⁴ And San Martín himself declared: ‘My soul would never be satisfied with a victory obtained at the cost of spilling American blood; I desire a peaceful victory, fruit of irresistible necessity.’³⁵ To the intendant of Trujillo, the marquis of Torre Tagle, he wrote: ‘Public opinion hardens and declares itself more openly, for it sees that I scrupulously fulfil my promises to respect the rights, offices and property of those who are not enemies of the cause which I am charged to sustain and promote’, and he called on Torre Tagle to join the cause of independence. Would it be prudent and just, he asked, ‘to struggle against the torrent of events and the demands of justice, against the will of the people and the dictates of necessity?’³⁶

San Martín was a true liberator, the most scrupulous in all the Americas. He went to Peru to wage a war not of conquest but of ideas, a war for the mind and hearts of Peruvians. Rather than engage the enemy immediately, he preferred to wait for the Peruvian patriots to join his cause. He has been criticised for expecting too much from Peruvians and overestimating popular support for independence. But his tactics made military as well as political sense: his own army was still too small to confront royalist forces which, including reinforcements from Cuzco and Upper Peru, militia as well as regular units, totalled over 12,000 men compared to the invading force of 4,500. So San Martín negotiated, sent a flanking detachment into the interior, and approached Lima cautiously from the north, to blockade rather than assault it, awaiting the dissolution of the enemy forces and the rising of the Peruvian patriots. In a long interview with the British naval captain, Basil Hall, he insisted that he could take Lima immediately but what would be the point if the inhabitants were hostile politically? His task was to be the liberator, not the conqueror, of Peru, and he asked, ‘How could I further the cause of independence if I were to take Lima by military force, or even the entire country? My views are very different. I want all people to think as I do and not to take one single step ahead of the progressive march of public opinion.’³⁷

Events seemed to vindicate his thesis of revolution without war. People, towns, regions joined his cause. Torre Tagle brought in Trujillo. Lima, and later Callao, fell without a battle, evacuated by the royalists, and on 28 July 1821 Peruvian independence was proclaimed. San Martín believed that this was an important statement in order to secure Lima public opinion; and if the capital took the initiative the rest would follow. There was, too, another factor.

³⁴ Bowles to Croker, 10 June 1818, Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South America*, p. 239.

³⁵ San Martín to Torre Tagle, 19 January 1821, Javier Ortiz de Zavallos, *Correspondencia de San Martín y Torre Tagle* (Lima, 1963), p. 34.

³⁶ San Martín to Torre Tagle, 20 November 1820, *ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

³⁷ Interview with San Martín, 25 June 1821, Basil Hall, *Extracts from a Journal written on the coasts of Chili, Peru, and Mexico in the years 1820, 1821, 1822* (3rd edn., 2 vols., London, 1826), pp. 215–16.

Patriots and royalists alike looked to San Martín to protect them from social disorder, and after the departure of the viceroy from Lima leading citizens invited the Liberator to take over promptly in the interests of law and order. According to Captain Hall, 'it was not only of the slaves and of the mob that people were afraid; but with more reason of the multitude of armed Indians surrounding the city.'³⁸ San Martín therefore came to the rescue of Lima, with the collaboration of those who in the circumstances placed security above royalism.

But Lima was not the whole of Peru. Could the interior be secured by similar methods? Could victory be won by avoiding battles, allowing the enemy to come and go, and leaving intact the royalist forces? For the next year San Martín ruled as Protector, in the belief that 'the rule of circumstances' gave him political and military command and that independence came before constitutions.³⁹ But he did not rule all Peruvians. In the sierra there was a powerful royalist army. The regime in Lima provoked resentment by its persecution of Spaniards. Peruvians disputed among themselves and with San Martín; they also withheld the military help which he needed to defeat the royalist army. His own army lacked cohesion; rivalry between Argentines, Chileans and Peruvians blunted its fighting edge, and many of the Peruvian officers were unwilling to embark on active service, preferring, according to General Miller, the pleasures of Lima to the hazards of the sierra.⁴⁰ But the problem went deeper than this. San Martín's defensive tactics and what were seen as flawed military decisions, especially the refusal to attack a royalist relief force at Callao, cost him the support of his senior officers, who could now withdraw the consent they had given in the Act of Rancagua. The tactical ideas of San Martín were not necessarily inferior to those of his critics and they were imposed with great conviction. But, as Bartolomé Mitre, a soldier himself as well as statesman and historian, pointed out, a general who prefers the shield to the sword encourages defeatism and risks losing the loyalty of his soldiers.⁴¹

How could San Martín escape from this stalemate, resolve his political problems and end the military impasse? He decided to go to Guayaquil to confer with the great liberator of the north. Simón Bolívar was approaching the peak of his career: he too had liberated more than his native land and, while not without problems, he had recent victories and a successful army behind him. San Martín, on the other hand, was conscious that his position in Peru was weak. He had not won sufficient territory, his forces seemed to be

³⁸ Hall, *Journal*, vol. I, pp. 222-3, 226.

³⁹ Decree of Protector of Peru, 3 August 1821, Instituto Nacional Sanmartiniano, *La conducta política del general San Martín durante el Protectorado del Perú* (3 vols., Buenos Aires, 1982), vol. I, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Memoirs*, vol. I, pp. 410-11.

⁴¹ Mitre, *Historia de San Martín*, vol. II, p. 483.

losing the war, and the Spaniards had turned stubborn over negotiations. He could count on no further support from the Chileans, and the leadership in Buenos Aires was frankly hostile. As for naval power, Cochrane and his ships had abandoned him after a dramatic confrontation. With few bargaining points, he approached the meeting in Guayaquil with three needs in mind: the annexation of Guayaquil to Peru (though he insisted above all that it had the right to decide its own destiny); the assistance of Colombian troops to reinforce his own army and defeat the Spaniards; and support for his plans of monarchical constitutions for the new states. The meetings were held on 26 and 27 July 1822. San Martín was realist enough to see that nothing could be done to reverse Bolívar's occupation of Guayaquil. And Bolívar made it clear that there could be no European monarchy in America. So San Martín's basic aim was reduced to securing Bolívar's military support; he even offered to serve with his own army under Bolívar. But Bolívar rejected these proposals: the offer and the request were excessive and he had serious doubts whether San Martín could deliver his side of the proposal. So the interview was fruitless. San Martín retired in disgust, convinced that Bolívar either doubted the sincerity of his offer or was embarrassed by his presence in the revolution.⁴² He believed that Bolívar was superficial, vain, and ambitious, dominated by 'la pasión del mando'.⁴³ He also had the honesty to recognise that this was the man to win the war, a man who would crush anyone in his way, not only Spaniards but if necessary San Martín himself. So the leader of the southern revolution decided to withdraw and leave the way open for Bolívar to conquer Peru for independence. As he said to his friend Tomás Guido, 'There is not enough room in Peru for Bolívar and me.'⁴⁴

San Martín's decision was confirmed when he returned to Peru to find his position eroded, his influence with the Peruvian ruling class weakened and his authority over his own army fading. On 20 September 1822, before the first constituent congress of Peru, he resigned his command. The same night he left Lima and the next day he sailed to Chile; from there he departed for Mendoza and then for Buenos Aires and Europe. After a brief stay in London, where he rented a house in Park Road, he moved to Belgium, then to France. The Revolution of 1848 caused him to take his family from their house near Paris to a more tranquil home, and he lived his last years in Boulogne; there he died on 17 August 1850 at the age of 72.

⁴² San Martín to Bolívar, 29 August 1822, a letter whose authenticity is disputed. See A.J. Pérez Amuchástegui, *La 'carta de Lafond' y la perceptiva historiográfica* (Córdoba, 1962), pp. 141–50, and *Ideología y acción de San Martín* (Buenos Aires, 1966), pp. 55–7.

⁴³ San Martín to Guido, 18 December 1826, 21 June 1827, Museo Mitre (MM), *Documentos del Archivo de San Martín* (12 vols., Buenos Aires, 1910–11), vol. VI, pp. 504, 529.

⁴⁴ Ruben Vargas Ugarte, *Historia general del Perú* (6 vols., Barcelona, 1966), vol. VI, p. 240.

6

Contemporary criticism of San Martín, echoed by modern historians, focused on his alleged failure of leadership in the conduct of the war in Peru; his persecution of Spaniards, who were forcibly expelled and deprived of their property; and his desertion of the revolution at its moment of greatest need, when the last bastion of Spanish power had still to be taken. To each of these charges there was an answer. San Martín frankly sought to revolutionise Peru, not to conquer it, and he deliberately deferred to the force of public opinion. His severity towards Spaniards was believed to be necessary in the interests of security, at a time when the royalist army was still in the field. He had seen too many examples of Spanish counter-revolution, usually accompanied by a reign of terror, to be indulgent towards a potential fifth column. And his retirement was realistic, for he had lost all influence in Peru and was convinced that his presence was the only obstacle preventing Bolívar from leading his army southwards.

In a generally unsympathetic account of San Martín in Peru, Timothy Anna selects for particular criticism his alleged failure as a leader, and he writes: 'Wracked by tuberculosis and addicted to opium, he could not provide day-to-day command or exercise the cunning brilliance that had brought him to Peru in the first place.'⁴⁵ San Martín did not suffer from tuberculosis; he was notoriously infirm on campaign in the Andes but modern medical analysis diagnoses asthma, duodenal ulcers and gout, and specifically rejects tuberculosis. As for drug addiction, the charge is frequent and false. He took opium as an appropriate medicine and under prescription, not for pleasure.⁴⁶

If San Martín had a weakness as a military leader it was loyalty. Facing the hostility of his own officers in Peru, which was a factor in his resignation, he admitted, 'To save the honour and the discipline of the army I should shoot a number of commanders, and I lack the courage to do this to companions who have followed me in good times and bad.'⁴⁷ At the end, in his farewell words to the people of Lima, San Martín pointed to a new danger in Spanish America, that soldiers might destroy constitutions: 'My promises to the peoples for whom I have fought are fulfilled: to secure their independence and to leave them to elect their own governments. The presence of a fortunate soldier, however disinterested he may be, is dangerous to newly constituted states.'⁴⁸ In an age of military golpes San Martín set a rare example of restraint. And he

⁴⁵ Timothy E. Anna, *The Fall of the Royal Government in Peru* (Lincoln, NE, 1979), p. 193.

⁴⁶ Antonio Alberto Guerrino, *La salud de San Martín* (Buenos Aires, 1999), pp. 56–7, 166, 169, 174–5, 182–3.

⁴⁷ Vargas Ugarte, *Historia general del Perú*, vol. VI, p. 240.

⁴⁸ Otero, *Historia del Libertador*, vol. III, pp. 801, 804.

was generous in defeat. He acknowledged that Peru could only be liberated by external aid, and that only Bolívar could do it. In 1826, when the liberation of Peru was complete, he wrote that 'the successes that I have gained in the war of independence are really inferior to those which General Bolívar has won for the general cause of America'.⁴⁹

Not all historians would agree with San Martín's self-deprecation, and for the word 'inferior' some would prefer 'different'. It is usual to compare the failure of San Martín in Peru and the success of Bolívar. But the comparison is not valid. General O'Leary, the aide, admirer and chronicler of Bolívar, contrasted the opportunity presented to San Martín and the difficulties faced by Bolívar. In a memorable passage he wrote:

When San Martín disembarked four years previously, the support for independence was general throughout Peru, and enthusiasm for the liberators matched the resources of this rich country. San Martín had only to come, see and conquer; he came, he saw and he could have conquered. But the task was perhaps beyond him, or at least he believed so; he hesitated and finally abandoned it. When the Congress entrusted to Bolívar the salvation of the republic, it handed him a corpse.⁵⁰

O'Leary exaggerated the degree of support and the amount of resources that Peruvians had offered San Martín, and he exaggerated too the general's failure to exploit these opportunities. It is probably true that San Martín made the mistake of trying to win the minds and hearts of Peruvians, before he had totally destroyed Spanish power, and he overestimated the popular support for independence. Bolívar perceived more realistically that only power could persuade, that Peru would have to be conquered before it could be liberated. But that lesson could not be learnt immediately. It needed San Martín's expedition to prove it, to test the ground. San Martín had taken the first steps to subvert Spanish power in Peru; he had destabilised the viceroyalty and prepared the way for liberation. When Bolívar arrived, San Martín had already driven a wedge into Peru. Of the two liberators he was the precursor whose strategy and tactics were a necessary preliminary to demonstrate what needed to be done. The two men represented two phases of the same war. For these reasons it is incorrect to place one above the other in the liberation of Peru.

Another contrast is often made between the monarchism of San Martín and the republicanism of Bolívar. This too can be exaggerated. Although the political thought of the two liberators was expressed in different terms, there was a striking similarity in their basic ideas. Both began with similar republi-

⁴⁹ San Martín to Guido, 18 December 1826, MM, Documentos del Archivo de San Martín, vol. VI, p. 503.

⁵⁰ Daniel Florencio O'Leary, *Memorias del General Daniel Florencio O'Leary: Narración* (3 vols., Caracas, 1952), vol. II, p. 240.

can ideals. But these were eroded by circumstances. In the last years of his life Bolívar was haunted by the anarchy of the new states and obsessed by their need for strong government. His Bolivian constitution provided for a life president with the right to choose his successor, which he regarded as an essential antidote to chaos. San Martín had also learnt this lesson. His political thought was always finely balanced between a preference for absolute power and for liberal government. Maria Graham, who met him in Chile after his resignation and was not impressed, thought he was vacillating: 'There seems a timidity of intellect, which prevents the daring to give freedom and the daring to be despotic alike. The wish to enjoy the reputation of a liberator and the will to be a tyrant are strangely contrasted in his discourse.'⁵¹

There is no evidence that San Martín owed his monarchical tendencies to his contacts with British sources and friends. The basic explanation of his monarchism stemmed more from American conditions than foreign influences. As he himself explained, his ideal was a republican government, but experience demonstrated that in Spanish America this was not feasible, because republicanism fostered anarchy, which in turn led to the despotism of a tyrant; moreover republicanism encouraged localist and divisive forces which would impede the war and damage the postwar settlement.⁵² The lesson began soon after he returned to Buenos Aires; his preference for monarchy was confirmed by the spectacle of anarchy in the Río de la Plata and by the hitherto fruitless search for unity and stability. He held a pessimistic view of human nature, its ignorance, its proneness to factionalism and violence unless restrained by strong rule, characteristics which were aggravated in the Americas by lack of any traditions of self-government and the ruthless search for power by the new politicians.⁵³ The monarchy which San Martín sought, therefore, was not a decentralised or powerless figurehead. His prime object was to concentrate authority and avoid disunion, the reverse of republicanism.

San Martín's conversion to monarchy began in Argentina. In 1816 he even gave his support to the exotic idea presented by Belgrano at the Congress of Tucumán, to crown a descendant of the Incas. In the course of 1817–18 his ideas matured, and he concluded that Chile was more suited to a monarchical than a republican form of government. To his friend the Earl of Fife he argued that revolution and war had induced a yearning for peace, stability, and firm government, and democratic ideas had lost their appeal among ninety per cent of leading men in Chile and Argentina.⁵⁴ Monarchy, however, did

⁵¹ Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in Chile*, during the year 1822 (London, 1824), p. 281.

⁵² San Martín to Guido, 6 January 1827, MM, *Documentos del Archivo de San Martín*, vol. VI, pp. 513–14.

⁵³ San Martín to Godoy Cruz, 24 May 1816, MEN, *Documentos para la historia del Libertador general San Martín*, vol. III, pp. 451–9.

⁵⁴ San Martín to earl of Fife, 9 December 1817, Webster, *Britain and the Independence*

not appeal either, least of all in the implausible persons of the European princes nominated by the Liberator.

Peru appeared particularly suitable for monarchy, and San Martín was ready to negotiate with the royalists on that basis. At Miraflores, in September 1820, according to James Paroissien, 'the general has proposed to the Viceroy to allow the Peruvians free and complete liberty to elect the form of Government they please, even if they should wish to crown a King of the Spanish Branch of the Bourbons'.⁵⁵ In June 1821 at Punchauca, before he had won a decisive victory, San Martín again proposed that Peru should be erected into an independent and constitutional monarchy under a prince of the Spanish royal house; until the prince arrived a regency should rule under the presidency of the viceroy. Although the Spanish monarchy in the peninsula might itself succumb to absolutism, he argued, this was no reason why America should follow the same example: 'the liberals of the world are brothers everywhere'.⁵⁶ But the plan was unworkable, as the viceroy could not guarantee independence and San Martín would accept nothing less. Years later he claimed that he knew Madrid would never accept these terms and he negotiated simply to lure the Spanish commanders into recognising the independence of Peru. But the terms bear the stamp of San Martín's political thinking and his known preference for monarchy. Ironically for so convinced a monarchist, when San Martín became Protector of Peru uniting in his own person both civil and military powers, one of his models, at least in 'his good points', was Oliver Cromwell.⁵⁷

Punchauca was not the end of San Martín's monarchism. In 1821 he sent Juan García del Río and James Paroissien to Europe to secure recognition of Peruvian independence, alliance with a European power, and a prince.⁵⁸ One of the names proposed as Emperor of Peru was the Duke of Sussex, son of George III. The two commissioners raised no interest or support in Chile and Buenos Aires and by the time they began negotiations in England San Martín had already resigned. No doubt the monarchism of San Martín was strengthened in Peru not only by political conditions and social structure in that divided country but also by the baleful influence of his collaborator Bernardo Monteagudo, who had undergone a dramatic conversion from advocate of extreme democracy to promoter of ideas of monarchy. But San Martín's defence of monarchy outlived his experience in Peru and nothing that he learnt

of Latin America, vol. I, p. 557.

⁵⁵ Quoted by R.A. Humphreys, *Liberation in South America, 1806–1827: The Career of James Paroissien* (London, 1952), p. 87.

⁵⁶ Piccirilli, *San Martín y la política de los pueblos*, p. 271; Puente Candamo, *San Martín y el Perú*, pp. 316–17.

⁵⁷ Humphreys, *Liberation in South America*, p. 95.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 101, 115; María Teresa Berrueto León, *La lucha de Hispanoamérica por su independencia en Inglaterra. 1800–1830* (Madrid, 1989), pp. 351–60.

of Latin America during years of exile changed his view, that the ideal form of government was a constitutional monarchy and a liberal administration. Yet in spite of all he was a liberator first, a monarchist second.

San Martín's political thinking was moved primarily by the desire to avoid social upheaval and a drift into anarchy. He was not alone in these forebodings. Bolívar too feared social conflict and the possibility of race war; his ideal ruler was really a king with the name of president. As reported by Commodore Bowles, San Martín was convinced that the early revolutionary governments in America were unduly dependent on popular opinion and conciliatory to popular forces: 'The lower orders have thus obtained an undue preponderance and are beginning to manifest a revolutionary disposition dangerous in any country but more particularly in this, where want of education and general information is so strongly felt.' The danger, he thought, was greatest in Peru, 'where the unenlightened part of the community are so numerous (particularly the slaves and Indians) and at the same time so formidable'.⁵⁹ The situation was rendered more explosive by the prevalence of irresponsible demagogues thrown up by the revolution: 'visionaries, agitators, adventurers...patriots, true, but more harmful than all the chapetones [Spaniards] together.'⁶⁰

While constitutional monarchy was his political preference, San Martín was open to more liberal ideas in his social policy. He stood for progress and enlightenment, and his government programme could be described as reformist. These were the sentiments which he expressed to Castlereagh when he contrasted the counter-revolutionary policy of Spain with the 'liberality, mental improvement and philanthropy' which were the hallmark of the age.⁶¹ In Peru he launched a programme of reforms no less advanced than those of Bolívar and no less enlightened than those of Rivadavia. Between August and December 1821 the Protector issued a total of 154 decrees, on matters ranging from the administration of justice to the establishment of a national library.⁶² He confirmed the abolition of the slave trade, which he described as 'an ancient abuse', and as for slavery itself he began by decreeing that the children of slaves born from 28 July 1821 should be free and at the age of twenty-one gain full rights of citizenship, though these libertos were to remain for some years under the control of the mother's owner. He ordered that each year a certain number of older slaves should be manumitted by means of state

⁵⁹ Bowles to Croker, 14 February 1818, Humphreys and Graham, *The Navy and South America*, pp. 226–7.

⁶⁰ San Martín to Torre Tagle, 13 January 1821, Ortiz de Zavallos, *Correspondencia de San Martín y Torre Tagle*, p. 32.

⁶¹ San Martín to Castlereagh, 11 April 1818, Webster, *Britain and the Independence of Latin America*, vol. I, p. 558.

⁶² Otero, *Historia del Libertador*, vol. III, p. 534.

compensation to their owners. And on various occasions manumission was offered in return for military service. These measures he regarded as 'a great act of justice', but slave owners opposed even this moderate programme and slavery survived independence virtually intact.⁶³ The policy sprang from a liberal mind and a humanitarian spirit but was also evidence of the constraints operating in a society dominated by a landowning elite.

San Martín's Indian policy was also a story of promise and prejudice. He abolished the Indian tribute and ruled that the name of Indians should no longer be applied to native Americans; they were to be called Peruvians, a name previously confined to those born of Spanish parents and their descendants. He also abolished the mita and every kind of compulsory labour service to which the Indians had been subjected.⁶⁴ Again, these laws were frustrated by the opposition of vested interests. Abolition of the tribute was not an Indian priority: the tribute helped to define their status and protect their land rights. And Indians were not necessarily attracted to the nomenclature of whites. But the decrees are important in the way they reflected a growing tendency to define the Indians in social and cultural rather than in purely racial terms, and to this extent they can be characterised as liberal, if confused.

The political and social policies of San Martín were secular, not religious, in inspiration. Like most of the liberators, he was a Catholic by default rather than decision, by convenience rather than conviction. His membership of the Lodge, an essentially political body, did not make him a freemason or a seeker after alternative beliefs. He respected the Church for its public presence and social role, and he encouraged religious observance in his army, joining in the liturgy as was expected of a commanding officer. According to Maria Graham, who suspected he was an unbeliever, he was 'not content with a decent acquiescence in the rites of which he was necessarily present', but distinguished himself in Peru by his religious zeal and 'excessive veneration' for Saint Rose of Lima, simply to create a good impression. In the event he impressed the Spanish archbishop of Lima, Bartolomé de las Heras, who admired the respect he showed to religion and its priests. For San Martín the final arbiter was conscience rather than dogma: 'Conscience is the best and most impartial judge an upstanding man can have.'⁶⁵

⁶³ Peter Blanchard, *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru* (Wilmington, DE, 1992), pp. 6–9, 15.

⁶⁴ Decree, 28 August 1821, *La conducción política del general San Martín durante el Protectorado*, vol. I, p. 96; Otero, *Historia del Libertador*, vol. III, p. 364.

⁶⁵ Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in Chile*, pp. 83, 281–3; Otero, *Historia del Libertador*, vol. IV, pp. 469–71,

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Exponent of enlightened absolutism, San Martín was also an Argentine nationalist, sensitive to any slight on American independence and suspicious always of European motives towards his native land. This presumably is the reason for his outspoken approval of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the Tyrant of the River Plate, as his enemies called him. But not the only reason. The political chaos of Argentina after independence disturbed him. The suspicion remains that as time passed with few signs of progress the political thinking of the Liberator, always balanced uneasily between authority and liberty, gradually came to favour authoritarian government. In a private letter to his friend Tomás Guido (by now an official in the Rosas administration), he suggested that a government acquired its legitimacy not in any principles of liberalism but in its care for the welfare of citizens, and he asked, what does liberty serve if a life's work is destroyed in revolution and one's family is sacrificed in civil war? 'The man who establishes order in our country, whatever the means he employs, he alone deserves the noble title of its liberator.'⁶⁶

Authoritarian in many ways and concerned more with order than with rights, San Martín was not blind to oppression. He condemned Rosas's repressive practices in Argentina, his persecution of good people, and his violence in government.⁶⁷ Moreover, he never lost his instinct for liberal analysis. The Revolution of 1848 in France which caused him to leave Paris for Boulogne and a possible exit to England, drew from him a social rather than political interpretation. 'The real conflict which divides the people is purely social: in a word, the have-nots seek to dispossess the haves. Think of the effect of this on the mass of the people, through the daily tirades of the clubs and the messages of thousands of pamphlets. If to these ideas is added the appalling misery of millions of proletarians, worsened at the moment by the paralysis of industry and flight of capital...then you see the true state of France'.⁶⁸ A report on France or a warning for Rosas?

San Martín supported the dictator's foreign policy and his resistance to outside pressures, first from France in the blockade of 1838, then from the Anglo-French intervention in 1845. In August 1838, writing from enemy territory and wondering whether he was still regarded as 'un hombre necesario', he offered his services to Rosas in any war with France, an offer which Rosas adroitly acknowledged and turned aside. San Martín reacted angrily to the later Anglo-French action. He wrote a public letter, published in the *London Morning Chronicle* (12 February 1846), praising Rosas for his firmness of character, his

⁶⁶ San Martín to Guido, 1 February 1834, quoted in Pasquali, *San Martín*, p. 426.

⁶⁷ San Martín to Gregorio Gómez, Grand Bourg, 21 September 1839, MM, *Documentos del Archivo de San Martín*, vol. IX, p. 500-1.

⁶⁸ San Martín to Rosas, 2 November 1848, MHN, *San Martín. Su correspondencia*, p. 136.

power in Argentina, and his ability to rally the people against its enemies.⁶⁹ When the blockade was lifted, in 1848, he wrote warmly to Rosas congratulating him on his triumphs in saving the national honour and presenting a model for all the new states of America to follow. 'For these achievements I send you and our country my sincerest congratulations.' 'I have done no more than imitate you,' replied Rosas, a presumptuous comparison that seems to have been lost on the aged San Martín, for he had further compliments to pay. In 1850, he wrote as 'an old friend', praising Rosas for 'the prosperity, the internal peace and order, and the honour recovered for our dear country, progress achieved in circumstances which few states will have experienced.'⁷⁰ And in his will he left his campaign sword to Rosas, who, he said, had sustained 'the honour of the republic'.⁷¹

But the republic was slow to honour San Martín or even to welcome him back. He tested the water in 1829, a year of civil war, but after a few weeks in Uruguay, from where he observed the polarisation and intolerance of politicians in his homeland, he decided that Buenos Aires was not the place for him and he returned to Europe. His very objectives in his heroic years left him in isolation without a political home or power base, and induced in him a sense of solitude and depression. The Continental Project and the grand American strategy marked him for life. Neither Buenos Aires, nor Santiago, nor Lima was his ultimate destination. Return to Europe seemed the only route left. He did not plan a long exile, but he never found a compelling reason to end it. When in 1838 he offered to return to Argentina for service against France and then to retire there 'if my country offers me security and order', Rosas made it abundantly clear that he should stay in Europe; in a masterpiece of insincerity he exhorted him not to trouble himself or to undergo the travails of travel for a minor incident.⁷² Argentine historians refer to San Martín's exile as his *ostracismo*, but it was a situation that he willed and accepted. As Mitre said, with some insight: 'The great warrior, admired in Argentina and accepted as a necessity in Chile, was never loved or really popular in either country... Without ceasing to be Argentine, he was American above all... a solitary soul, not inclined to close affections and condemned to a life without a home.'⁷³ In her

⁶⁹ San Martín to Rosas, Grand Bourg, 5 August 1838, MHN, San Martín. Su correspondencia, p. 125; Rosas to San Martín, 24 January 1839, *ibid.*, pp. 125–6; San Martín to E.F. Dickson, Naples, 28 December 1845, MM, Documentos del Archivo de San Martín, vol. X, p. 125–7.

⁷⁰ San Martín to Rosas, Boulogne, 2 November 1848, Museo Histórico Nacional, San Martín. Su correspondencia, p. 136; Rosas to San Martín, 19 March 1849, *ibid.*, pp. 138–9; San Martín to Rosas, 6 May 1850, *ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷¹ José Pacífico Otero, *Historia del Libertador Don José de San Martín* (Brussels, 1932), vol. IV, p. 340.

⁷² See note 63.

⁷³ Mitre, *Historia de San Martín*, vol. II, p. 40.

recent biography of San Martín, a worthy successor to the classic work of Mitre, Patricia Pasquali argues that his strong sense of mission placed him in 'la soledad de la gloria'.

Historians have discussed – Mitre himself did – whether the course of history can be influenced or changed by individual leaders. In itself the course of history is no more than an abstract concept. History consists of events, structures and their movement, continuity and change, and these depend on human mind and will. Human action is focused by leadership, and in the South American revolution San Martín led with his ideas and his actions, taking the revolution outside national frontiers and beyond national interests and giving it an American identity. As far as we can judge, he did not respond to any particular interest, whether regional, or social, or economic, but was motivated by political objectives and ideas. The military objectives were more easily resolved than the political. San Martín always said that America's great crisis would arrive not in defence of independence, a relatively simple cause sustained by national pride, but in the subsequent defence of freedom and civil rights in backward societies bereft of fundamental laws and lacking citizens of sufficient education and integrity to lead them into representative government.⁷⁴ His views are to be found in letters to his friends and associates, not in treatises or proclamations. He did not philosophise about his own role, and in this sense he belongs to Carlyle's 'great Empire of silence' where the true heroes are the strong, silent men of history, who do not need to adopt a declamatory mode, display ambition or claim greatness.⁷⁵ That was the style of San Martín.

Yet style was not the essence of San Martín. His life was marked above all by decisive action at critical moments of Spanish American independence and often against the flow of events: the decision to abandon Spain for America in 1812, the insistence on the Continental Project in 1816 and the determination to quit the scene in 1822. In each case the situation was difficult and needed clear analysis and firm action amid discordant and often hostile voices. In each case, while he had to take some account of his personal interests – so disinterested is not the right word – the historian can see that objectively he moved the revolution forward and secured positive gains for America. And in each case he was the person best qualified to act, taking account of the whole picture and the continental dimension he had always favoured. In this sense we can let Mitre have the final word: 'San Martín era el hombre americano y el hombre necesario.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ San Martín to Guido, 6 January 1827, MM, Documentos del Archivo de San Martín, vol. VI, p. 513.

⁷⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Heroe Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London, 1901), pp. 257–8.

⁷⁶ Mitre, *Historia de San Martín*, vol. II, p. 258.